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KLIMT

At the far end of the room there was a piano with a folded American flag on top of it. Nearby, a window cast rays of light that slanted downward. The piano was black and shiny, the flag a fat triangle. The window was large and small-paned with an arch at the top. He'd have to paint those frames one at a time with a one-and-a-half-inch angled brush if she were to hire him to paint the living room. But it wasn't only the living room she wanted a price for. There was a bedroom as well.

"Yes," she said. "This is the living room. The bedroom is this way."

She led him down a carpeted hall. They came to the last door, the third door. She opened it and they went in. It was a girl's room, but things had been removed. Clothes, stuffed animals, photographs, posters and such were missing. The curtains and the wallpaper and the smell, though, told the story.

He was in whites, painter's whites. It was a warm day, middle of November. He had a clipboard in hand. The woman's name, Marilyn Baskin, along with a phone number and an address were at the top of a blank sheet of paper on the clipboard.

"You want this room painted, not papered."

"Yes."

"Okay. Let me tweak the wallpaper down at the baseboard here to see how many layers of paper there are."

"Sure."

He took a putty knife from a narrow pocket along the side of his pants and got down on a knee and lifted a wedge of paper from the wall.

"Two layers," he said.

"Is that bad?"

"Not bad, not good. I'm just calculating time. Four layers would take more time to remove."

She nodded. He stood up.

"Can't you paint over the wallpaper?"