

## TELLING STORIES No.2

The Letter to the Immortal Beloved continues as follows:

*(6 July, in the morning, contd.)*

My journey was a fearful one and I did not arrive here until yesterday at four o'clock in the morning. As there were few horses the mail coach chose another route, but what a dreadful road it was; at the last stage but one I was warned not to travel by night; attempts were made to frighten me about the forest, but all this only spurred me onwards - but I was wrong. The coach must needs break down, of course, owing to the wretched road which had not been made up and was nothing but a bottomless mudded track. If I hadn't had two such postillions I should have been left stranded on the way - Esterházy travelling the other usual road with eight horses met with the same fate as did I with four - Yet I felt to a certain extent pleasure from my trials that I always feel when I have overcome some difficulty successfully - Now, let me turn quickly from things external to things internal. We shall surely see each other soon; and today also time fails me to tell you of the thoughts which during these last few days I have had touching my own life - If our hearts were always closely united, I would certainly have none of these. My heart overflows with a longing to tell you so many things - ah - there are moments when I find that speech amounts to nothing at all - Be cheerful - and be for ever my faithful, my only sweetheart, my all, as I am yours. The gods must send us the rest, whatever must and shall be our fate -

Your faithful  
LUDWIG

What sort of a mood is Beethoven in? Like Esterházy, he's had a difficult journey. But Esterházy is hardly his chief concern. Beethoven's travelled by night, through darkening forests on dreadful roads. It's been a struggle to get where he's got to, but get there he must. *Fate* demands it. Beethoven's exhausted and yet he doesn't mention sleeping. He's exhausted and yet he's probably been up all night. The urge to write is clearly overpowering, despite the fact he can hardly think straight. His heart is pounding with excitement and expectation that "we shall surely see each other soon". And Beethoven's head is pounding too. Whatever the need to tell of the *external* story of his journey, perhaps to demonstrate to his Immortal Beloved the difficulties he has overcome simply to rendezvous with her, his *internal* stories and thoughts are much

more important to him. His *internal* thoughts, stories and yes, his dreams too, are everything. Beethoven can hardly write in sentences - his letter is rapidly generating dashes by the score. Beethoven's heart is overflowing, spilling over with seemingly everything in the world he has every wished to tell anyone. His heart is racing, his head is spinning. He can't go on without sleep and rest, but he goes on without sleep and rest nonetheless.

Look at the original manuscript of the letter, first and last pages. The handwriting, barely legible at best, gets larger and less legible as the letter goes on. By the end of the letter, there is barely one word per line, and it's verging on illegible scribble. Except that it's everything more. Beethoven is tearing at the paper. The dashes are not dashes but searing and seething cries of anguish at separation and love at imminent reunion and *emotions-beyond-words* across the page. Beethoven here is on the edge of nowhere and on the brink of everything. It is well worth noting that in the original German, this is the only letter Beethoven ever wrote where he addresses a woman by the familiar German "Du" instead of the more formal "Sie". Beethoven is doing everything for the first time. He's romantically impassioned, but treading virgin ground.

Who is Esterházy? The only Esterházy Beethoven is known to have known is Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, who, in 1812 was the Austrian Ambassador to the Saxon court at Dresden. And in 1812 the 6th of July fell on a Monday. *So 1812 fits*. And in early July 1812, it's known that Beethoven was in Teplitz taking the waters on the advice of Dr. Malfatti, Teplitz being a renown Bohemian spa town. And in early July 1812, it's known that Prince Esterházy was ordered to travel by Prince von Metternich

from Vienna via Teplitz to Dresden with diplomatic dispatches. All of which means that the Letter to the Immortal Beloved could well have been written in Teplitz 1812. Let's accept this as fact for now.

At the same time, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was in the neighbouring spa town of Karlsbad, directly to the south. But Goethe wasn't there to take the waters, and he wasn't there seeking inspiration in the mountainous countryside either. Goethe was in Karlsbad as Privy Councillor to the Duke of Weimar, an advisory post to the Duke Goethe much enjoyed. And Goethe was in Karlsbad because he couldn't stand the rush of Teplitz.

Teplitz was normally quiet enough, but in July 1812 it was filling up with ambassadors, dignitaries and heads of state of all kinds. Indeed, the whole *charabanc* of dukes, princes, kings and the Austrian Emperor Francis who had greeted the Emperor Napoleon with such unctuous attentions at Dresden in June was now rendezvous-ing anew to discuss *what they were supposed to do now?* They were all the allies of Napoleon largely under duress, and they all needed the healing waters of Teplitz as much as Beethoven had need of them himself. If Napoleon conquered Russia, he would be the undisputed master of the Continent from west to east, from south to north - and everyone considered Napoleon's success a foregone conclusion. The King of Saxony, the Prince of Courland, the Grand Duke of Würzburg, Goethe's master the Duke of Weimar, the Prussian Ambassador Baron von Humboldt, the Austrian government adviser Prince Karl Lichnowsky (*yes, the patron of Beethoven*), and the Emperor Francis of Austria himself all knew the score. And so, amidst this crowd of flat champagne and generally small beer royalty, did the civil servants,

writers of "confidential memoranda", journalists, junior ministers, spies and woman of various degrees of charm, beauty and intellect that always accompany such a gathering, and in this case had accompanied it direct from their greeting of the Emperor Napoleon at Dresden. *The score was this*. If Napoleon conquered Russia, he would be the effective dictator of the world. In Teplitz in 1812, no matter how long they bathed, the spa waters couldn't heal the assembled rulers' pain. The evening concerts and balls were tinged with a distinct air of diplomatic panic, of anxiety all permeating and unavoidable.

And in the midst of all this was Beethoven, in search of a quiet life for a change from the bustle and gossip of Vienna, only to find that virtually everyone important in Vienna had seemingly followed him to Teplitz! But whereas everyone else in Teplitz saw only a dark and dominated future, it's possible Beethoven was contemplating exactly the opposite. He was contemplating union with his Immortal Beloved.

The retinue of the "Congress of Teplitz" stayed in Teplitz itself, or, like Goethe, in Karlsbad. The Karlsbad *Kurliste*, a voluntary register of visitors, states the following for June and July 1812. Present, amongst others, were:

<b>Visitor</b>	<b>Arrival</b>
Elisabeth von der Recke	June 7
Princess Moritz Leichtenstein with husband	June 25
Baroness Dorothea Ertmann	June 25
Antonie Brentano, with husband and child	July 5

So, if we accept that Beethoven wrote his letter in Teplitz on Monday, the 6th of July 1812, then the Immortal Beloved can only be one of these four women. Yes? Yes. And let's accept the fairly universal consensus that Elise von der Recke and the Princess Leichtenstein aren't serious contenders. And I'm going to discount Dorothea von Ertmann, because whilst George Marek suggests her, even he admits he's not convinced. So we're left with Antonie Brentano, with husband and child. Here's Antonie's story.

*Secretly, they rendezvous-ed in Prague. She had said everything he thought he'd never hear from a woman. He'd been rejected by peasant girls for peasant boys, and by aristocrats aplenty for aristocrats. Magdalena Willman had sung his songs but concluded he was "ugly and half crazy". But to Antonie he was different. "You are everything" she said, "my whole life and all my dreams combined". Beethoven didn't know what to do. Every previous fault was suddenly a virtue. His tumult was inspiration, his unworldly habit of not listening to people simply proof of a divine creed. And he certainly listened to Antonie. Throughout the previous months he had found seeing her almost unbearable, yet somehow go on seeing her he had. His earlier interest in Bettina Brentano was but nothing in comparison to meeting her sister-in-law. Bettina had charmed and flirted, and been considerably miffed to be ousted by her sister-in-law in the first place, but Bettina also knew how to look after herself, and besides, she'd recently married Achim von Arnim. For six months, Beethoven had walked twice a week to Antonie's house, his feet almost floating on the pavement. For six months, Beethoven had been angry no longer. Instead he felt impetuous and yet kind, thoughtful and yet aware of the necessity of quick action. "Ludwig", intervened Antonie, as they sat together in a cafe. "Are you listening to*

*me?". She spoke not loudly but with great clarity and purpose. Beethoven marvelled that he could hear her without difficulty. "Yes, of course" he replied, "but I am also thinking of what we must do". In Prague, they were on their way somewhere, but uncertain as yet just where. The waiter asked them to order. Antonie ordered iced coffee for both of them. Beethoven wanted wine, but thought the better of it. This was a time for clear heads. What were they to do now? They both knew they would have to leave Vienna, perhaps for years to come, but surely with time the scandal would pass. And one thing Antonie knew for sure. She could never go back to Frankfurt. Antonie's days with Franz were over forever, her life with Beethoven just beginning. Her life with Beethoven, and her daughter Maxe's too.*

*Maxe was ten, and busy playing with the napkins. Antonie and Beethoven felt it safer to whisper anyway, but with Maxe with them too, it was essential. Maxe must not, in her innocence, breathe a word to Franz, else she too would be lost. Antonie had married Franz Brentano, a banker and bourgeois fifteen years her senior, at her father's behest on July 23rd 1798. Antonie's father being none other than the noted Austrian statesman, scholar and art connoisseur Johann Melchior Edler von Birkenstock, the marriage was a very grand affair, and one at first most pleasing to all concerned. Franz, already building his bank in mercantile Frankfurt, was looking for an aristocratic wife to secure connections in Vienna. He wished to forge alliances between the north and the south speaking Germanic lands. Von Birkenstock, aware that the pace of development in the north was outstripping that in the south, wished the union success for the same reasons as Franz, but from the opposite perspective. And the young Antonie was the perfect symbol for such a plan, with her unblemished upbringing in an Ursuline convent at Pressburg and her impeccable manners. And*

moreover, she was pretty too. Her nose was perhaps a shade too long, but its fine boning had elegance, and her eyes shone brightly. Her curled hair framed her face with piquant charm, the effects on men of which its owner as yet barely understood. Antonie had "obediently yielded" to her father's wishes not knowing what else to do. And besides, Herr Brentano seemed kind enough. By 1806, Antonie had born five children, all but the first of which had survived. To all the world Franz and Antonie had everything, including an ostentatious mansion by the River Main. But all was not as it seemed. Franz was a naturally considerate man, and Antonie quickly developed deep affection for him, but of love there was none. And Frankfurt came to depress her utterly. She found her new home wholly strange and wept cold tears in solitude. In Frankfurt there was none of the art and gossip of Vienna, few or no visiting princes or princesses or counts and countesses to enliven the social calendar, and hardly any theatre or music worth speaking of. There were only money men by the score, and money is what money men speak of. Antonie came to regard it all as very vulgar. One never spoke of money in Vienna, one simply possessed it. But she understood her situation nonetheless. Franz worked at his bank all hours because he did not possess as much money as he wished to have. And neither, for that matter, did he yet possess as much money as he and Antonie stood to inherit through her father. Perhaps, thought Antonie, when Franz was satisfied, their lives would change. Perhaps they could move elsewhere, to an old and more cultured city such as Prague or to Berlin, or even back to Vienna itself! Oh, blessed thought, but no! In time, Antonie came to realise that Franz's appetite for money was insatiable, the driving appetite of all. For Franz, Frankfurt would always be perfect. Antonie took to calling it Franz-furt. She sighed and reflected often that she couldn't decide whether she didn't understand the bourgeois mind, or whether she simply despised it. Franz, the bourgeois

*paterfamilias, wished desperately to make Antonie happy, but ultimately, he simply didn't know how. Money did nothing to impress Johann von Birkenstock's daughter. Antonie became irritable and had constant headaches. She rouged her face in a parody of the bourgeois Frau Franz half desired her to be. Franz thought she looked radiant. Antonie only laughed. Gradually, the light was losing its shine in her eyes. A deathly silence reigned within her soul.*

*And then a sad but welcome relief! In 1809, Antonie received news of her father's death, and she took at once the opportunity to move back to Vienna to settle the affairs of the estate. Quite apart from the von Birkenstock house itself, there were art treasures and manuscripts to deposit with and auction to various museums and private collectors of all kinds. Although in mourning, Antonie delighted in Vienna's insouciance and artfulness once again, and it was with joy she came to share society gossip with the irrepressible Bettina, and the three von Brunsvik sisters Therese, Josephine and Charlotte. Through them she soon came to meet Luigi van Beethoven, by now Vienna's most sought after piano virtuoso and composer. In Frankfurt she had heard much of him, but he had never travelled there to play. In Frankfurt Antonie had not even been easily able to secure the score of a piece by now so famous as the Moonlight Sonata. Soon enough, Antonie approached Beethoven for lessons in piano composition, to which the composer responded eagerly. There was immediately something about her sad diminished eyes and graceful yet mourning profile that attracted him. Her curled hair framed her face as if half disguising her own inner sorrow. Beethoven could see Antonie was unhappy, and sought to unlock the cause. They were soon in love.*

*And so it came to pass that Ludwig van Beethoven and Antonie Brentano sat together in a cafe in Prague on the 4th July 1812, sure enough of their intentions, but with the plan as yet half-hatched. They talked of freedom. For the first time in many years Ludwig could hear his own voice without difficulty. Antonie's eyes shone deeper than the brightest waters of the deepest wells in Heaven. Beethoven was to go on to Teplitz, claiming need of rest. Antonie, with Franz and Maxe, was to go to Karlsbad, claiming need of a cure for her headaches. Antonie wrote down her address on a piece of paper with a pencil, and gave both to Beethoven. She was to stay at the White Swan. "Keep the pencil" she said, "it is something of me with you". But what after Teplitz and Karlsbad? How would they meet up again, and where would they go? As Beethoven sat in his lodgings at The Oak in Teplitz at the end of his dreadful journey the next day, there was still much that worried him. Could he, a bachelor by habit if not by intention, come at the age of forty two to give himself up to a new family life? He was certain of his love for both Antonie and Maxe, but would Antonie herself be happy? She was proposing to give up her entire inheritance! If she left Franz as she intended, he would automatically take claim to all. Money problems were nothing new to Beethoven, but he knew they would be utterly new to Antonie. And her naive insistence that after Franz, money was something she never wished to speak of again, worried him greatly. Money, he pondered, is spoken of much more frequently by those without it than by those with it. And then there were the other children. Did Antonie really propose to leave three of them behind? Beethoven knew well enough that the support of four children was utterly beyond him financially, and he knew also that if Antonie left Franz, he had first claim by law to all four of the children anyway, but even so! Antonie saw Beethoven as "natural, simple and wise, with pure intentions", but was that enough? Beethoven adored Maxe, but how would Maxe cope with being*

*separated from her brothers and sister? And what agony would Thomas and Christophe and Fanny go through themselves? Perhaps the boys would be stoical, but Fanny, in Heaven's name, was only six! And would Franz invoke the law to claim Maxe back as his own too? How would Antonie cope with that? Beethoven had been out walking and all these thoughts constantly returned to his mind. He had returned to find a letter from the great Goethe proposing the two men meet. There was no higher honour than to meet such a one as Goethe, but frankly, Beethoven didn't care. He opened the window, and peered out into the evening, south over the mountains towards Karlsbad itself. His faith returned to him. Their love was true, as yet unconsummated but already complete. It was as if every thought of Antonie's came directly to him on the evening breeze. He sat down to write once again. He took out Antonie's pencil and held it lovingly, still confused himself, but strangely confident.*

*Evening, Monday, 6 July*

You are suffering, my dearest creature - only now have I learned that letters must be posted very early in the morning on Mondays - Thursdays - the only days on which the mail coach goes from here to K. - You are suffering - Ah, wherever I am, there you are also - I will arrange it with you and me that I can live with you. What a life!!!! thus!!!! without you - pursued by the goodness of mankind hither and thither - which I as little want to deserve as I deserve it - Humility of man towards man - it pains me - and when I consider myself in relation to the universe, what am I and what is He - whom we call the greatest - and yet - herein lies the divine in man - I weep when I reflect that you will probably not receive the first report from me until Saturday - Much as you love me - I love you more - But do not ever conceal yourself from me - good night - As I am taking the baths I must go to bed - Oh God - so near! so far! Is not our love truly a heavenly structure, and also as firm as the vault of Heaven? –

*One thing was certain. Antonie would refuse to go back to Frankfurt. She had managed to remain three years in Vienna whilst tending to matters of estate, but Franz was becoming impatient. Three years to tidy up the life of a dead father was long enough. Franz was a practical man, and he frequently swore blind that left to*

him, everything could have been settled within six months. Antonie would refuse to go back to Franz-furt, of that Beethoven was sure. The inexorable logic of this alone drove his passion onwards. Antonie wished to be his. He was more important to her than all a banker's money in the world could ever be. There was a knock at the door. Could it be her? Beethoven knew she was planning only to leave Franz, the most cursory of notes, but perhaps she had done this already, and now stood outside, married still yet free, unrouged and freshly beautiful anew. Beethoven opened the door. It was Goethe. "Herr van Beethoven, I am Goethe" he said. "I know" said Beethoven. Goethe stood at once tall, erect and imperious. He was dressed casually, yet still wore the badge of Privy Councillor to the Duke of Weimar. "Your Excellency, your Highness, your Honour. I am honoured" Beethoven added quickly. "I gather we have shared a correspondence with Bettina Brentano" said Goethe. "Yes", said Beethoven. Goethe clearly expected to be invited in, but Beethoven thought it better if they walked out. If he allowed Goethe into his lodgings, he would have to conceal his letter for one. And in his desire for secret union, Beethoven was convinced no other but Antonie must have knowledge of it. Besides, he had drunk all the wine.

The two artists were no sooner out in the street than Goethe espied the Emperor Francis of Austria and full entourage coming direct towards them. Goethe immediately stopped to bow. Beethoven walked straight on. Goethe was appalled. Beethoven pretended not to notice. "Don't you know who that was?" asked Goethe. "Of course I do" replied Beethoven. "Then why did you not bow?". "I have long perfected the habit of appearing oblivious to such things as rank and position your Highness. I find it is easier that way. And besides, amongst them was Prince von Metternich, whom I loathe...". Goethe stopped Beethoven to listen to the singing of an

evening sparrow. The bird could not be seen, but Goethe was certain of its location amongst the roof tops. Beethoven swore he could hear nothing. "A man should listen to a bird's song or read a beautiful poem at least once a day" said Goethe. Beethoven walked on, and realising he hadn't eaten for a full three days, asked where Goethe intended them to eat. Goethe said he wasn't hungry, having been offered a buffet at several diplomatic functions during the day. Beethoven grew impatient. Goethe decided to change the subject. "What an effect this man Napoleon has had on us all" he said. "Yes" said Beethoven. "I met him once", continued Goethe. "It was at the Conference of Erfurt. And Napoleon sought me out. Can you believe that? Napoleon Bonaparte sought me out!". "You sought me out" said Beethoven. "I can believe anything. But I do not envy you. There was a time when I would very much liked to have met this Napoleon myself, but I would not like to now". Goethe didn't believe this for a moment, and was convinced Beethoven was jealous. Beethoven was convinced Goethe was convinced Beethoven was jealous, and was furious. "I have better things to do with my time than reminisce on meetings with the famous Herr Goethe" said Beethoven. "I am in love". "But an artist like you can never marry, surely?" said Goethe. "She is already married". "Oh, you mean you are having an affair" enthused Goethe. "Well, good for you! I presume the lady is one of your patrons as well". "That's not what I meant at all" said Beethoven, by now wishing no further truck with anything. "I am hungry, and you are not. Perhaps we could arrange to meet another time". "Yes of course" said Goethe, rather shocked. It was the first time anyone had expressed exasperation at meeting him in many, many years. This Beethoven was certainly the uncouth fellow everyone had led him to believe! "But one last thing. Tell me Herr van Beethoven, do you work best in the mornings, the afternoons or the evenings? I myself find the hours after the dawn the most convivial". Beethoven

*looked at Goethe shocked and disappointed. An amateur! "I work all the time Herr Goethe. Good evening".*

*Beethoven went straight back to his lodgings, forgetting to eat despite his hunger, which quickly passed and turned into a kind of light headed, highly unstable, and yet deeply invigorating energy. The night was cool, but Beethoven found himself sweating in abundance. He was still not sure of his course of action. The question of finding a new city in which to earn his living came to preoccupy him. Prague did not appeal to him, its significance in matters musical having constantly diminished since the Habsburg monarchs had left it for Vienna several centuries before. And surely there was no answer to be found with a minor Bonaparte at the court of Westphalia! To Antonie at least, it would simply appear an inferior Vienna. But then, even Westphalia would be better than the living death of Franz-furt. He had forgotten Antonie's surety of purpose! If they could only grip their faith firmly in their joining hands, they would yet be free. Free to love and free to live anew. Perhaps they could have children themselves, which might ease Antonie's pain of having only Maxe beside her. Beethoven still couldn't sleep, and the night was long in passing. He tossed and turned, and found himself speaking direct to Antonie, so near and yet still a spa town and a mountain range away. He wanted her, truly, deeply, madly. He wanted to taste her, to go between her, to know fully and be surrounded by her scent. For the first time in his life, Ludwig van Beethoven had feelings way beyond those which any music he might compose could possibly express! Ludwig van Beethoven was smitten, and swimming in a sea of anticipated union. He was up before the dawn, and, after washing, returned to the bed in which he had thought of Antonie all night to write to her anew. The first rays of the sun found their way into the room. Beethoven*

*was still resolving contradictions, and yet further resolved to be united in Antonie's arms, at whatever cost. The landlady brought him breakfast, and fresh news of the postal service. As finally and ravenously he ate, Beethoven was spurred on further.*

*He must have her:*

*Good morning, on 7 July*

Though still in bed, my thoughts go out to you, my Immortal Beloved, now and then joyfully, then sadly, waiting to learn whether or not fate will hear us - I can live only wholly with you or not at all - Yes, I am resolved to wander so long away from you until I can fly to your arms and say that I am really at home with you, and can send my soul enwrapped in you into the land of spirits - Yes, unhappily it must be so - You will be the more contained since you know my fidelity to you. No one else can ever possess my heart - never - never - Oh God, why must one be parted from one whom one so loves. And yet my life in V is now a wretched life - Your love makes me at once the happiest and the unhappiest of men - At my age I need a steady, quiet life - can that be so in our connection? My angel, I have just been told that the mail-coach goes every day - therefore I must close at once so that you may receive the l at once. - Be calm, only by a calm consideration of our existence can we achieve our purpose to live together - Be calm - love me - today - yesterday - what tearful longings for you - you - you - my life - my all - farewell. - Oh continue to love me - never misjudge the most faithful heart of your beloved

(?)L/B/LB(?)

ever thine  
ever mine  
ever ours

*With this, Beethoven got up out of bed, and walked at great pace straight down to the postal box. His mind was made up, his concerns and contradictions resolved, his new future with Antonie as certain as the very ground on which he paced. Only the worry that Franz himself, with Antonie in Karlsbad, might see the letter concerned him. But Antonie was surely clever enough to insure against that! And besides, what if Franz did read it? He would read only of what he would find out soon enough. Antonie was leaving him forever.*

*The next few days passed slowly. Antonie was an ever present absence, Beethoven's window was constantly open. He awaited her reply, but knew one to be impossible until Saturday. In the meantime, he tried to busy himself composing, and soon found himself sketching a piano piece inspired by Maxe's ten year old curiosity and laughter. Heaven's whitest rose, the melodies she opened! Ludwig van Beethoven was to have a daughter! On Saturday morning, there was a knock at the door. At first Beethoven did not hear it, and so the knock was repeated, growing deafeningly loud. Not Goethe again, surely! Yet more tales of famous men met that day, deliberations deliberated upon with Ambassadors, all mixed up within a cocktail of artistic theories, opinions and observations. Beethoven decided not to be in. The door knocked again, this time more softly, but with a frantic, urgent rhythm. Beethoven could hear it perfectly! And he could hear a child's voice too. He opened the door. It was Antonie. She stood there, tears streaming down her face, her hair in tatters as she anxiously and repeatedly ran her hands through its ragged curls, which framed her countenance with a look of the hunted and pursued. Her eyes were consumed by the blackest flames of Hell. "What's the matter?", said Beethoven. "Everything", said Antonie. "I'm sorry". She held out her hand. In it, was Beethoven's letter. He took it. "I can't. I just can't" she cried. Maxe looked up at Antonie bewildered. "Mummy, what is it?". Beethoven didn't need to ask. He patted Maxe on the head, and went to kiss Antonie on the cheek. She did not respond. "Do not conceal yourself from me" he said. "It's no use. I have no choice" she wept, through tears of utter confusion and torn obligations. "I am going back to Frankfurt". Beethoven could not hear her. His ears rang with confusion's rancour. "What?".*

I don't like this story. I don't like it because it doesn't have a happy ending. In fact, it doesn't really have an ending at all. It just stops, unresolved. But whether you like it or not, this story could well be true. For in November 1812, Antonie Brentano left Vienna for good, and in the remaining 57 years of her long life, there's no evidence she ever returned. Neither did Beethoven ever travel to north Germany to revisit his Bonn birthplace on the Rhine, which would have given him an easy opportunity to call in on Antonie in Frankfurt on the way.

In essence, sad conclusion *et al*, the above is the story advanced by the modern Beethoven scholar Maynard Solomon. I think Solomon's story is plausible, but then Solomon is always less convincing than his surface appearance, since like many of the fusty scholars in this field, much of his erudition is really point scoring by omission. For example, Solomon implies that the finality of Beethoven and Antonie's parting in 1812 is proof the pain of reunion would have been too great. He doesn't mention that you can at least as plausibly argue that their failure to meet after 1812 simply demonstrates they didn't give a damn about each other and never had. And on top of that, Solomon's under the self-created pressure most Beethoven scholars succumb to, namely that a new book on Ludwig sells on a new candidate for the Immortal Beloved.

Well, I'm obviously no scholar because I've got no new candidates. For the record however, the major scholars fall out as follows:

**SCHOLAR**

First biographer  
L. Nohl  
Alfred Kalischer

**IMMORTAL BELOVED**

Giulietta Guicciardi

A.W. Thayer	
M.L. La Mara	
W.A.. Thomas-San Galli	Therese von Brunsvik
Romain Rolland	
K. Smolle	
W.A Thomas-San Galli ( <i>change of mind!</i> )	Amalie Sebald
Theodor von Frimmel	Magdalena Willmann
Hugo Riemann ( <i>with reservations</i> )	Bettina Brentano
S. Kaznelson	
H. Goldschmidt	Josephine von Brunsvik
Dana Steichen	Marie Erdödy
Max Unger	Undecided (but convinced 1812)
George R. Marek ( <i>hedging his bets</i> )	Dorothea von Ertmann
Maynard Solomon ( <i>case solved!?</i> )	Antonie Brentano

In other words, experts, as ever, disagree. *Odi profanum vulgus et arceo.*

Three final reflections I make for myself. Firstly, Beethoven's punctuation is dreadful, and who ever taught him at primary school should be ashamed of themselves. Secondly, if the date of Beethoven's letter can only be right if it was written in 1795, 1801, 1807 or 1812, then I don't see why it couldn't also have been written in either 1818 or 1829, both dates when the 6th July also fell on a Monday. In both these later cases, there is *no evidence whatsoever* that Beethoven had any romantic dealings with anyone, not least because he died in 1827, but this doesn't wholly invalidate my case. It simply means that in 1818, Beethoven, a very lonely bachelor, was making the whole thing up as he went along to pass the time. Thirdly,

two entire chapters of this novel would be unnecessary if Beethoven had done one of two things. He could have written the full name of his Immortal Beloved, thereby saving me and an awful lot of other people an awful lot of work (the next time you write a love letter, remember this. You never know how important it might turn out to be). Or, if Beethoven didn't want to write her full name down (a formal practice lovers normally dispense with after all), he could at least have included the year along with the date. But then, any man who got his age wrong could easily have got the year wrong too, which would doubtless have caused just as many problems as it solved.

We end where we started. Intrigued, but not knowing, the riddle still unsolved. We know only the sentiments of the man who said this: "Unfortunately I have no wife. I found *only one*, whom no doubt I shall *never possess*". WHO WAS SHE??!!