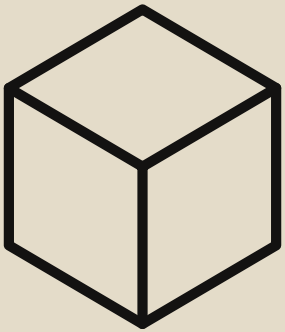
TRANSLATION / 1930-1931



NINE LETTERS FROM THE SALT WORKS

Klara Ettenreich

APOCALYPSE CULT

READING COPY AC-0133

NINE LETTERS FROM THE SALT WORKS

Klara Ettenreich, 1930-1931

THE FIRST LETTER

October

Dear Hanne,

You ask whether it is true. It is true. The notice went up on the Thursday, and by the Friday evening the pump at the main shaft had stopped, which I had heard every hour of my life without once hearing it. I woke in the night because of the quiet. So did everyone. You could see the lamps go on down the whole street, one house after another, as if somebody were walking along and knocking.

The notice says suspended. Nobody uses that word. They say the works is resting.

Your Klara

THE SECOND LETTER

November

Dear Hanne,

The company store is open in the mornings only. Herr Brandl stands behind the counter as he has for thirty years and writes each purchase in the book, though he knows and we know that the book will never be reckoned. I asked him why. He said, what else would I write in.

The children came to school as usual. I had not expected it. I think their mothers want them somewhere with a stove.

THE THIRD LETTER

December

Dear Hanne,

The first thing to go was not what I supposed. I thought it would be bread. It was the time. The shift whistle no longer sounds, and without it nobody is certain of the hour. The church clock and the works clock have always disagreed by four minutes, and we lived by the works. Now there is only the church, and people are four minutes late for everything and have not yet understood why.

The men stand at the corner where they used to wait for the cage. They stand at the old hours. They do not know what to do with their hands.

THE FOURTH LETTER

January

Dear Hanne,

It is very cold. The company has always cleared the snow from the upper road, and this year nobody has. For a week we waited for it to be done. Then old Frau Auer went out with a coal shovel and began at her own door, and by evening there were forty people on the road with whatever they had.

I mention it because it was the first time since October that anyone here did a thing without first asking who was responsible for it.

THE FIFTH LETTER

February

Dear Hanne,

The manager's family has left. They went early in the morning in a hired car, and the house is shuttered. I do not blame them. But I had thought of that house as a fixed thing, like the hill, and to see it with its eyes closed has affected people more than the notice did.

The bandstand has lost its roof to the wind. The band still meets, in the school, on Wednesdays. They play the same six pieces. I find that I am glad of every one.

THE SIXTH LETTER

March

Dear Hanne,

I will tell you what I have been thinking, and you may laugh.

When they built this town they built it handsomely. There is the administration building with its columns, and the hall with the portraits of the directors, and the fountain. We were proud of those. We showed them to visitors.

Now the works has stopped, and none of those things has made the least difference to whether we eat. What has made the difference is Brandl and his book, and Frau Auer and her shovel, and the midwife, who has not been paid since autumn and has not missed a call.

We learned which of the walls had been bearing weight. It was never the ones with the portraits on them.

THE SEVENTH LETTER

May

Dear Hanne,

Some of the young men have gone to look for work in the east. Their mothers say they will be back when it starts again. I do not contradict them. It is a sentence that holds a house up.

I have fewer children in the class each week. Those who remain have become very careful with their pencils. I had not told them to be.

THE EIGHTH LETTER

July

Dear Hanne,

A gentleman came from the company with a camera and a notebook. He was very courteous. He photographed the headframe, the administration building and the fountain, and he asked me how old the school was. He did not go into any of the houses.

Afterwards I understood that he was making a record of the property. It had not occurred to me before that the town might be a thing that could be listed.

THE NINTH LETTER

September

Dear Hanne,

You write that I should come to you, and I am grateful, and I will not. I do not say this from courage. I am needed here in a small way, and I have discovered that I had rather be needed in a small way than be comfortable.

It is a year now. The works is still resting. I no longer think it will wake, and I find I can say so. What I did not expect is that there would be a life on the other side of saying it. It is a thin life. But the snow was cleared, and the band plays, and the children can read.

If anyone asks you what became of us, tell them we are still here. Tell them the pump has stopped and we have learned to sleep.

Your loving sister, Klara

ABOUT THIS TEXT

TITLE	Nine Letters from the Salt Works
AUTHOR	Klara Ettenreich
DATE	1930-1931
TYPE	Translation
PUBLISHER	First printed privately as Neun Briefe aus dem Salzwerk, 1934
EXTENT	24 pages in the original edition
LANGUAGE	English, translated from the German
TRANSLATOR	Dagny Ulvestrand, 2026
SOURCE	Translated from the privately printed edition of 1934. The letters are given complete. Place names follow the original, which disguises them.

Klara Ettenreich taught the lower classes of the works school in a salt-mining town for nineteen years. When the company suspended operations in the autumn of 1930, she remained. Over the following twelve months she wrote nine letters to her sister Hanne, who had married and moved to the city. Hanne kept them, and after Klara's death had them printed in a small edition for the family.

The letters are short and almost without complaint. Their subject is the gradual discovery of what a company town consists of once the company is subtracted. Ettenreich has a schoolteacher's habit of exact description and a private, unsparing humor. She notices which clocks stop first. She notices who picks up a shovel.

I have tried to keep her plainness. Where she uses a dialect word for a tool or a trade I have chosen an ordinary English one in preference to a footnote.

The much-quoted sentence about the walls, in the sixth letter, is rendered as literally as English allows.

The letters are the principal source for the closing section of The Slow Apocalypse.

COLOPHON

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