



Lauri Pilter

My Yiddish Girlfriends

As the spring arrives, my Yiddish girlfriends keep whispering impish cajolery into my ears. “Go ahead and get lost from here,” they advise me in low voices on the stairs outside the front door, as I am puffing at my inseparable pipe on the bench in the passage way. The time of awakening, with bird-song and a promise of greenery. Christian girls are walking in front of my wooden house at night and telling me I am a knight now, no longer the monster I used to be. Jewish women are standing on the pavement and giggling in soprano voices about how the spirit of Hitler is alive in me, who must redeem himself for them. Pieces of firewood are being sawed in the neighbouring yard in the morning, it sends me the message about how soon enough they are coming to saw off my arms, legs, and genitals, I am to become a stunted torso as the punishment for the sufferings that my words had caused to the people. Somehow they all know I once shouted the foul victory greeting. Different Yiddish girls are passing my house in sharp daylight, their Egyptian facial profiles sending me various grinning grimaces. The next night, a show is being held in an apartment in the house across the street: a Jewish grandmother, stretched out in bed, is groaning about me being the enemy of her people, “Haman! Haman!” she is directing curses at me, while her young granddaughter is consoling her, “Yes, he was a Haman, but he is one of us now, let’s not have him hanged after all.” It is past mid-April, a lorry with the box full of ragged prisoners is speeding down the street past my house, the guards in Russian uniforms, slovenly-looking, big, dark men. “Good-bye Adolf!” they yell at me. “You have got ten days left, then we are going to be back!” The doors of a bus at the bus stop screech under my window like a scream from a woman close to me, who is taken along to be raped. There is poor soil in this suburb, yet I try seeding carrot and dill in the beds I just made in my garden, having brought fertiliser from the market-place. The young car-owner lads from the next house grinning at the fence at my endeavours, their mouths agape, I place my palms on the earth, making fifty push-ups and fifty more. With a stench of tobacco smoke and strong black tea floating in my cool apartment, I am considering ways of doing myself in, how about grabbing the fire extinguisher from the wall of the stair well and blowing foam in my face. The circular saw still buzzing and groaning its threats in the next yard, before they come for me, not to face the worst, I tie up my wrists with the packing cord to the best I can muster, and spend hours lying on the privy floor, my head between the toilet seat and the cardboard wall. In the next, shiny morning my Yiddish girlfriends entice me to the bus station. I take the bus to Viljandi. As it stops in the countryside, among the entering passengers there is a boy with a shadow of death and doom

on his face, which he sends towards me, without meeting my glance. I am standing immobile in the Viljandi bus station, my blue sports trousers torn at the groin, young women, old men are looking at me, their eyes rolling like a merry-go-round in an icy compassion, the looks flitting, quivering, twinkling moistly, sharing the chamber memories with me, the common experience. As the bus driver is selling the ticket to Pärnu to me, instead of “You are welcome!” he utters a polite, cruelly detached “Sieg heil!” In the city of Pärnu, Jewish businessmen in black leather jackets are waiting for me, with a whiz they are halting their cars near the bus station, they see me as a lost, sinful rabbi. What am I doing in a strange city? I cannot go to the capital, Tallinn, that would finish me. My Yiddish girlfriends persuade me to start walking to Lihula; seventy kilometres. Out of the city, stepping with a brisk gait I go astray on a fifteen kilometre side road, the forests, meadows, fields are rejoicing at the vanishing snow, the sun blazing, a small plane roaring overhead with promises of the victory day, am I to have a share of them? Under the bridge, I am scooping water with my palms from a large river, drinking it, pissing straight away, I really am thirsty, drinking more from roadside ditches. Running into the woods now, any violets here? Someone is talking from the private house in the woods: “See, a man is lying stretched out on the moss!” – “What is he doing there?” – “Just lying.” – “Hiding himself!” middle-aged Jewish women answer screaming on the road. “He is even worse than the very *him!* Another Himmler!” For the whole day, I am walking towards Lihula, a car of ambulance comes towards me and halts in the evening darkness, I pace past it, later a motorcycle stops at me, a gaunt man in the saddle, he talks gravely to me, saying that I have fallen, I, who once was such a bright, promising young man, with all his might he tries to talk me into turning back, do I even know what is expecting me in Lihula, who is in power there, aye, the local Nazi youths, furious at losing their leader, will finish me off. I keep on going, something touches my left hand, it is a big, delicate dog, three or four greyhounds are soundlessly following me along the road in moonshine, stopping as I stop, continuing with me, I am muttering prayers, they won’t do anything to me, and they won’t. But farther ahead, in the farmyards shrouded in pitch-dark forests, fierce watchdogs are snarling and yelling, this village is called Ahaste, some millennia ago, seas were lapping here, ocean bays, lagoons, I turn around, walking back towards Pärnu before daybreak, early traffic is starting to race about me, vans, lorries, their engines and windscreens gasping “Sieg heil! Sieg heil!” as they pass, the drivers sending curses at me from the wheels, the spring morning blood-red, I can hear telepathically from across the Atlantic the object of my unrequited love discussing with her partner, the father of her child, what offences I have committed and still, what my certain values are, yes, I did write well about my feelings, that might be my redemption, in the mid-morning I reach a crossroads, can see a modern-style village schoolhouse, can sense someone watching me, I do not want to respond, a premonition makes me to resist, nevertheless, I look – like I thought, a slim tall youth is standing across the road, a schoolboy, the skin of his face so ruddy and healthy, observing me with a frozen grin on his lips, holding his right arm towards me in the Roman greeting. I promptly turn my eyes away. I take the road to the left, a lovely, green, sunny mid-day, people are gardening around a house, raking, I stop to watch, am noticed, they are growing suspicious, in a synagogue in Riga a stout rabbi is shaking and rocking in prayers for the salvation or damnation of my soul, a meadow by the road, a creek under the trees at the end of it, I sit down by the stream, treading thoughtful patterns into the mud with my shoes, there is even some ice on the shaded riverbank, some dozen steps upstream I can hear voices talking, someone discussing my intimate relations with someone over there, taking an account of me and my possible rivals, someone dear to me sitting there, at a decent distance and still so close, these are all my friends here, well enough, my Yiddish girlfriends knew where to guide me, a gentle maidenly voice growing louder, hours passing, the day turning older, these two are keeping their *Shekinah*, kind voices of young men are saying of us, the time of

holocaust arrives in the twilight, our souls freed from earthly pains, after lightly rising we are walking by the light of forest-torches towards our escape, I go on hiking along the road, sure I know now, I must spend the rest of my life in a provincial bedlam, wish I could take the bus there right now, shortly before midnight I reach the outskirts of Pärnu, an alien suburb that smells like some city in the distant South, a sweetish odour creeping into your pores, like the fragrance from sugary, brown dough, I know that I am being watched, a small rabbi is keeping an eye on me, having made me into his man, into his golem.

NE KOPIRATI

Uncle Endel's Grendel

1

I am old, that is, middle-aged, inert, obese, and in staggering health. Like my uncle Endel at that age, who still had fifteen years ahead to live then. For myself, I am not expecting any more. The laws of physics and nature, the progression of time and physiological processes remain superior to any individual wilfulness. A placid mind, a firm ground to stay on, self-confidence and conclusive professional skills are the rewards I have received in return for wasting my health and my youthful vigour. Not the worst outcome, it would be even sadder if the losses had remained with no compensation at all.

There is hardly anyone who cares to have any friendly business with me, any more. Having seen, done everything, I am weary of dreams. Most of all, I am scared of situations in which I can dream no more, but in fact I can, I just do not have the powers to any more.

For my dearest ones, I am too old, and cannot help it. No one expects any great achievements from me, any more.

My nervous system is too inert and cautious for me to be a poet. I am looking for a poetry that would not be language shaped into images, but like mathematics instead. Tonight, before I lost my sleep at half past one, I dreamt of my form master, a teacher of maths. A stern and witty man, weird a little, dying he was no more than ten years senior to my present age. I am looking for a poetry that would never sink into antiquity, just as there are no epochs in mathematics.

Maybe someone is longing for me right now. Not longing for me as a man and one carrying the seed, but as a living being with a human reason that keeps himself alive by eating and breathing. Is it a relief or a disappointment for me? She would surely be disappointed if she knew about my state of mind – unable to long for anyone to be a stable partner, seeing as I do in her the same impermanence of all, the unavoidable pain or disappointment of the future. There is no endurance anywhere, in anyone, or anything.

The sun is dry. The sun is silent and dry. The sun is silent and the wind is tugging my sleeve. Away! Should I go to the spa for a bath in the bubble tube? I feel like an anatomical sample, still holding a bit of life, requiring mechanical care as any mechanism. Should I go soaking myself in a bubble tube? But why since the ideas, in which and for which I am living, stay on without my body being around? Do the people who appear to need me as a contributor to arts and humanities, really need me if they do not need my body. Do they need the body to go on contributing to the fine arts. Or is it no body at all that does it, and what becomes of it, is only its own concern? To a long sleep. The golden house of my father's. Birches in the pasture. Gone forever. That which is now a horse the rack dislimns.

Uncle Endel's Grendel – what do I know of it? I know that the monster started lurking and then hugging him at the arrival of his puberty. He had been a healthy and joyous boy, playing games in the garden with kids from neighbouring yards. And learning for good grades. His mother – mamma took him to join the Academic Boys' Choir. Endel was wearing a white shirt, a tie and a black suit. He was not that talented a singer, still, they accepted him into the best boys' choir of the whole republic. After a month and a half, he dropped out of it. Just would not go. Creeping close in miasmal mists, that was the first victory of the beast. The boy's grades fell, he began failing at school, he kept moping about at home, his plumpness, of a healthy kind formerly, developed into a fatness, as he went on devouring his mamma's meals. He quit the high school. Having graduated from evening classes eventually, he tried enrolling at a university but failed the test. He managed enrolling at a college of agriculture but dropped his studies in two months. Evidently, that sealed his destiny. O yes, he could look ahead for some better times yet: assisting and continuing his father's job of lithography, having fun at the parties of his relatives, reading quite a few books for sure, solving

crosswords, practising his hobby of self-made electronics. In his early thirties, as the whole family – his mamma, papa, and himself, with papa at the wheel of his own car – were travelling among farmholds or townlets of Livonia, the well-to-do toffs from the capital visiting their country relatives, he still looked rather slim and even handsome.

Grendel attained his prey for good as the Soviet Union crumbled, and when the independent Estonian Republic was declared, uncle Endel had just turned forty-six. He lost his job, the only one he was qualified for and capable of, he was assaulted by dozens of illnesses of interior organs and by mental complaints, he became increasingly addicted to alcohol, he even drank cheap perfume, he was listed in a psychiatric hospital, his close ones, the few that he had, felt ashamed when he, on very rare occasions, chanced into the sight of someone visiting them, he distrusted everyone except his mamma, whom he treated as an unavoidable property, he only earned a handicap pension, he was indifferent or mean to me, his only nephew, with his huge bulging belly, his neck and face buried in folds of fat, the hair grey and greasy, he was the embodiment of idle apathy and aimless vegetation. That is how Grendel obtained him – and nevertheless, I am thinking about his death at the age of fifty-five years and nine months, the last photograph of him as dead under the eyes of my mother and grandmother – I was absent from his funeral service before the cremation – the frozen face coloured red, a painful grimace on the mouth, the obesity diminished a little in the final agony – as the battle death of Beowulf in his fight with the dragon that ravaged the lands of the *geats*, as the joining of a hero of the dignified ranks of his ancestors across the river of memory, in a land of shadows garmented in noble peace.

I recall a dialogue I was present at as the third party, as a fifteen-year-old boy of secondary school, visiting my grandmother, who had become a widow two years earlier, and her son, in the summer of 1987, on a bright and mild day with some haziness of the shadows from the stripes of clouds, glistening in through their living room window. My uncle and me had been discussing the topic that had lately become a favourite of ours – the origins, history, and nature of the universe. He had given me a few books of popular science by Russian astronomers. My grandmother, mamma, could hear as uncle Endel said that in a few billion years, the Earth is going to disappear: the sun will be swelling and taking the Earth in his hot embrace and burning away all of it, everything will be burning to ashes.

Uncle Endel was standing at the door to the living room, mamma quit her usual chores and sat down in a soft chair next to the round coffee table made of dark solid wood and with high legs. She leant forward a little, placed both her elbows on the table-cloth and was fingering its fringe thoughtfully, in matter-of-fact placidity. Her eyes whose focus at times made them look dark as raisins, were flitting a little, glancing partly into the living room window, partly into herself. “Now, can that be true!” she exclaimed. “That is not going to happen by any means, is it?”

Uncle Endel struck his arm through the air in a gesture of resolution. “Yes, it is, everything will be burning away and disappearing! That is for sure!”

Mamma centred her gaze into the midday light streaming in through the window, with a tender ripple of a smile on her lips: “But these little birches up here look so sweet!” – and she pointed at the tops of the two birches that were rustling amicably straight next to the balcony of their third-floor-apartment, by the gates of the kindergarten building, on a lawn trodden black and strewn over, as usual, with metal corks of beer and soda bottles. Those trees had been a delight to her eyes for well about twenty years.

The glimmering legs of the dawn. That was the dawn of life of my own: the bursting of the daybreak into a day. Now, I am like uncle Endel at that time.

2

As a youth, I was an innocent solitary. I spent my extra energy by running about in the forests. I had a love relationship with the woods, the odorous moss and the cowberry leaves at spring, the little crackling twigs and branches that I was chewing, the budding tree leaves that I was nipping, my dog whom I was flinging about, caressing, and running with, rather than with any young female being the cherishing of whom could have only led to disappointments and pain, a unilateral or mutual injustice. But there were dangers in the very innocence – by directing my love urge to the woods, nature, I was making love to death, autumn, decay, as though to a frozen female body, and for a long time, I had difficulties with recognising a sovereign spiritual being in a woman.

The quail symphony. More an expression of feeling than the art of painting. The cuckoo is calling your fates. The quail is singing your moments of happiness. The quail will prevail. The pied piper is playing the quail part of Beethoven's Sixth symphony. Let us follow him, kids! Whatever the cuckoo may be calling.

The burble of water around me is the quail singing. My heart is a cuckoo.

The cuckoo of my heart would be choked silent if it would not hear the quail.

Hercules is coming to the garden of Hesperides, to steal the egg of the cuckoo, or maybe Atlas is coming instead.

The chunks of ice in the bay turned into flocks of white swans. My creative writing teacher told me it was too simple a metaphor.

With the pocket knife I had bought in Southeastern Latvia, I cut through the neck of a dying swan at the bay of Hoosal in March. I am Septimus. A Septimus fond of life, fixed on life, taking pleasure in it. And hearing close family friends dropping off, falling into the valley of death.

Along the street of Hoosal that passes the back quarters of the old castle, with the hospital opposite to it, there came a man with a shotgun, clad in dark robes, who was hunting the foxes that had become a pest in the town, having been wandering freely in streets like homeless dogs for a few years now. The rabies was no longer a menace, that is why they had been multiplying that fast, taking over populated areas. Right at the moment, he could see one coming, strolling in self-conscious peace like a regular vagrant cat. He aimed and shot it. But alas, at the very moment the young teacher, in the years of her prime, from the art school was walking along the street, there being no pavement, rejoicing at the promising spring, casting agile looks in search of prettier, more artistic sights, thinking of the forthcoming lesson at the art school. She was delicate, and her slender limbs were nimble. She was wearing a blouse of fine tissue – whining, the bullet hit that gentle shoulder, tearing the cloth, sprinkling blood and bits of flesh! Luckily, it just bruised her. She will be fine. What will I do, Septimus, seeing the nice teacher suffer! I am swearing revenge, promising to myself to cut the black rottweiler dog of the gunman's, Silvio's, into ribbons, anyway, he was not allowed to shoot at the fox even. After accomplishing my revenge, I am caught, young as I am, I have no record of offenses, I am sent to the bedlam in the capital, for recuperation. But that leaves me with a stigma. After being released, I am not the same any more. I keep roaming in the crazy Northern Estonia teeming with crime, in and around the capital city. It is the crude nineties, two rascals catch me by a railway, sadists, who not just rob me but make me a cripple, removing, as in a real bad American horror movie, my right hand with a chainsaw. A good Samaritan finds me, calling for help, my life will be saved in the hospital. Still in that big, brutal, buzzing capital city. Talented as I was, with an eye and a hand for painting, as my teacher said, what kind of art am I fit for now, having lost my hand? But there are even those who paint with their toes or mouths. That is what my new girlfriends, senior to my age, the good aunties full of love and respect and caring for me, my platonic sweethearts, the benefactresses I always wish to hug, tell me.

With the pocket knife I had bought in Southeastern Latvia, I cut through the neck of a dying swan by a place of open water in the icy bay of Hoosal in March. The bird was dazed, fallen on its stomach. The wings had fainted, the black webs forked apart, childish, helpless. The white neck hardly flinching once or twice in the hold of my large palm, the skin of my thumb startled by the brief white coarseness of the neck feathers, as I pushed the blade in. I cut through the middle of the long neck. Not much of a Saint George, though there really is something dragonish in a swan figure. Giving up you, giving up life, going the way of all the mortals. No euthanasia for a monster, though when recklessly protecting their offspring, they attack you hissing, the beaks prepared for stabbing, the heads stamping angrily, the preening, sinuous, cruel grace of beautiful creatures. Halting for a moment though, it really seemed as if I were killing a fine rounded dragon, slipping it off with my knife into the waters of Lethe. I am no good at birds, cannot classify most of the waterfowl. In late April though, the reaches of the bay of Hoosal are ringing like a mad kindergarten deep into inland areas, throbbing in a noisy jet of the colours of sound.

3

Uncle Endel, mamma and I were coming from downtown Tallinn and walking through an old and decaying slum. We were glad at one another's company as always, though we did not always recognise that. My uncle was the same heavy-built bloke as ever, reeking sweetly of sweat (I did not smell but knew it). Those were the years of his early middle age, the year might have been 1987, again, me in my mid-teens. Grandmother went to a shop to buy food stuff, while my uncle and I were waiting in the street, he smoking a cigarette for a pastime. Grandmother came back to us carrying a bag full of delicious promises. It was in the evening, the spring twilight nearly there. We went along Clover Street (the street in which a gang of scoundrels would rob me of all my belongings, including passport, and nearly beat me to death one May night six years later). My uncle was smoking another cigarette. Two young Russian women with juicy hips and long dark hair met us on the pavement. They asked my uncle to light their fags and I could see at once that they liked him! I was proud of him and pleased at his success. Why should they not like him, such a bold, hairy, stocky bloke at his prime!

"Russian bitches!" uncle Endel said with gusto, in a tone of jovial calmness, as we went on walking, and mamma muttered something in soft reproach. My thoughts were playing around uncle Endel's fine unexpected success as if it were a jar of honey. It seemed to me as though through him, those vagrant Russian girls had paid a bit of attention to myself. Even back then, my eyes kind of double noticed those kinds of dark-haired lasses.

"Bitches! Larats is looking for bitches! Larats likes bitches, doesn't he!" my uncle once exclaimed at me, in a voice of coarse mockery, at his and mamma's place. I was hurt, not deeply, but quite, shrinking in dismay from his neighbourhood. My uncle was slandering me, labelling my intentions. In my secret teenage dreams there was no place for women of easy conquests. I was dreaming of a tender, suave girl with a fine soul who would be able to read the soliloquies of mind from across distances, who could hear my wordless longings, with whom I could share the profoundest impulses of my soul and afterwards, in a serenity of friendship and reverence, the devotion of our bodies. Evidently my uncle was attributing his own wishes to me, that he had buried alive in a callous denial, the sour afterthoughts of having failed. What did he know of the out-door performances my fancies staged with a youth falling on his knees at a maiden's feet in a juniper grove by the sea shore, of the secret glances laden with meaning, exchanged in a tremulous pink sensation in studios smelling of paint? What did he really want to know of them at all? Not the least bit! Together, we had been discussing science fiction stories and reading about astronomers' theories of parallel

universes, but in the other universe, contained in my youthful spirit, he did not show the scarcest bit of interest, laughing rudely and sneering at the very possibility of its existence! And ever after that outburst of uncle Endel's irony, I began sensing how the gazes, words, and gestures of others, including my close ones, turning into outer alien forces, started forcing desires and attitudes on me, that I had not recognised as mine. "Larats is craving for bitches!" In their opinion, that was exactly what I had to be craving for, a normal course of events, like being born and having to die.

4

It is nearly twelve years since I last had a bath in a bathtub, not counting the bubble tubes at spa centres. But the latter can never replace what was the main charm for me of the regular man-length cast iron bathtubs. Nor could one afford the same delight in them, at least not to the former extent, now as even water has become so expensive. In this respect, the needier but cheaper times were better ones, really. The delight consisted in lying naked on your back in the empty tub, your head against one end of it and your feet against the other, and letting a stream of water of temperate warmth flow from the tap in a spout of sufficient force for it to cover the tub bottom with a thin burbling layer before it disappears through the small plastic grate of the round drain opening at the bottom. The film of water is tickling and stroking warmly you spine, hips, and collar-bones, you feel safe and proud, stretching your legs under the thin jet from the tap. The empty tub feels bleak, the warm film beneath your back makes the air around you appear even colder, the metal vessel in which you are lying seems almost like a sarcophagus, you are trembling, nearly shuddering, feeling parts of your body to be turned into defiant goose flesh. You can go on lying for dozens of minutes that way. No harm can happen. The elements are caring for you, all of a sudden, the dim electric lights in the bathroom appear so lovely, the electricity is serving, waiting on you, life is forever. You plug the drain opening. The hot embrace is gradually turning stronger, you are getting ever more evidence of being loved. A person able and willing to have such sensations will always be capable of love for their own self, nor will such a person ever cease wishing to be lovable for others. They cannot let themselves down, being right here as long as they are, the way they are. Occasionally some people have died in a bathtub. But that will never happen during those tickling trickle procedures, as the warmth and the chill are giving massage to your mind and your body. The tap water is washing and cheering up your skin cells, the fine circulation of your sensitive blood, your nerve ends, the prominent projection of your bones groping for the jostling future. When the water is up to your throat, the caress of the warmth unquestionable and all-including, you are gradually starting to feel sultry and there is a lot of steam in your breath, you can hardly see the tap through the hot vapour, with the fondness still pouring on in a rustle. You turn off the tap. Soon you will be unplugging the drain. You are returning to the initial delight, you can repeat it for a lot of times. It is even better to return to the beginning, while the edges of water are lapping close on the tops of your thighs and chest yet. The people at whose places I last took such baths about a dozen years ago, are all dead by now.

5

I was with the old scholar, Mr. Sepp, who translated ancient Germanic literary texts into my native language. He was living alone in a country house in Ipiki, a village in Northern Latvia about seven miles south of the Estonian border.

His old ages had made him look Jewish. He looked very much like an old Jew whom I had often noticed at the synagogue in Riga.

Sepp was decrying, nearly imprecating upon the Irish mythological heritage which he called a moronic buffoonery, quoting someone's article on the so-called "Irish mongrelism".

I told him how I had scared off the first girl I had been attached to, by sending her obscenities. "I meant to do like a character in Faulkner's short story "There Was a Queen", sending lewd letters to a girl," I told Sepp. "In that story, after getting about a dozen of such letters, the girl gets married with a young Southern aristocrat. The man dies in an accident caused by his insensible pride and recklessness, and the woman is left alone with her newborn son. She tells one of her in-laws, an old Southern lady, about the first of those letters. She vows to burn the messages but keeps them. And the lewd anonymous "admirer" of hers steals back those letters, robs the bank he had been working at, and runs away. She knows the compromising letters to exist somewhere. Years later, she encounters an FBI agent, a young Jewish man, who is investigating the case of the old bank robbery. By tracing the robber, he has got hold of the letters. He is to hand over the letters to higher authorities. At that moment, he is still the only other person to have read them. In order to obtain and destroy the disgraceful letters, the woman, married into gentry, goes to the decadent city of Memphis with the agent and sleeps with him. Then she receives the letters and burns them. It is not in the best light that that short story presents a Jewish person."

"So you intended to repeat the plot of that story, to act all the male roles in it by turns. To find out into which of them your destiny would finally station you. Wrote obscene letters to a girl. Tried to act proud and reckless and to marry that girl. In which you failed, of course. And then you turned to playing Jewish."

"Yes, it was then that I turned to becoming Jewish. I tried following a stereotypical Jewish role, presented in Faulkner's tale."

I told him that the factor of being Jewish – the image of a Jewish Yankee sleeping with women by means of compromising materials – had come over me and I could not get rid of it any more. By getting acquainted with Jewish culture, I learned how far such a Jewish type lay from the likely average, but with the male trinity – an anonymous ribald, a thoughtless aristocratic hero and the investigation bureau agent – holding a place for a Jew, I stuck to it. And then I met a Jewish girl, Hannah.

Sepp shook his head. I thought that he probably disliked my story, and he probably also disliked that translation of "Gawain" I had made and brought for him, even because with its code of honour and its Celtic fancy world the verse narrative was a far cry from the kind of Nordic mentality that he was dealing with.

Let us imagine a girl with a stern, eagle-like face befitting her Armenian origins. There are the proud solitude of mountains and some thirst for extreme measures in her face. A girl involved in the movement of Esperanto, with a few penfriends that she is corresponding with in that language. Such a girl might have been my bride. I did not have such a bride. My life proceeded in contacts with women that were devotees of some faith and with women far from any confessions, worshipping the god of the unfaithful, the Capital, and its prophet in reverse, Karl Marx. A descendant of rabbis who had passionately chosen not to be Jewish.

In the Jewish lore, the moon is the symbol of their nation. I had always loved the Moon, with a capital M. The love was hereditary, having awakened in my grandmother, who had written an essay "My friend the Moon" while a small schoolgirl. As rarely and random as I had seen the moon, either as a yellow glowing disc or sabre at night or as a pale spot in the bluish-grey skies at day, I had had contacts with Jewish people. I certainly met them in the synagogue. In the temple, however, their being Jewish was not that important, because by reading the Torah they were worshipping the Lord of all people, unified by their faith that might have been embracing many non-Jews that had also been given the main Jewish laws, according to the Jewish apostle Paul. Down there, they were not united by their race, an aspect irreligious and alien to the Jewish religion. But among the unbelievers or the tepid in

faith, or the fake believers, that I met outside the synagogue, there could be found a lot of people of nearly the same race, to whom the lore of being Jewish did not extend. As it was with that Armenian woman. I knew her type. I did not know any such person well enough. Still, in years, I had grown a longing for an Armenian woman whose nature was glittering deep, like her eyes, like the hue of her hair.

I had the same dream at Sepp's for several times. The helmet lying down on the floor in front of me, was no real helmet. It was made of several layers of plaster, spread right on top of where the head would be, having been let to petrify and covered with silver foil, which had been thinly painted black to emulate iron. Plaques of tin had been glued above the eye openings, with a plaited ornament pressed into them, picturing arms holding swords and axes, legs intertwining into swastikas. I was somewhere in reddish mountains in Armenia, and I was crouching terrified in a narrow cellar which resembled a corridor, as far back as the throng of people in the cellar had let me go, and outside, horses were jostling, their hoofs were beating down the passage of the corridor, the pounding of their hoofs penetrating quite palpably into the farthest recesses. What was important was that there were horses out there, that they were panicking in ferocious fits, why they were galloping there, was not that important, perhaps there had been an earthquake, perhaps the country was attacked by an alien war chief or anonymous hordes (it could have been any era whatsoever), and what counted was that I was not outside, sitting on horseback or being surrounded by them, but hiding from them. The horses were in power, me having no communion with them. The dream occasionally even overwhelmed the screen of my conscious while I was awake. In another dream I was wearing a magnificent Viking-style set of arms and robes and sitting on horseback in a field near the farmhold of Sepp's. I was sitting and waiting for someone. Then the horse began shying and the dream was interrupted right at the moment I fell off the saddle. The fall and the vanishing of the dream lasted some minutes. I woke up and I heard Sepp making low growling sounds and stepping to and fro in his kitchen, from the living room door to the front door and back, a lot of times. I recalled the midsummer night party at his place a year and a half earlier. I was there in the early morning of the previous day, so I could have some serious talk with the old scholar before he started his binge. He and I were on first name terms. Others guests began arriving, a few of them by car, but most of them plodding the seven miles on foot from the Moisakula bus stop across the Estonian border. The majority of them the host's fraternity mates. A young Estonian state official whom I knew to be a medic, discussed Sepp's health problems with him, hearing the complaints. Obeying the host's instructions, I began making the pea soup: emptied a plenty of cans of meat, peas, and other vegetables into a pot, set it boiling and cracked about fifteen eggs into it. Sepp was being visited by an old Latvian man from the village of Ipiki, a former militia man (that is, the Latvian Soviet-style policeman), as the host explained. They kept raising their vodka glasses and grumbling to each other in Latvian. That sounded so primordial that I could not help chuckling at it. The old Latvian was caught in anger and exclaimed in Russian for me to keep my trap shut, even my parents having been snotty brats while the two of them were living the lives of grown-up men. A young fellow, obviously tight with beer, suggested in a smaller company going for a fight with the Latvians in Ipiki, and giving them a good thrashing, a traditional enemy of the Estonians as that nation had been since ancient times. Upon his suggestion, I sent a distracted look of contemplation towards the village across the fields: a lovely haze of summer sunshine hovering over the meadows, the distant battle field appearing improbable, in epic mists. The childish stupidity of the suggestion somehow struck me as sweetly exciting. That kind of muddle-headed urchins always appeared to me living lives more real than my own. Towards the evening, more bands of boys were arriving, mostly students, with a couple of girls among them. A latecomer, a tall youth whose legs were dangling from the joints like a spider's, boasted about having crossed the state border in the

woods, by just jumping the barbed wire – and he noted his high jump record for us – he would not have been let through the frontier-guard post as he was without the passport. Well into the night, the old scholar kept drinking ninety-eight degree spirits, wearing the Viking helmet with horns, and bragging by the festive fire in the yard near his barn about his having made a phone call to Hitler one night in 1943, fifty years back. And shrouded in the darkness of late night, the host and his company of youths fell asleep, some of them in various rooms of the house, others by the fire, still others under bushes, dozing inebriate with vodka like a crew caught in a sudden paralysing nap in a ship floating in a placid ocean.

I was one of the first to get up in the morning. Most of the guests were still lying somewhere under trees or bushes or in the sauna. Sepp and I drank instant coffee, which he always offered his guests, with quite a lot of sugar. What the old scholar said sounded clear enough and he did not look to be especially suffering from the recent booze. We were standing in the front room as two young people came down the attic ladder, both of them just released from the faintness of sleep, kind of languid and elated.

Breathing out vodka vapours from his mouth, Sepp said to his fraternity fellow: “You young man, you’ve spent the night with a woman.”

“Is that a sin?” the fair-haired girl next to the youth uttered numbly, insusceptibly, a little drowsily and as if with indifference, not moving her head.

“That’s a sin for me,” Sepp’s reply resounded. For the whole scene, I was perceiving an unpleasant, restless tremour overcoming my entire body: feeling both envy and scorn for all the three of them.

6

I bought records with dialogues for learning Gaelic, Welsh, Catalan. I wanted to listen to old Europe. I heard America roaring across the Western appendix of the Old World, America with Thanksgiving turkeys, lobster shops, fastfood and Indian restaurants, and hasty dashing petrol stations. European languages were the slang of eccentrics, a cute hobby like all the oddities of the old-fashioned. South Asia like a sturdy wood-cutter at least could respond something to America. European languages were like a sound without even any fury.

A warm, rainy side street, recurrent in dreams through a veil of memory, in fairy-tale greenness, and me cycling along it on my bike to go waiting for my mammy and her girlfriend who may come walking here, if they do, at a ten foot high red light turret with a lantern on top of it, on the Eastern shore of a small cove, like a lakelet, of the sea in an autumn evening yellow with showers of sunshine, back in the year 1975.

The chilly years lining up into shadowy, callous hardships at elementary school then, the schoolmates bullying, teasing and caring for me, the basic school and leaving the brotherly gang of the boys of the home neighbourhood, the boat harbour from which my parents and I and my grandpa and granny and uncle from Tallinn, often launched our trips to the summer cottage in Aiboland, in the boom of the boat engine and the murmur of seas and further in the roads among juniper trees.

Down there somewhere, the wall of years is rising high like expanses of fog sullen in the open seas of November. The dreams are bringing bits of this and that home to me at night with paths of speech between days being forgotten. The cormorants expectant on rocks in the shoals of the bay, for the years of my growth and being taken farther away from my home I was unaware how close I had been to that sight of my brat years, to the sunset in my eyes before I was hardly over three feet tall.

7

On the faraway shores of the Southern continent of the New World, ultramarine waves are murmuring on the sands above which cool, tight and luxuriant palm leaves are curving and swinging in a warm lenient wind, casting bluish green shadows, the wind blowing from the Atlantic apparently up to the Andes, and here, the light with an odorous yellowish tinge, is not dry, not harrying, ruthlessly meticulous, nor laying the kernels of things bare like fading bones, as in some African deserts, but just playing its part in the matter-of-fact shadow theatre of silhouettes sliding as a streamy flow from the dawn till the close of the day, and as the light is fading into the brief twilight, the night is received with the reward of the mild silver rain of the ultimate rays.

On the forested slope of a hill, a small river with the breadth of about twenty feet is rippling between grassy banks. A granite boulder that would reach a man to his chest, is crouching at the edge of it, half in the water, where the current is softer. Here, the stream, having rebelliously danced and splashed at a small distance upstream, meets with the balancing powers of an ancient presence, as if it were reaching out its arms against the rush and momentum. The current is twirling, shirking the obstacle in a flighty confusion, foaming and bubbling, unwilling to give up any of the ardour in which it is dashing down across the rocky bottom, in a clear and fierce juvenility, a little way off upstream. There are not as many trees on the banks, nor the tree-tops as thick, for the sun not to extend its light to the stream, in the lucid midmornings of spring and early summer. In such times, a solitary man is going to the calmer waters at the boulder, to receive a softly flogging bath of bracing briskness.

The summer arrives, the time of ripeness. You are on a trip. In a distant country, you could nearly wish to stay living here. But every country prefers to consist of its natives, first of all. The cicadas are chirring. Chirring through the dusk. The urges of the South are inciting hundreds of millions, suffocating you. The continents are immense, the people uncountable, everyone aspiring for more, to their last breaths, but you must accomplish something. Accomplish something, the cicadas are chirring. Perform something – like a palpable roar into the deep thick night of the South. Into the thicket of branches, dark forkings and gnarling shadows, deep as the feeling of debt.

NEKORAMA

Enland Evenings 1983 – 1990

As father and I were on our knees threshing rutabaga shucks to the fugues of Bach flowing on the radio
 in the single huge room of our farm house built in 1882
 lit with one or two dim electric bulbs
 the whole floor covered with smelly rutabaga stalks scattered on a single great green canvas
 the tiny black seeds when crushed accidentally, giving off puffs of pungent plant oil smell
 early on a dark autumn night with chilly stars, hoarfrost and shots from hunters' guns outside
 that was in 1987 and my five-year-old cousin had already spent days at our place
 father bought the place in the late winter of 1983
 I had a favourite area in the surroundings, a wild alley of juniper bushes, with a kind of grassy
 road in between them stretching for half a mile from our yard to the seashore
 in that alley you could meet vipers, chance on a sheep corpse or be confronted with a roaming
 red cow or bull
 it was lined with sizable granite stones, gathered from the fields a century ago and arranged
 into low primitive walls
 when I came from the town by taking the boat across the bay of sea, I would walk to our
 homestead along that alley
 I once took my small cousin Allan to a stroll in it
 on his initiative, we discussed the basics of the adult topic of getting offspring
 I was fifteen
 I picked a small juniper tree, and cut it down with an axe, I lopped off the branches and
 barked it with my knife, and made it into a walking stick fit for wanderers in the wilderness
 straight, with some gnarling enlargements, ends of cut off branches, and a bend for a handle
 cosy to grip
 I thought of it rather as a wand
 Allan was afraid I would step on a viper while I was fussing about among the heaps of stones
 looking for the tree with a suitable shape
 but he liked the walking-stick when it was complete
 I showed him where the bird's eye primroses and smooth horsetails grew
 I showed him our water-hole with the small stream flowing from it into the creek
 but I said beware of the hole
 we called it our source or spring
 for a couple of years it was our only well of water
 back in the yard and in the kitchen of the old house, grandmother praised our juniper walking-
 stick
 she had a fine eye for things like that
 I called the juniper alley Enland, "en" meaning juniper in Swedish
 most likely the ones who made it and first used it were Swedes
 as they cut their trips shorter by driving their horse wagons down to the harbour
 for me, Enland was there for seven years
 in the autumn of 1990, all of it was uprooted, turned upside down, the soil ploughed through
 many times, ditches dug in the ground, no trees or bushes, no paths or grassy roads, no stone
 walls, a new field instead
 no horsetails or bird's eye primroses
 I learned of the havoc through the letters my parents sent me to America
 in August before I flew to America, I walked in Enland, as I returned the following July, no
 trace of it
 then our native country became politically independent

farming became unprofitable
for a couple of dozen years, the field where Enland used to be, has produced little if any
harvest
oftentimes the farmer has left the crops unharvested
it is mostly growing weeds
but a new spring of water has opened down the bank of one of the ditches
where some of the village people have been going with buckets for exquisitely clear water

NE KOPIRATI

Heide's Basket of Berries

Valya was Russian on her mother's side. She called herself Estonian, and hardly spoke Russian. Valya's mother, Anna, had died in late spring, two years earlier, at ninety-one. She had been blind and had not left her apartment in twenty years. She was buried in the Orthodox area of the churchyard. When she lived she liked saffron cakes at Easter.

Anna's father had been the prefect of the county in the days of the empire. Anna worked as a bookkeeper in the county agricultural bureau. An auditor came from Tallinn to check her accounts. He became Valya's father. They never lived together. Old people from other branches of the family came from Tallinn for Anna's birthdays. Anna had had acquaintances from her bookkeeping days that were living in the surrounding countryside.

Such was Heide. They had worked together at the agricultural bureau. Heide was over seventy. She grew carrots, potatoes, and beets and brought them to town to Valya. She lived on a meandering road in the southernmost village of a peninsula across the straits north of town. She had a dog, and a farmhand helped her with the gardening, chopped wood for her stove, and did occasional light construction. He also accompanied her when she went to pick berries in Eimbe woods—*Eimbe skon*, as the coastal Swedes had called it in their dialect. The terrain ranged from low marshes and thickets of alder to a high pine forest on a sandy ground. In late summer and early autumn she and her farmhand picked blueberries and cowberries. She made jam of them. The strawberries and raspberries of early midsummer were eaten fresh. In spring she and the farmhand picked the previous year's cranberries in the marshes, and she made jam of them as well. In late autumn they gathered mushrooms. They had to walk a few kilometres along a path through the changing landscape. The path was used by animals, hunters, and the village people. Heide had a daughter who was married and lived in town. It was by her husband's car that Heide could get to town and bring fruits and vegetables to Valya.

Valya had a daughter who was just past thirty and living in Denmark. When she lived with her mother and grandmother, acting had been her avocation. The daughter paid the expenses that came with living in Valya's collectively owned apartment house, but otherwise the two were not on good terms. The daughter and her Danish husband were office workers. They did not have children. They had decided to marry in her country; the wedding party had been held in a villa by the sea, not far from town.

As a girl, Valya's mother Anna had been good at music, but her teacher at high school, the renowned composer Cyrillus Kreek, had graded her just satisfactory. Anna's mother had then had a confidential talk with the music teacher. It was thereafter said that Mr. Kreek had taken a liking to Anna's mother. When Anna was born, her parents were living in a two-story wooden house on a site that would become the town's market square, next to the churchyard in which they would one day be buried. The house also lay not far from the railway station that had been built at the turn of the century for the reception of Russia's imperial family when they arrived for summer holidays. In the yard Anna's parents kept chickens and geese. And they were well-off enough to keep servants. But Anna's father lost his job as the county prefect when the Czar lost his. When the republic was declared, Anna's parents opened a guesthouse and kept only the smaller part of the residence for themselves. Twenty years later, when a new revolution overthrew the republic and the era of collectivisation was imposed, Anna's father quickly sold the most of the house to escape persecution as a wealthy bourgeois. They kept just a few small rooms. Anna had a brother, a few years her junior, who remained in the town all his life. He had had a childless marriage and died a few years before her. When her parents died, her father in the fifties and her mother in the sixties, Anna lived in one of the new „Khrushchevkas“ apartment houses.

Heide's house in the village lay behind a stand of high fir trees. Very few others lived in the village through the year. Heide's former neighbors had died, moved to town, or been taken away to colonies of the elderly. As summer approached, townspeople came to the village, heated the dampness out of the houses that had been shut up for the winter, lit the sauna stoves, barbecued meat and sausages, sliced tomatoes and cucumbers they had brought from the supermarkets in the town. On weekends, they were joined by flocks of friends and acquaintances. Heide was constantly cold. Even in warm weather, she wore a woollen cap that covered her cheeks and warmed her ears.

Heide's half-brother, ten years her junior, had once kept horses and a barn in the village, and in winter had a sideline offering sleigh rides. He sold the horses, moved away, and became a long-haul driver, ferrying loads throughout the EU.

Valya had been very ill several times. She had lost organs to cancer. Once, while her mother yet lived, she lay in a coma in the hospital in Tallinn for over a week. Her neighbours from town had gone to see her, expecting that she might never return to consciousness. She and her mother had benefactors among the ethnic Swedes who lived in the Finnish province of Ostrobothnia, nearly five hundred kilometres to the north. Their Finland-Swedish friend Erik had also come.

Erik was familiar with the country, from his occasional trips to the health spas around Pärnu, which were inexpensive for Finns. Erik and his two brothers raised silver foxes. They sold the hides once a year. The heavy work wore on him, and he had had several shoulder operations. His father and mother lived into their nineties. After they died, he lived alone. He and his brothers sold the land, and he made plans to sell the house as well and buy an apartment in town. Erik went cross-country skiing in winters; he was very keen on skiing.

Valya recovered. Her eyes had always been very weak, and occasionally they caused her great pain. Because of her eyesight, she had been living on a state pension since she was a teenager. She was very impractical in financial matters, perpetually in debt. In winters, Valya and her little dog had sometimes crossed the ice over the strait to the peninsula where Heide lived.

Of the people of Heide's village, Valya's neighbour Vesta knew more than her. That Senna, for example, drank beer and wetted her trousers while sitting at the kitchen table; the piss ran hissing on the floor. She canned pears and cucumbers. She did hoeing and gardening and in earlier times she had made hay. In the days of the collective farm, she had been in charge of its cafeteria. Like Heide, she went to Eimbe woods to pick berries and mushrooms. Her husband Julius died of stomach cancer at sixty-two. Julius had been a good tractor-driver who for decades cultivated the fields of the collective farm. He had been born and lived his whole life in the same parish except for the period of the military service and the time spent at training to become a tractor-driver. He had ploughed, harrowed and rolled the fields of his native area. He had collected stones from the fields and sown crop seeds into the slaggy earth, seagulls yelling overhead. He could mow grass for hours with the scythe with rational skill. As he lost his job when the collective farm was dispersed he fell into utter poverty, with still nearly twenty years to wait for his pension. He could retrieve the lands that had been taken from his father during the deprivatisation. Of the properties of the former collective farm, he gained a cow. When the milk-trucks ceased to circulate among small farmsteads to collect milk, the cow had to be taken to the slaughter-house. From then on, Julius only had dogs, a big and a small one. The small dog happened to fall into the well and Julius had to scoop it up with a rake. He grew potatoes, rutabaga, beets and carrots for his own household. To earn something he sold trees from the lands he had retrieved. He later worked as a spare hand for many neighbours. He did mowing, and he was a talented carpenter. He rode a bicycle between the villages. He liked listening to the radio while working. He lost his appetite because of the cancer and as he lay dying on the divan he already looked a skeleton.

And that young Arne, from Stockholm, who came conquering the country on his bicycle, was thrilled by Estonian-Swedish history. And that with no pangs of conscience he lived at the expense of his many Estonian acquaintances. He had married an Iranian woman in Sweden and had a daughter with her.

And she told Valya of how Bengt, or Benku, a shortish Finland-Swede, piloted his small boat across the Gulf to bring her a used washing-machine, the first washing machine in the forty-five years of Vesta's life.

And of how Ilmar Kunnas, an Estonian man with Finnish roots, had been deported to Airootsi at the end of the war by the retreating Germans. His family had lived east of Lake Peipus, in the lands around the River Plyussa, but the Germans had settled them in the village abandoned by the coastal Swedes. Born in Soviet Russia, he failed to obtain citizenship in the new independent republic. He died of pneumonia a few years after the changes. He had worked as a geologist in northeastern Estonia, in the petrochemical industry. He was divorced and had two sons who were artists. Late in life, with great skill and pride, he had built himself a new house and sauna in Eistorbi. When his sons sold the house after his death, the new owner disassembled half of what he had built and refashioned the house. In his last years, Kunnas quit drinking vodka, saying that all he needed was health. His brother, who lived just a couple hundred meters distant, passed a year and a half after he. His brother's wife, Dunya, was still living. She had three sons, and one often went to her sauna. Dunya's neighbour, Water-Man, had frequent binges. He ploughed the fields and cursed everybody. He died of lung cancer.

The main activity of the vacationers was mowing the grass. Heide's gardening started much earlier. The grass was white with morning hoarfrost when she would go to the shed to fetch the tools in the chill. She wore woollen socks and black rubber shoes. She dug the earth with her spade and extracted weedy clods and roots with an iron rake, pulling and pushing at the soil. Finally, on all fours, she evened it with her hands. After the six long beds were ready, she sowed beet seeds in one of them, rutabaga in another, and carrots in the rest.

With the warmer days and the plants sprouting, she weeded the beds barehanded, thinned out the seedlings, hoed the thistles and orache out of the hardened soil between the beds, and hauled the waste to the compost heap behind her shed.

In the mornings she cooked herself oatmeal porridge. For lunch she fried herself potatoes and cut scallion shoots over them. In the evenings she ate an egg sandwich and drank tea of raspberry shoots. Every day she made a fire in the oven, its hot wall warming her small bedroom adjacent to the kitchen.

A couple of times a week she went to the village shop, three kilometres away. She bought black and white bread and at times also sugar and cookies. Heide loved bananas, but in the store these were often missing, or else either green and damp or overripened, brown, and sticky, nearly rotting. It was her appetite for bananas that made her take the hour-long bus ride to town at the beginning of every month, as her pension money was being transferred to her bank account. She would go to one of the huge new supermarkets, clumsily pushing along the limping trolley, taking a long time to select the prettiest cluster of bananas.

On this particular morning, she bought herself also a pair of underwear and thinner, summer socks. She thoroughly studied the cheese counters and bought a box of melted cheese. Out of the store, she sighed with relief. Next was a visit to Valya. Valya spent six hours every day walking her little dog, and Heide's visits brought her joy.

Heide always brought a present, a jar of either jam or honey, but this time was something more special: a tiny box with a French inscription, containing a bottle of a lotion for anointing the legs. Heide had found the catalogue of a French cosmetics company in her postbox and had ordered a few items that suited her purse.

Valya lived in a big apartment house. Her apartment was always a mess. So that Heide wouldn't stumble, she swept up a bone on the floor. She shook out the throw on the sofa and collected the bills, pills, empty cups, and crumbs from off the table.

When Heide rang the bell downstairs, Valya shut her barking, twisting doggie in the other room and showed her guest in.

Heide was thanked abundantly for her visit and her present.

"This is for tired legs," Heide explained. "When you return home with Yolantha in the evening, first wash your legs and then massage them with this."

The visit lasted a couple of hours. Heide then slowly made her way to the station to catch the three o'clock bus. No later service stopped in the village. With bananas in her bag, she sat by the window of the aging bus. As it left the town, she viewed the boxy new shopping centres gliding past, their long, fine-coloured pennants flying. Thickets followed on both sides of the road, more houses, thickets again. The driver stopped only where there were passengers waiting or disembarking, rattling past the stops at which no one wished to exit or enter.

NEKOPIRATI

An Eternal Rhapsodist

Roderick believed in the birth of an eternal rhapsodist – believed that as the clouds are gathering and it is thundering and the wind is blowing fertile freedom, howling over corn fields and meadows, and as the first reddish-green dots of buds are appearing on the hard frozen boughs, the birth of Vergil is being repeated – he that coming from the nature, brings a formular word to humankind. He believed the creative nature itself to be a rhapsodist, from whom a classic rhapsodist in the human speech is ever springing, readable both in the shape of letters and in the murmuring of air, water, earth, a bright blaze. He believed that at least once before he dies, the eternal rhapsodist will speak to him and that his whole life (even after he appears to have heard the rhapsody already) will have been a preparation for that event – striking him with repletion like a life-giving lightning-bolt, as quickly as a fatal lightning-bolt had in an instant deprived him of his brother.

I am a stream in which Zeus is steeping his legs, I am a leafy grove from whose boughs Aphrodite is sprinkling dew on her shoulders and chest, I am the wind of blossom crowns in the wings of the sandals of Hermes. I am the roaring music of Poseidon's servants, the waving veils and the powder of Hera, the wise birds of Athena. I am all that because I made Artemis angry. I am the tears of Demeter and the sorrow and scorn of Persephone, the bulb of a flower beneath the dead earth at winter, a log of wood glowing in a poor woman's hearth forever. I am the curly shadows in the flaming smithies of Hephaistos, the mute screaming of the subjects of Hades. I am the midday calmness of Apollon whose harmony is the punishment of the reckless. My legs, arms and genitalia are twirling into the self-forgetful vine shoots of Dionysos. I am the laughing leaves through which Pan is gazing the nymphs, the drivelling joy from the mouths of the hounds of spring on the frigid winter's traces. I am all that because I earned the anger of Artemis and I am no longer what I was before I could see her.

Back then, in the month of July in 1975, as mother, father, and I sat into the small red-and-yellow boat that belonged to the newspaper my parents worked as correspondents for, and drove into the Bay of Hoosal, I first consciously saw Airootsi, the mysterious peninsula even whose name until then had only half reached my ears, with a wild coast line like a tropical land of treasure hunters, an African shore in this summer haze, lapping in the north to the buzz of the boat engine. From then on, father started to go fishing in this bay, as scant as those waters were of edible fish except perch, one could catch sizable pikes in the more open seas to the northwest, not far away. That time back then, the boat got stuck in the shoals, father climbed out, the water reaching him to the navel, his feet groping in the gluttonous sea mud. Mother and I in the boat observing and cheering him, he pushed it for over three hundred feet, in the following times he always remembered to steer past those grounds.

I tried to describe my grandmother what the Przewalski horse, or the Mongolian horse, as I preferred, or the Asian wild horse, which I also liked, looked like. Its being nearly the height of a pony, a little helpless and awkward. Cocking its ears a bit similar to an ass's, the squab body, a black line, called the eel stripe, on top of its back. With strong and wilful shoulders, a scanty mane, as if shorn. To tell her how I first met it in the forest at Eimbe – a shaky drab figure of a horse, lowering its head quietly yet excitedly, turning its face towards another bough behind the shrub, the velvet quiver of its mane above the medley of cowberry and blueberry leaves the first sign to catch my eye.

My grandmother was blind. So blind that what she could see were only the tales of her ancient childhood. In return for her stories, she expected me to tell her about the great beautiful world of the living, in which she believed I was a joyful participant, accomplishing everything with a playful levity. When I went to America at the age of nineteen, to stay there for a year, perhaps longer, those being still the Soviet times, her sister from Southeastern

Estonia wrote her an admonishing letter: “Well, you can count on losing that child, unless he belongs to the kind of your own son, he’ll be disappearing traceless in America. Couldn’t one really look for a proper education in our own country?” Far away in Minnesota at that time, students of capable spirits were building a brighter morrow in the “fairs of the future” with fascinating geometrical technologies. My paternal uncles in Tallinn were just about to become car owners, in their mid-thirties, for the first time.

Roderick was painting – by the independence and sternness of his spirit he might have been taken for a clergyman or a writer of a great mission. Yet what he did was painting, mostly bird watching platforms or towers, that were abundant in his native neighbourhood – a structure with stairs towering in an empty landscape, a plain with cane fields, with its form either dark upon the background of bright seas and skies, or glistening in sunshine, surrounded by a dark threatening beyond, often visible as the episodic sum of single short energetic brush strokes, the entire picture like a cascade of many-coloured commas, the nature of the structure merging with the flickering heat, the shiver of the sunshine, the veil of rain, the folds of the fog, or the haze of snow. One could take his art for a rebirth, a revival of impressionism; and at times, a lonely heron would be seen standing at a tussock in the foreground.

NEKOPIRAN

An Olympian Spring

1

By the January of 2000, I had lost contact with my parents, living in Hoosal in Western Estonia, for several months. I was working as a packer, with intermittent twelve hour day shifts and night shifts, in a blanket and pillow factory in Viljandi. I was living as a tenant in an attic room of the private house of a rather well-to-do family at the suburb of Viljandi called Peetrimõisa, then, after a couple of months, I moved to the apartment of an old drunkard spinster, Linda, in a shabby wooden house at Kantreküla. I was still doing my tasks at the factory at the noon of December 31, 1999, when the foreman approached me and told me that I was dismissed, because the production rates would be reduced. The moment the new year, century, and millennium arrived, I was washing my socks in a tub in my wrinkled landlady's bathroom. I lingered on in Viljandi for a couple of weeks, then I travelled to Latvia. In the Eastern Latvian town of Rēzekne, or Rāisaku as it was called by the Estonians in former times, I looked up the centre of the local Jewish community. I attended a Sunday class of modern Hebrew for small Jewish children. I had a talk with the community leader, a grey-haired Jewish gentleman, who asked me why I wanted to be Jewish, why I wanted to settle in Israel, and why I was not pursuing my studies of English language and literature at Tartu University with more resolve and eagerness. I showed him the picture of Carol: I had covered the photograph of her in the green and blossoming yard of my parents' country place in Airootsi in the late summer of 1997, with me, my mother and my grandmother standing around her at a distance and welcoming her, a rare visitor from the New World, with a sheet of paper, having cut just an opening for her own figure to be visible, because I was embarrassed of showing strangers any more of the scene, my family members who appeared so homely, and especially myself, as silly, light-haired, and non-Jewish as I looked. The community leader glanced at her and just said that she was a nice-looking Jewish woman. The ten-year-old Jewish girl, Diana, whom I had sat next to in the Sunday class, and whom I asked for a dance in the centre hall after the class was over, which she of course refused, after a moment of sweet and innocent hesitation, had been watching my conversation with the community leader, and as I slipped the covered photograph out of my hand, she secretly grabbed it and removed the covering sheet to reveal, to my shame, the whole scene to herself and the gentleman.

I later started to think of Diana, who must have been born in 1990, as symbolically a daughter to Carol, who was born in 1963. And I started thinking about that encounter of ours as a symbolic engagement ceremony, with the elderly gentleman as a symbolic father. Times would pass and Carol would turn just into an old auntie, and Diana, into a new beauty. Of course, in her adult life she would ally herself with others, not me but young men of her age, but I still felt as if our communion at the Jewish centre back then had been the grounding of a nuptial agreement between myself and a sprouting femininity of what there was reassuring in the Jewish tradition, even as shaky as that aspect was.

As a result of that meeting, and other similar ones in the Jewish world, I bought a huge Hebrew-English-Hebrew dictionary in a bookstore in Tartu, for five hundred kroons (about forty-five dollars at the time), which was a quarter of my monthly income. I started savouring individual Hebrew words and I wrote the names of various items in Hebrew on tiny slips of paper and glued them on the corresponding items in my parents' apartment, when I was back living with them. I believed modern Hebrew was a poetic language and the words suggested so many side meanings through sound play and mutual similarity. For four months, I attended a Sunday school of modern Hebrew at a Christian Zionist centre in a vaulted basement of a mediaeval house in the Old City of Tallinn. After the meeting in Rēzekne, I had paid several visits to the much larger Jewish centre in Daugavpils, the capital of Southern Latvia, and had

had an interview with a Jewish (*mamzer*, that is, Jewish only through his father, as he specified, as if with slight regret) prison psychologist. We were talking eye to eye just the two of us and I told him my story, about meeting Carol and my attempted conversion, with my attendance of the Yom Kippur service in the Riga synagogue in the September of 1997. I admitted him that I had been an anti-Semite previous to that and had therefore gone to the Yom Kippur service full of deep penitence. Hearing this, his eyes bulged, but he kept his emotions. I told him that I had published anti-Semitic verse. He shook his head gravely. I added that the verses were Shakespearean, because I wanted to become the kind of anti-Semite Shakespeare had been. "Shakespeare an anti-Semite?!" he could not believe his ears. "Still, you know," I drawled, and he ventured a nod of pretended understanding. We ended our conversation by singing together the Yiddish song "Oyfn pripetchik brent a fayerle", though I realised while singing that I remembered just a few initial lines and catchwords of the song, and must have left even a bit more ridiculous impression to him, who nicely and correctly sang it. It was frosty winter outside, exactly when people would gather around the fires in the hearths of their humble houses, as envisioned in the lyrics, and for several years now I had been imagining with tenderness myself as a rabbi, young, poor, and of noble idealism, teaching a small class of black-haired Jewish brats, their complexions mellow light brownish but a few of them amazingly pale, with their eyes wide open to the sufferings and pain and simple savoury joys of the harsh world for these brief expanses of our lives, in perfect and vibrant expressiveness. The song was just about those kinds of things.

In my musings and reveries, Diana became a fairy or a nymph for me.

2

In classical English literature, the theme of fairies is known to have been practised by the poet Edmund Spenser, who wrote the epic poem "The Fairie Queene" consisting of six voluminous parts, intended to become the national epic but left unfinished, and by William Shakespeare with his comedy "A Midsummer Night's Dream", placed in a sweet natural scenery. A significant role has been given to fairies by other English verse authors, handling the theme mostly in a playful spirit but still with a seriousness modelled for adult readers. The short epic poem "Nymphidia, or the Court of Fairy" (1627) by the Renaissance poet Michael Drayton (1563 – 1631), often considered his wittiest and brightest work, pictures the fairy king and queen Oberon and Mab, familiar from the comedy of Shakespeare's. As in the whole of Drayton's oeuvre, the tonality of the work resembles chamber music in major, full of light, frolicsome, refined humour and the detailed charm of the wonders of the natural world. His fairies are tiny spirits of nature, of the size of insects, whose company they form. Compare that with the fairy world of the much later, Irish poet and playwright William Butler Yeats (1865 – 1939). His fairies are beautiful, but dangerous spectres, a breed of human-like inhabitants of a deceitful and potentially fatal otherworld, whose intentions apparently even include jeering at people. According to an interpretation of early Irish myths, that Yeats was relying on in his plays on fairy topics, the fairies really are former tribes of people who have retreated into a shadowy realm, after the Celtic invasion of Ireland ousted them from their native domain. Later, as a similar invasion, by the English colonists, struck the Irish Celts themselves, the latter were pushed onto the borders of the shadowy beyond, and as half-spectres, their identities were wavering in the twilight zone between the injustices of the actual world and the suspicious enticement and menace of the fairy realm. The topic of a romantic relationship between a human hero and a fairy woman emerges in such plays of Yeats as "The Only Jealousy of Emer" and "The Death of Cuchulain". As such, it was also present in the poem by Drayton. In the "Tale of Sir Thopas" in Geoffrey Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales", the topic had been passingly handled in the wider context of a parody, analogous to "Don Quijote", a miniature mockery of the prim style of court poetry. In

Drayton's hands, the over-refined verse form from "The Tale of Sir Thopas", which he applied in "Nymphidia", served as a medium for a lenient and benevolent allegory, performed with vivid poetic devices, which includes both elements of ridicule and a serious moral message.

In the plays of Yeats, one can observe a paradoxical synthesis of Early Modernism: the author has applied the conditional, fictional frames of national myths about fairies to present the relations of the hero and a fairy woman in an immediacy of intuitive liveliness, with psychological insights at crucial moments surpassing the division of the duality of life and art. The suggestive power of the scenes with the characters at their dilemmas and predicaments may bewilder or even terrify. The relation of the human hero to the fairy woman is erotic, by degrees, to the extent that eroticism inevitably governs human nature. As a temptress, the fairy woman is a fairy first and a woman second, her enticing role is determined by her being a creature not really existing for the common sense.

3

"Not by informers. Someone had said it somewhere. It was common knowledge that the German commissary trains were standing there.

No, the Germans would not have been shooting anymore, they were *kaputt* by then.

Yes, who one should have been scared of were the Russians.

Those forest brothers had been grinning terribly, eating the blood-soaked snow with their paws and grinning, as my uncle was praying.

He had been terrified all the time that they would finish off Teele. She was the one who took food to the woods yonder. Uncle August had been terrified that they would kill Teele.

No, what the bomb landed on was the house of the Goat-Hag. The Goat-Hag was living alone by the marsh of Pääsküla.

"No, I am not selling my house!" she had been persisting. "I will die with my house." And just imagine, she did die along with his house, the bomb was dropped on it.

And when the bomb landed, my hair went up, like this. It was from the air pressure.

No, not in the yard, I was in the house. I said: "The bomb can come just as well when I am not lying under the bed." My husband was scared, I was a bit braver.

They were called the Christmas trees. They were the kind of bombs that hang up for a long time, lighting up the skies. And still they could not aim correctly, dropped the one by the marsh, killed the old hag.

But us, we did not go to any shelter, we were boldly striding around, giving no thoughts to going to a shelter.

Whoever they were, Tiina of Urblepa and the Päsöke family and Elmar's folks, Siina among them. "Now if the bomb should fall right upon this house, we'll be all finished," Siina said.

... The guns were banging and the bullets flying. We kept going bravely down the road from Tallinn towards Nõmme. The kind of young pine forest. And the verges of the road all green and all the Russian soldiers that had been hit had been laid down along the road side, and they looked horrible, some of them green and some blue. One of them refused a cigarette, see who is offering, an enemy.

That is how it was at that time, later of course it all changed.

The priest Vladimir Allik was the one who baptised me. I say, there is a posh monument to him in Nuia graveyard, to that Vladimir Allik.

Because we went to the race course, it was being said that all the printing house men had been sent aboard a submarine at the port, to be taken away in it.

All the women were howling and...

The following day my husband came home and he had a strange smell to him, you know, the odour of war – heh-heh – all the clothes reeking.

The Germans had arrived at Lasnamäe long ago and they were shooting from there.

And I was the fool that went to dig the antitank ditch at Pääsküla. It was down there near Pääsküla. The diggers were fed bread and salted herring. And I kept on digging bravely and even got praised.

The kind of iron posts were erected along the ditch, for the German tanks to come and get stuck. No German tanks ever came there.

They were right grappling with each other, Old Mammy and her daughter, Tassa. She had been there in one of those houses, eating and drinking with the Germans. She brought home ends of smoked sausage from there, Tassa did.

You know, in the German time there were no pigeons in Tallinn. The Germans shot them all and ate them.

Huge amounts of coffee beans, of sugar.

Big cans of meat, marvellously good meat.

At the children's hospital where I was working at that time, there were tuberculous children, a little girl had the bone tuberculosis, oh how awful it was. I got a wheelbarrow from there and that is how we fetched it. A box of French liquour.

In the house of the Tohter family.

I never got to where they got chocolate. There was business going on permanently. The Peelings-Siina, the one who collected potato peels, she had been pocketing matches with her folks. Mati's mother Liisa lived in a house in Aster Street, the Peelings-Siina was the sister of Mati's mum.

And the tremendous jars with candied fruit, and all the amounts of jam, oh dear, there were real strawberries in it. They looked as if freshly picked, but the Germans had got everything.

But people had injured themselves by carrying all that, just imagine, the huge sacks of sugar, a hundred pounds in one.

The Russians distributing bread for free, and we have got meat and even strawberries. And the canned food was great, and the bottoms of the German officers' trousers.

One of the bottoms would make for one shoe, well, you needed two bottoms. The shoemaker nicely did them, I had got nice shoes.

Mati was in the same class with my son Endel, that is why we knew their family so well. Your mother Merike was a small girl when we went to see the telly at the Peelings-Siina's place.

I forget where we gathered. And then we were taken in a car, a lorry of course, well, I somehow managed into the lorry-box, someone was pushing from the back and someone pulling from the front, it was difficult to get in there, I would never manage getting up there now.

No, the wheelbarrow, it was with several little wheels, but with really tiny ones. See, I can't remember that, I really don't remember what the wheels were made of. Yeah, the biggest thing in there, that was the box with the French liquour, made of cardboard, with ten bottles or more. Boxes are usually of cardboard.

And there were the box of canned meat and the box with the candied fruit in it..."

I was visiting my grandmother Alma in Karksi-Nuia and she had been telling me her wartime memories. She had kept farm animals in earlier times but now as she was older, there were only two dogs, barking angrily locked up in the house when she was away. Around the house, apple trees and berry bushes grew and there were peonies in flower beds in the front yard. The house was painted crimson. It was with a great sense of excitement that I arrived at

granny's near Karksi-Nuia, in my mind's eye envisioning the neighbourhood as desirable as the land of Canaan. And the name Karksi-Nuia sounded so similar to the Southern French city of Carcassonne, with its fanciful mediaeval castle. There were also ruins of a castle in Karksi-Nuia, and it was also a wine production area, although what they called wine here was not made of grapes but berries such as currants. There was a meandering river here which enlarged into an impounded lake, and at the bridge to the village of Polli, a powerful artificial waterfall was murmuring. In my wanderings, in a park at the edge of the town I assisted town cleaners at shovelling fallen autumn leaves, raked into huge piles, into the box of a lorry. On my way back to granny's place, which lay two miles to the north from the town, I turned into a copse of trees on a high hill, deep down in the shaded ancient valley a small stream was burbling, I felt as if I were in mountains, for I had spent the whole of my life in the flat areas of Northern Estonia, and sitting down beneath the trees on the steep slope, and gazing down towards the creek, I uncorked the jar of French mayonnaise I had just bought in a shop in Karksi-Nuia and dipped pieces of white bread in the mayonnaise and ate up all of it, secretly smoking a cigarette afterwards, for I did not want anyone to see me smoking, in a paranoid conviction that in some way or another it might entail a disaster. I buried the fag end in the soil of the slope and as I pressed my fingers into it, I could see that the soil was red, solid, and rich, not the kind of earth I knew in my native region. I spent ten days at granny's. Twice, my aunt, my mother's younger sister of nearly forty years of age, a divorced school teacher in an elementary school in the town of Viljandi, came from the town by bus with her two sons, and my cousins accompanied me in roaming in the surrounding fields and woods. Granny nearly spoiled me. She constantly urged me to eat, and would not even permit me the natural exercise in the yard of splitting the dozen thick logs with an axe, which she needed for firewood, saying the neighbouring farmer would do that for her. Although a voracious eater, I could not consume all the meat and ham and sausages I was offered, nor the cheese and bread and cookies and candies. In the ancient oven, by placing the dough in long rectangular moulds, she allowed me to bake cakes, though she would not eat them herself.

4

"When I was twelve, the unmarried fifty-year-old neighbour woman knitted me a white-and-blue-and-orange angular beret.

Mamma told me that after the war, there was a craze of tennis shoes. They were whitened with chalk powder.

I had zipped rubber boots for snowy weather. When you went outside on a frosty day, the rubber broke, and when it turned warmer again, water would start trickling in through the crack.

Mamma's father Aleksander died in 1956, when I was seven or eight, in the first class anyway, because he died in the autumn.

When grandpa was alive, I think we went twice to his country place.

And I have just been awakened and I am standing on the bed and I have no shirt on and mamma is pulling clothes on me... and I am trembling because it is morning and we are about to travel to the country.

... a big suitcase, made of cardboard, very inexpensive, in which my daddy's socks, shirts, and a little sweater of his were laid and a few dresses for mamma.

The Liiva railway station where we got on the train was about a mile and a half from the Jaani-Mother's house where we lived as tenants. We walked to the station. The journey lasted for four and a half hours, we left the train at the Kaarli station, which was preceded by Sürgavere and Olustvere and... There were no telephones and we had informed grandpa about the exact time of our arrival with a letter. Grandpa had come to meet us with a horse and a wagon at the Kaarli station. From there, it was seven miles to his place. A long trip upon the

wagon behind the horse, the sultry air, flies, mosquitoes and gadflies keen on biting. By turns, some of us went on foot. The horse was farting and crapping and flipping his tail and... It took an hour and a half to travel in the horse wagon. Then we reached our goal, we were there. Grandpa's new wife, mamma's stepmother Olga started offering warm milk right away. "Well, if you don't want warm milk, I will lower it in the well." She did it in a long thin cylinder vessel, the milk had been poured into it through a cheesecloth. Red currants, black currants, and white currants, and right among the white currant bushes there were beehives. At the end of a tremendously long barn, near the right end wall there was the privy, in the privy there were the Viljandi newspapers "The Viljandi Communist", "The Road to Communism", or something like that. Next to the privy there was a small pen with a pig in it. To the other side of the barn, left from the centre, there was the well, and see, this is where the well was. And we ate in the kitchen and for the meals, terribly salty meat and eggs were usually fried. In the soup, there were fresh cabbage and potatoes and carrots and milk had been poured into it, so the soup was white.

And there was a pantry in that house.

There were an old machine for making butter and all kinds of pails and firkins, it was a very mysterious room. It was very clean and it was somehow, I liked it the best of all.

There was a fly trap made of glass in the kitchen, up in the loft, behind the hatch, huge amounts of honey were being kept.

And the following day then, it was decided, let's go to Nuia now. At the Polli manor there was a pond and in the pond there was a boat and I crept into the boat and my father took a picture of me and my hair was in braids.

And in Nuia we went shopping we went into the store at the street corner and mamma asked: "Do you have socks?". The shop assistant offered her, you know, the kind of brown striped stockings.

"Ah, you mean socks!" The Estonian word for socks meant stockings in Southern Estonia. The word meant socks down there when the k-sound was palatalised, which it was not where we lived.

It was around the end of Stalin's time.

And the mass deportations, they had occurred just about a year or two before we went there by horse. And my grandaunt Marie was perhaps still hiding in the forests and granduncle August was living in Ärbj, in Airootsi.

My aunt Helju kind of wanted their dead mother's sewing machine for a dowry when she married, and their stepmother Olga kind of didn't give it to her.

When we visited Helju, mamma's sister, we travelled to Kilingi-Nõmme and took a taxi from there to their village, Võidu.

... Her husband Elmar was working at a machine-and-tractor station and he was ploughing the fields of various collective farms and maybe he could stay overnight and even sleep at that machine-and-tractor station, I do wonder. I say, that reminded me of something... because once again, that salted meat had been fried, the smoke was floating in the house.

At their place, there was no privy, they kept going to the woods. That machine-and-tractor station might have been at Abja, perhaps, that is where it might have been.

As we got back to the Carnation Street in Nõmme, our little home seemed so good and sweet to us and everything was kind of so good back there. Old Mammy might have been frying potatoes and..."

Back in my parents's apartment in Hoosal, I had been listening to my mother recollecting her childhood experience of her relatives's rustic life.

I recalled while we were living in the other part of the town, from my fifth year till late teens, in Soil Street, the red evenings in the bedroom of the flat on the fifth floor, with a sight of the railway station built for the Czar, of the park forest and the glowing sunset on the seas

in the West. A dawn of the daughters of evening, the desk lamp with a red cylinder-shaped cloth shade on the night table, a big red painting with the faces of a young man and a young woman nearing their mouths for a kiss above the bed.

A poison grey tributary river of the Amazon, trees with trunks stretching from the water and green like algae, overshadowing green bubbling plains of water, often appeared in my dreams, both calm and vexed.

As Airootsi was an island – in April 1985 – grandfather Konstantin had just been buried – the yard of our country place ringing with cowslips, water, mud, buttercups, globeflowers, it took time to get there, the peninsula being separated from the continent by nearly a mile of knee-deep brine water, our dog had begun crapping at the back of the car and we took him to the side of the road under the juniper bushes to let him strain the crap out of him. The crap stained the mops of hair of his butt and father wiped it with a frayed blue grease-rag from the car. As we drove on, the car got stuck in the slimy road dirt, before us, the expanses of the flooding sea, we had to wait till a tractor that happened to pass pulled out the car, wading in rubber boots, we reached the peninsula and a feeling of pride filled me as I watched the morning glitter of the skies upon a high stone on the hill in our home yard, an Olympian spring bursting, burbling around us with a snuffling buzz ever louder like a lad whose voice is cracking, we had come to inspect how our rutabaga roots we had harvested from the field the previous autumn, had survived the winter beneath the piles of straw, all the later times, till late autumn of that year, as we drove to the country place, on the neck of land to the peninsula, I could see the blue rag father had cleaned my dog of crap with, glimmering in a cluster of grass under the juniper tree.

I recalled those views of my life of old, and resorting back for a moment to my tortured quests in more recent years, in Latvia and Southern Estonia, I realised that I had indeed come back home, to be with my mother and father.

NEKORIP

A Cat and the Moon

My fortieth birthday coming and going, I was entering my middle age. I was living with my mother, who cared for me in all possible ways. There were no signs of any woman being interested in establishing a family with me. My mother suggested that I should answer people who expressed surprise at my situation that I was still looking around and making choices. I ran into such people more often than I would have liked. I wished to believe that what she advised me to tell them was true, for I was not desperate beyond choosing. But then, in reality, I did not even have any choice. An elderly female relative, of a very distant branch of our family, who once in a while made me phone calls, advised me in a sweet voice to “start dealing with some woman“. It was impossible to explain the realities to her, and my suppressed sighs on the phone left her sighing. For my whole previous life I had had no intimate partnerships with women, it had all been just begging or grovelling for love, that led to breaking of acquaintances, or left the relationship pending in the air, with irresolute offers of what appeared some heavenly kind of friendship.

I remembered the first stanza of a poem by the Russian Romantic poet, Fyodor Ivanovich Tyutchev, who lived from 1803 to 1873, which I had memorised early at high school, where I studied in a class specialising in the Russian language and literature, and which with the exception of myself solely consisted of girls, who had all remained just blank faces and names for me. The lines always brought associations with a bus trip to Mikhailovskoye, a Russian village some four hundred kilometres from my home town and outside our small country, a constituent republic of the Soviet Union, in Russia proper, near a town called Pushkin Hills. Mikhailovskoye had been, a century and a half earlier, the place of internal exile of the greatest Russian poet, Pushkin, and it was also his resting place. I remembered the romantic golden autumn with muddy roads and paths, the Russian *starushki* selling vegetables and frequently making cross signs with their hands in Mikhailovskoye, the plain wooden bed which Pushkin had slept in, which was so short as to fit a modern twelve-year-old boy, and which I found it hard to believe was his because of its endurance in the immeasurable distance of time. I remembered the puddles on the hill ways, the sunny and chilly air, the romantic promises of youthful hopes in a season of degeneration, and the book with hard emerald covers, comprising two of James Joyce’s early masterpieces in English, printed in Moscow, which I had bought upon our return stop in a bookstore in the city of Pskov, and which I gave my mother as the birthday gift, back in the October of 1986.

Yest’ v oseni pervonachal’noi
korotkoya, no divnaya pora:
ves’ den’ stoit kak by hrustal’nyi
i luchezarny vechera.

There is a spell in autumn early,
One all too brief, of an enchantment rare:
The nights are radiant and pearly,
The days, pellucid, crystal-clear.

Remembering those lines, and chanting them to myself, now, brought to my mind a girl I had known and to whom I had paid visits, eating, cooking, conversing the two of us, without ever hoping or even seriously wishing to win her to be my bosom friend, let alone sweetheart. I had brought carrots on one of my visits. I remembered the cold, pink, rigorous,

skinny, slender, long fingers of the young woman holding carrots and peeling them with a knife.

Estonia was just one million bawling creatures for me. I lived for individual pursuits, individual enlightening. Some brief but happy moments when myself and everything just was there. Through years of feeling ill, powerlessly raging, frustration, I just suddenly received glimpses of such moments. They could occur in bus stations, on the countless bus trips in my early middle age. I would notice a girl whose appearances and behaviour looked amazingly similar to impressions I had gathered in my early teens. Nearly identical, and made me feel, against my common sense, as if myself could actually be so young again, as if the years in the middle were just a reverie. They made me feel like a soul in the cavern in the legend by Plato, who suddenly recalls his true homeland. In fact, I seemed to discover, with a tremor of pleasure and apprehension, that to remember in flashbacks sensations from times past was no different from remembering the times when one was not yet living, or remembering one's life when one hardly lives any more. As on a very long bus trip, from the town of the university where I gave lectures, to my parental home town, one autumn on the day of Michaelmas.

Light brown hair, brightly shining, tied up to the back of her head, frolicking like open rays above and before her ears, brushing against the cheeks, with a shy dishevelled lock on the forehead; the girl is bouncing on the bus seat, lightly leaning herself sideways, whispering something inaudibly to her girlfriend, as gently excited as herself.

The picture brought back to my eyes after twenty-five turns of the earth, seen already, yet unseen, stable in quite a few mutations – the same sweet self-contemplation, a vernal flickering of a flame blustering beneath the protective purity of a mirror, in the crimson beginnings of an autumn.

After the fata morgana of the West had vanished, Iceland became the allurement for us. Somehow, we felt, it was looming stronger than the virtual satisfaction of electronic communication, which filled the years, day by day, for most of us. We had never been to Iceland but we knew the way it affected us was not the same as it had been with the West. The latter had been just a way of life, transient like everything human. The rocks, the cliffs, the ice, the glaciers, the geysers and the smoking mountain-tops were solid. They would endure through the internet and cell phone age, along with us, if we persisted in our yearning.

Our own land was plain, nearly nondescript, forgettable. In the Northwest we had the traces of the heritage of "Swedes". The connotations of that ethnic term when used in our own context differed vastly from its meaning when referring to the population of Sweden. The Nordic country we regarded as rather modern, more so than our own, and we could not help but furnish its inhabitants with a whole array of negative or somehow, prickly, stereotypes, that easily arose from general impressions. But a Swede as a term in our own provincial life rather meant an affiliation to a healthy, unspoiled, tradition-bound, hardy and energetic, land-tilling and seafaring people. I sometimes thought that instead of a Swede it might just as well have been a Frisian or even an Angle, any ethnicity of the free-minded Nordic ancestry of sailors.

The speaker of an insignificant and marginal language, my vocation as a translator into my native tongue of artistic writings was an unrewarding one. I had met early in my youth an old man who had rendered nearly all the old Germanic epics into beautiful verse in our language. I had been with him three times, he died five years after our acquaintance began. At his death I was just twenty-three. Merely having seen his devotion and having savoured the lovely rhythms and rhymes of his translations somehow had taken their toll of my mental inclinations: they made me to feel that bleak though the life of that kind of translator's was, the strivings, the endurance and the fruits might be self-rewarding. From then on, my mind was split. It strove toward that kind of selfless devotion, by the very nature noticeable to very few, while a contrary thought kept hammering on that when I am waning and after I am gone,

there might well be no one left to witness my devotion, to live up to the hardships of craftsmanship I have put into my art. Be it so, the example of the old man not only directed me towards accepting the profession of a verse translator in my infinitesimally unremarkable language, but reinforced my interest in the old roots of the Germanic tongues. It was with a degree of reluctance therefore that I reacted when in my late thirties, the few who appreciated my abilities appeared to expect me to turn my efforts toward rendering works from Romance languages – I was especially expected to share the enthusiasm in the minor Provençal tongue. Why not – but what would I be actually serving in translating Provençal poets? Is it of much joy or notice to themselves if their works appear in my language, surely of even much less international reputation than their own? And then I knew a lot of more authors and texts more familiar to me, that I had intended to translate – and considering all those texts would end up set into verse in my provincial speech, what difference then, except that Germanic leanings had long been my vocation?

The days that had slipped past and accumulated into decades of life that were just memories, used to be so long, every one of them when one rose from bed to welcome its arrival. Now they were grains of sand on a shore trodden long ago.

Me and my ailing grandmother, *mamma*, were staying in the shed house (called so because it had a single living room with a stove and a fire-place adjoining the shed). Mamma's heart was failing her, in fact she would be dead in three months' time. She would be lying on her back in the bed which once had been my parents's marriage bed. In every fifteen minutes or so, she would rise, pull on some clothes, and hobble out the door, down the small concrete stairs father had built along with a wooden handrail specifically for her aid, and go pissing on the lawn behind the corner of the house. Mostly she just squatted, it having been a false alarm. Once in a while she would scribble notes of what was happening around, sort of memos just to keep her mind awake, on tiny ribbons of paper or on newspaper corners, which she would soon tear into small pieces. I had come to stay with her and share the room with her at nights, because I wanted to give some rest and relaxation to my mother, who was exhausted from tending to her. I tried to talk with my grandmother, but with little success. The reason was not only in her departing vitality. I was sour and frustrated most of the time, on the verge of another nervous breakdown. I felt friendless, and particularly, without the sense of commitment by a girlfriend, at an age which seemed alarmingly advanced to myself and must have seemed so to my juniors. I thought that the same grandmother and my own mother and father had been parents for a long time at this age whereas no girl or woman had approached me with any more intimacy than friendly talks. I sort of felt betrayed by my juniors, who happily established family relations, and also by my parents and the same granny, who had done the same being juniors to my present age.

I had a pocket-size Bible with me, which a Baptist preacher, a friend of my irreligious mother, had given to her. The preacher had died of stomach cancer the same summer, a few weeks earlier, and my mother had attended her funeral. Grandmother had taken possession of the folded sheet of paper with Baptist hymns sung at his funeral, with the photograph of the deceased and the picture of a candle on it, which mother had brought home afterwards, and grandmother had poked it into her black handbag already full of useless, odd and trivial little things. I read the Bible, sitting on the old yellow couch in which I slept at night, and tried to ignore the agonising ill health of my granny. One evening I asked her a biblical question. She had strongly turned to the church in her late seventies, some six or seven years ago, after her son, my uncle, who had been living with her all his life, besieged by various heavy complaints, died at the age of fifty-five. I asked her to guess, or to figure out, which is the species of a domestic animal never mentioned in the Bible. I meant to please her. She started thinking and I could see from her tortured utterances how much at pains she was. She offered me the names of all sorts of animals, goats, sheep, cows, and forgetting they had to be

domestic, suggested wolves, lions, giraffes. Then she slept or continued with her restless walks. The day passed, after we had gone to bed I reminded her of my question but she was too tired and I abandoned my endeavours. It was only in the evening of the following day that I dared to return to the topic and she with relative eagerness replied that she had figured it out. "Rats," she spurted. Only before the next bedtime, after we had eliminated all the other creatures, she suddenly exclaimed as if having been sent a spiritual message, "A kitty!"

Her own last cat, a fat yellow castrated tomcat called Miki, had died two years after her son, that is five years before her own collapse, and my parents and I had buried him in a shallow grave in a triangular section of our country place near the red gates, beneath the lawn under the alder and rowan trees behind a hedge of rose bushes. It was me who placed the body, wrapped in a linen sheet given by granny, into the hole, the corpse being still quite soft yet. My father found a lump of yellowish limestone, about a foot high, wrote the cat's name on it in black paint, and erected it to be the gravestone. When grandmother, still in relative health, came to our country place, she would at first go to see the grave.

Now dead herself, she is white ashes lying two feet deep in sandy ground in a piny cemetery in the nearabouts of Tallinn, next to the white ashes of her son, whom she survived by seven years, and the only skeleton of their family, as I remember it from her last decade, is the remains of Miki in the southeastern end of our summer place. On dark and windy late autumn nights, and on winter nights with the murky woods lurking to the west and grayish blue night clouds storming across the skies, when the houses and the yard are all deserted, us being surrounded by cosy warmth and electronic modernity in our apartment in the town five miles to the south across the bay, the moon would be shining high above the field and woods and painting cool silver linings to the threatening clouds that are wandering past and across it, and maybe *mamma's* spirit would come hovering, light as the vapours of retreating frost, over the grave of her last and favourite cat, touch the name on the yellowish gravestone with her immaterial finger, and call for his spirit to rise and come snuggling against her ethereal legs again.

Let My Right Hand Wither

*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat
down and wept, when we remembered
Zion.*

*On the willows there we hung up our
lyres.*

*For there our captors required of us
songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”*

*How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a
foreign land?*

*If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right
hand wither!*

*The Bible, Revised Standard version.
Psalm 137: 1 – 5.*

Leah Granman’s birthday was on the day of the events in James Joyce’s book “Ulysses”, which a number of devotees of the author call Bloomsday, after the name of the main character in the novel. It was early summer, the weather was mild. A family of Jews, acquaintances of her late father, had come to visit Leah on her birthday. Only her father, Moysey, had been Jewish, of Czech background, her mother having been Russian. Moysey was buried on the new Jewish cemetery of Tartu, next to his closest relatives, their common forefather having come to Tartu from Riga in the 1880s. The grave of the forefather, with the suitable first name Abraham, could be found among them. There had been a time when Lars had gone raking her father’s grave with Leah, and on another occasion he had taken a walk out to the graveyard at the lonely edge of the city all on his own, to place a pot of blossoming heather at the grave stone of old Abraham. Before the war, Leah’s father had worked in Tartu as the manager of the macaroni factory; at the beginning of the war, he had retreated from the city on foot, looking back all the time, to avoid being shot in the back. He had been evacuated into the depths of Russia, to join the Red Army over there. Leah’s mother was buried in the Russian cemetery in another part of the small city. Lars was living as a tenant in Leah’s apartment. In pre-war times, it had belonged to Jews, a few of whom had later moved to Israel. The room which Lars rented was the smallest in the three room apartment, just a small chamber. Before the war, the house servant had lived in it. The narrow space was made even narrower by the bookshelves standing along the walls, containing books mostly in Russian, the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, novels, books of travel, collections of poetry, and a lot of volumes in Russian, German, and Estonian, focusing on various branches of medicine. Through the high window one could see the soiled, sooty backyard, with the weather-worn façades of the houses in the former main street of Tartu visible over the roofs of lower cottages. Crammed into the room there were also a desk, a chair and a convertible armchair, which served Lars both for sleeping and relaxing. It was impossible to sit at the desk when the chair had been turned into the bed. On the table of her birthday party, Leah offered wine, vodka, and potato salad, the main meal being fried pork with sauerkraut and oven-baked potatoes. There was also a B-shaped coffeecake. The guests were doctors, just like Leah.

They had come with their two daughters, the elder one eight, the younger one five years old. The parents mentioned the elder girl's interest in dancing. "The little one wants to become a ballerina!" they said in Russian.

In the living room a piano stood, but Leah Granman, living alone after her parents' death, could not play it. There was enough space for all the guests at the big solid table. The dinner was over and the adults were still sitting at the table, conversing and raising glasses. Lars, having been asked to participate in the party, listened to the guests talking in Russian and did not say much. After the dinner, he went straight back to his room, staying alone and browsing his textbooks. The older sister was sitting in the living room at the end of the bed in which Leah slept at night, near the table and next to the door, and she kept babbling in Russian. Lars was listening to her in a distracted manner, wordless. The girl talked about ballet, about her hoping to get into a ballet school, to become a ballerina and to dance. She was rather plump, not at all of the build of a young ballet dancer. She had lovely black hair, and plump arms and chubby cheeks. She spoke with enthusiasm, but being aware of her well-fed looks, she also seemed a bit embarrassed.

The door of Lars' room in the hallway wall was open. The younger of the sisters had been showing signs of jealousy for the attention caught by her sister. She slipped into Lars' chamber. When the young man went to see her, she was standing in her slippers upon his convertible armchair and she was trampling her feet. Being younger, she was naturally not as eloquent, besides, there were ugly strips of band-aid on her nose and forehead, and she appeared rather desperate for catching the youth's attention. She made dancing movements on the armchair, then she lay down and stood up on her head. She came onto the floor, lay on her back and formed her body into an acrobatic bridge, demonstrating her underwear. The youth responded by observing it with a soft, perplexed interest. The elder sister had grown restless and now she also came into Lars' room. Seeing what her sister was doing she lay down on her back as well and formed a bridge, to show her underwear. Lars' gaze followed the frolicking children in an attempt to remain decent. Should he have felt embarrassed if they were not ashamed of him? The adults were conversing in the living room peacefully. Engaged in bodily exercise, the elder girl kept babbling. Lars stopped to listen to her. At the same time the younger sister twisted herself and he could see in her face that she was about to outdo the older one. With a single effort, she pulled her nice lacy skirt up, pulled the drooping hoses down on her knees and after a few quick movements Lars could see her lower body, her thighs and butt naked, her panties down. The little girl had exposed herself. At that moment the mother came to the door, and the child waddled to her, the parent immediately restraining her, pulling her panties on again and taking her to the living room where the guests were rising from their seats, about to leave. The elder girl followed them. The event of the little girl exposing herself to the young man was not taken too seriously, things like that may happen with children.

Nevertheless, the event had a sequel for Lars, several sequels in fact. It stayed in his memory, lingering there in contrast to his relations with several other members of the female sex, several other Jewesses. During his youth and early middle age Lars fell in love with a few women, a few grown-up Jewesses and he made advances to them, and they never exposed themselves to him. How much he would have wanted some grown-up Jewess to let her panties fall in front of him! How much he wished two adult Jewesses, jealous of each other, to compete in showing him their underwear and stripping themselves! Did he miscalculate something, choose the wrong women? Who knows. Less than a year after the incident described Lars was in Massachusetts, USA, studying at a community college and proud of himself for the fact that in difference from others in the college theatre company, he had not yet been seized by sexual restlessness and lust that spring and that he was (at least apparently) left cold by the fit of heat of the girls in the company. The troupe kept talking about sex.

Couples were formed, some of which broke apart in a few days; one of the courses in the humanities department of the college had been “human sexuality” and that was probably where these young people came from, who seemed almost with a scientific interest to be waiting for romantic love, obviously just a mythical construction according to the theses of the course, overturned and the freedom of natural drives prevail. Whoever had not yet slept with someone from the theatre group seemed an outcast. Girls were hanging around his neck when he was arranging his make-up before the mirror in the waiting-room (he was playing a monk in Brecht’s “Galileo” and his face was painted pale, he was dressed in a brown monastic robe of simple fabric, with his feet bare), threw their hair backwards and whispered in his ear: “You are sexy!” He trembled, remembered it, but did not respond to them, just took a few deep breaths and went to wait for his time of performance.

He put all his youthful acting abilities into the role. He even tried taking himself into some kind of trance. That was how he was banishing the fear which otherwise might have vanquished him. Waiting for his performance behind the stage, he intentionally began to gasp air, doing that so loud and noticeably that one of his fellow actors asked in amazement how he felt and if he needed a doctor. He had memorised every single line of his role, uttering all the original words in the play, which was rare among actors. On the stage, he presented his long soliloquy with pleasure, enchanted with the pure British accent of his training. In the rehearsal he made a mistake in pronouncing the word “pageantry”, the director remarking that a trace of foreign accent could be heard. At home, with the help of a dictionary, he learned the correct pronunciation of that word. If something was missing on the stage it was his contact with other players, mostly he just heard their voices, the visual connection with them being weak. He was heavily short-sighted, but did not wear glasses. So he could not see the facial expressions of the girl Rebecca, impersonating Galileo, to whom he as the servant of the Pope had to explain in what a horrible way Galileo’s new cosmogonical teachings affronted the convictions of the church and of simple loyal Christians. However, when the nightly shows began, he perceived the audience well, listening to the rustling audible in the darkness between his words and sensing a favourable reception. In the third evening of the show, while he was raising his querulous and astonished voice to the falsetto, from one of the seats in the hall sounded a high voice imitating and mocking him, a tasteless echo to his utterances. His granduncle and his granduncle’s wife having come to see the show one evening told him at home that he had played well. They had videotaped his soliloquy.

Lars had arrived in America the previous autumn. In the New York airport, he met fellow Estonians who had been on the plane. The Estonian girls asked what such a young man was doing alone in a foreign country. When he replied that he would begin studying, the girls reacted with sighs: “Poor parents!” During the year which Lars spent in America the fate of his native country, a constituent republic of the USSR, was precariously uncertain. He kept receiving phone calls from his parents and his paternal grandmother, who all persuaded him to do everything in his powers for staying in America, even if that meant “going to a refugee camp”. In reality there were no refugee camps in the country, there were just illegal immigrants, and his granduncle, having taken responsibility by promising to shelter and feed him, ruled out the slightest possibility of his becoming one.

Lars had the weakness of cherishing theories that likened Estonians and other peoples speaking Finno-Ugric languages to the native peoples of America. One day, searching through a shelf of journals of the college library, he found a newspaper produced by the Iroquois Indians. He read it and made up his mind to write a message to its letters bulletin. He wrote about his native people, about how similar their ancestors were supposed to have been eight hundred years earlier to the native peoples of the forest zone of North America, with their forest culture of foraging and their early stages of agriculture. While writing, he sensed that the similarisation of ethnic groups situated so far apart was a bit overdone, but he

believed that was how it had to be written, words appearing on the sheet of paper as if by themselves. The letter turned out to be long and he based it on contrasting conquering peoples and surrendered peoples. He added a five dollar bill to the letter, the price necessary for being sent the next issue of the newspaper. The issue was sent him but his letter was not published in it and he never learned whether it appeared in any of the following issues. The centre of those Indians lay in the Northern areas of the state on New York and it was beyond Lars' resources to travel up there.

Occasionally, a plump middle-aged Jewess called Linda from a neighbouring house came to see Lars and his granduncle. Linda had hands with thick fingers. She was an amateur actress, travelling all over the world with her theatre companies, having given performances in Ireland and Finland. She also wrote plays. She said that the figure who had influenced her the most was Hemingway. There was something of the big-mouthed, coarse-voiced androgynous women of Hemingway's in her. She told about her life in Boston: there having been street disturbances and the police shooting tear gas and it filling her room from the open window. She asked Lars to show on the map where Estonia was and what it looked like. "It is very small," she said, looking at the map, "really very small." Lars told her his opinion about Hemingway: he was a brilliant stylist, but not courageous enough in his work, liable to repeating himself. The youth was curious to see whether what he had said would irritate her, but his statement must have sounded so balanced that she found his compassion to the writer rather moving. The next time Linda was accompanied by her teenage son Adam, her only child. Adam said that he wrote science fiction and he knew all the parts of "The Star Trek". When Adam was away, Linda said that her son is Jewish through her line, and that she had made it her heart's matter to give him a Jewish upbringing, centred on the synagogue, that would form the basis in his life which he was later free to abandon.

One day Lars and his granduncle were visited by the granduncle's son Jonah, living in New York. Like Lars, Jonah was of medium height, a slender thirty-seven-year old man. In the evening Jonah suggested going out together to drive around in the car. Lars put on more festive clothes. They headed for Northampton. On the way they talked about literary magazines. In the city they parked the car and visited four bars and cafés. The first of them gave the most powerful impression, it was like a swarming beehive. Jonah bought himself a beer and soda for Lars. There were no vacant seats at the tables, they remained standing at the bar seats; once in a while somebody wanted to pass them, saying sorry. For a long time they were just standing, casting glances at what was surrounding them. Then Jonah asked in a low voice a few things about him and his relatives in the native country. When the conversation turned to culture shock, the young man said he sometimes felt like a young prince here and sometimes like a degraded Indian. High above the heads a TV-set was playing, showing baseball. Jonah explained that baseball was his favourite game, that in that game there was time for contemplation. They kept standing and smiling. One of the girls sitting in front of them turned and asked Lars something. He did not understand what was asked, it was uttered with a strange accent (the Boston accent, Jonah said later). Jonah told the girl that Lars was a foreigner. "From where?" Lars had to explain that Estonia was a country south of Finland and was presently under the Soviet power. The girls gazed at him and he stared at them. They said that they studied at the University of Massachusetts, the one with dark hair raising children. Lars had no skills to go on chatting with them. They finished their drinks and went to look for the next bar. At some places they were left behind the door, either because Lars was too young to be let in or because it was a closed party. They went to an Irish restaurant, the visitors watching baseball. The next bar was filled with darkness and with drinking figures, in one corner there was disco dance going on. Lars could see a couple cuddling. Jonah drank another beer, Lars water again. The young man standing next to him talked to him and he was asked about his origins again. Lars said he was from Lapland. The young man did not know

where it was situated. Lars said it was in Northern Europe, where Santa Claus lived. The young man said “ahah” and did not speak any more. Jonah asked Lars whether he could see anyone to ask for a dance, but he could not.

Finally they had a meal in a café and talked more. They talked about two Czech writers, Kundera and Havel. Jonah had been busy writing his master’s thesis about literature that year. They set out for home when it was one o’clock.

At home he read a book about the language and the mind of the Navajo Indians taken from the quite large shelf of books about Indians in the college library and he took a bath. In the book there occurred the word “sweathouse” and he tried to figure out what that might mean, whether it was related to a bathhouse. According to the beliefs of the Navajos the gods thought the world into existence in a sweathouse.

After a lunch in the college he went into the office of his lecturer of cultural anthropology. The bearded man received him kindly. Lars said he thought he had done the last quiz on a hundred points, that is, the maximum. The lecturer checked it up, and it was true. In one of the lectures lately a documentary had been shown, a survey about Mexican farm people, their work and their festivities. In the obligatory essay written on the basis of the film Lars had remarked that Mexico, the underdevelopment and the primitivity of that country had left him a sad impression, all the scenes in that film, including the festive scenes, being filled with dolour. The lecturer had commented on the margin of his essay that Lars’ idea had hit the target, that being a very correct observation, the essence of Mexico really being dolour, Mexico being the land of dolour. Now, in the lecturer’s office they talked more about that country. The lecturer had a summer house on the Yucatan Peninsula, the area in which the Maya Indians lived, where he spent a lot of all his summers. The lecturer asked for how long Lars had been in America. He asked how come he spoke such good English and whether he understood everything that the lecturer said. He asked whether Estonian was a Germanic language and having got a negative answer he asked whether Estonians had come from Asia. He was furthermore interested in what language people were educated in Estonia and whether Lars was optimistic about Estonian independence. Lars said yes, but he added that the danger to independence would remain because there were just one million Estonians and a lot of ethnicities had become extinct. The teacher mentioned that he was of mixed English, Frisian, and Native American ancestry, and asked whether Lars was watching the documentary series about the US Civil War which was on TV in those weeks, and he told the youth at length about his contacts with contemporary Southerners, a lot of whom considered their country occupied even now and would not get tired of reminding him of that.

One of the actresses in the play “Galileo” presented by the college theatre was a tall girl called Susan. She impersonated a man, a secular astronomer connected with the church, whose role it was to search for nice girls instead of stars with the spy-glass. During the pause of a performance Lars noticed Susan sitting near the mirror. The girl was watching him, her brown hair falling on her shoulders. The air whirring of direct bodily contacts and of uncensored language among most actors, it did not seem intrusive at all when Lars approached the girl by a few steps, bent to her and said by her face: “You are so nice that I would like to paint you if I could.” On another day, after a usual morning at the college, Susan talked to the young man in front of a college building. She asked him how it was going and implied that he would be welcome to pay her a visit in Northampton. “I’ll introduce you to my housemate Jozy.”

For some time, Lars did not even know whom he was visiting, towards whom he was turning his heart and thoughts, Susan or Jozy. The latter had participated in the stage setup of “Galileo” and had seen the young man already, although he had not noticed her. For the first time they met eye to eye after the last show, in a party arranged by the stage director. There were a lot of people, a few of them going to the roof to watch the moon through a telescope.

Most were sitting in scattered companies, drinking soda water and alcohol, smoking, talking. Jozy talked with Lars at a table for half an hour, both sipping soda water once in a while, Jozy also drinking beer and lighting some cigarettes. The girl was smiling. She seemed to have a cunning way of smiling. She said she liked him. She had a narrow face and fine features. Her nose slightly hooked. She said her ancestors had come from Latvia and Lithuania.

Jozy acted as if Lars were a friend of Susan's first and foremost, with herself just a friend of his friend. On the day the three of them went to eat in an Indian restaurant, their relationships were still of the kind. There was very dark in the restaurant, the extremely dark, almost black-skinned Hindu waiters appearing at their table all of a sudden, as if they were a part of the darkness, a shadow from shadows. The young people ate very heavily spiced meat, although it was not the spiciest among the items available in the menu. At the table Susan, chewing the food, talked about her libido which she said she was losing. Lars and Jozy kept their voices low. They all drank a lot of water. The girls paid for Lars because they had invited him out. Although Jozy kept a formal distance, her conversations with the young man in the girls' house had turned out, perhaps against her will, to be more intimate, the feeling cropping up that there was a secret the two of them shared, a feeling that was left out with Susan because of her constant sexual irritation. On one occasion they were sitting on benches in the yard and drinking the cocktail "Bloody Mary" the girls had mixed. The third housemate Mary, of about the same age and of Anglo-Saxon origins, had joined their company. Lars made a joke referring to the name the girl shared with the cocktail and blinked his eye at Mary, to which she responded by showing him her fist. Mary's black boyfriend appeared and started helping the girls prepare the food.

Lars did not feel any special physical attraction to Susan. Firstly, the girl was too tall. She was also skinny, unusually lean, the skin of her face turned almost too sallow for such a young age, only the spring sun making it glow crimson at the cheekbones. One could look at her, to some extent admire her, but Lars did not want to touch her, he was almost scared of it. He knew about Susan's origins that the genes of a lot of nations were mixed in her and to his surprise he even heard her say that she had some Italian ancestry.

Neither was he particularly attracted to Jozy. She was short, also skinny but considering her shortness, she still had more shape to her. The skin of her face was coming off in scales. ("I have bad skin," she said.) Her skin was not youthfully fresh – she was three years older than Lars – but yellowish, which may have been caused by excessive smoking. Once Lars followed her into her room on the second floor of the house. When the girl bent over her bed, standing with her back turned to Lars, he could see her dry buttocks looming through the grey trousers. There was nothing exceptionally erotic in them. Lars could feel no drive stirring in himself, just a slight erotic vibration for a fleeting moment, and he would remember the scene: the girl stooping over the bed, full of hesitation, looking for something in her reticule, feeling in fact uncomfortable for the visitor having come so far without being invited. Thus Lars had no particular desire to touch Jozy either and yet there was something attracting him to her which Susan lacked.

It was usually Jozy who brought Lars to the girls' in her Toyota. One day he took the bus to visit them. He was standing at the bus-stop and he had to wait long, for the bus was late. He was surrounded by pale, hunched up figures. When Lars asked them a question, they grunted something indefinite or pretended not to hear. People who lacked money to buy a car. He managed to talk a little with a black guy. That young man was a pure representative of his race, his skin almost greenish-black. Lars asked the Afro-American where he thought he came from. "England," the man suggested, perhaps by Lars' accent. "Actually I am from Eastern Europe," Lars said. "Eastern Europe," the man repeated inexpressively, and stopped talking.

When the bus arrived, painted on its side in big letters was the advertisement USE ONE, in which the letter O was designed into an unopened condom. The bus-driver was a

woman. Near her by the bus-door there was standing a lean bearded man wearing jeans, holding a big object which looked like a vacuum-cleaner. He and the bus-driver were discussing about Jesus and the grace of God. At the end of the discussion the lean man stated his belief that God who was a loving God was not sending sinful spirits into hell but just extinguishing them from existence, punishing them that way. Before going to Susan and Jozy Lars visited a bookstore in Northampton. He was looking for something by Joseph Conrad, found a biography of him, thumbed it, looked up the words "sexual life" in the index and read about Conrad's sexual life, standing in the bookstore. Then he looked up the writer's writing habits in the index and read the corresponding pages. When he finally reached the girls' house by having walked along the dead end street, through the glass window in their front door he could see one of them standing. It was Susan washing her hair in a bowl. Her hair had been dyed purple, the tone still noticeable in it. This time the girls were joking, they invited the young man into the yard, to the light blue blown up pool which they had filled with water through a hose, and they took a peculiar stance, about the way of ballerinas, holding each other's hands and sputtering water from their mouths, impersonating water-sprinkling fountain sculptures. A young man of Armenian origins, Susan's admirer, was present. Lars and the Armenian went for a short walk. They walked to the front of a clothes store in one of the neighbouring streets and they stopped there. The young man told Lars that he was interested in photography. He showed him a dummy in the showcase behind the glass and he said he intended to photograph it, since he said he found the interplay of light and shadows on the glass in front of it fascinating. Lars looked at the dummy both from a close and a far distances with his short-sighted eyes, the way paintings are carefully studied. Then they walked back. The girls joked about the young men having gone behind the corner to beat each other because of Susan. After that Lars observed with interest what was going on between the Armenian and Susan. It was obvious that they had been quite close but had later drifted apart and that their relationship might or might not flame up again. Susan joked with Jozy at Lars' presence about the two of them having to find a dildo for themselves to have a satisfactory relationship. (Northampton, the girls' present hometown was called the Lesbian capital of the world and there was a society of Gays and Lesbians in Lars' college, one of whose members was the teacher of Lars' creative writing course, a forty-year-old female poet; in the college rooms Lars frequently met the chairwoman of the society, a girl in her twenties with a stout masculine body and bobbed hair.) Once in a confidential talk Jozy informed Lars that Susan had had all kinds of sexual relations, herself having had much less of that kind of experience.

For Jozy's birthday, the fifth of June, the girls had adorned the living room with paper festoons. Lars was already there when Susan, standing on a small ladder, tied balloons beneath the ceiling. For fun, Susan glued onto Lars' upper lip a stripe of cotton for a moustache. Guests arrived, mostly co-actors from "Galileo". Beef was grilled on charcoals in the garden and wine was being drunk. Jozy got drunk and as the tape recorder was playing in the room and couples that had formed in the acting company had taken their seats, girls in young men's laps. Jozy climbed on the table and made a few dancing movements with her small body. She descended and stood and talked with Lars. In the darkness of the room she passionately grabbed the young man by his hands and clutched his wrists. Then she seemed to sober up a little. "Sorry for clutching you," she said, almost spurting. She conjured up a strange, distanced look. She went and sat down in the proximity of Santo, a young man of Italian origins, also having acted in the play and after some time, when it was growing dark outside, she stood up and having put on a leather jacket she went and sat on Santo's motorcycle behind his back and they rolled away, to a bar, as the rumours said. The rumours also said that Santo had a divorced wife and two children in California. The guests were beginning to leave and finally Lars was left alone with Susan in the house. Susan looked nervous. She phoned someone and talked with them and then she came and said to Lars that

she had called Jozy and she had asked if Susan was not harassing the young man. “Of course I said I was not, because I am asexual,” Susan said. Lars told the girl about his aspiration to become a writer and told her a story he had written. He thought to himself that many of the guests who had left might be thinking that something occurred between him and Susan in the empty house. Finally he left, took a late bus in the darkness to his granduncle’s place in the neighbouring town.

The next time Jozy went out with Lars, just the two of them. They dined in a Mexican restaurant. Jozy smoked cigarettes while eating and Lars talked about Virgil and Dante. Afterwards they drove to the proximity of a park, sat on the grass under a tree and discussed literature. Lars mentioned Conrad, Jozy said she had not read him. She said she did not especially like Joyce’s “Ulysses”. Lars said he considered “Ulysses” readable. Jozy praised Salinger, especially his “Franny and Zooey” which she said was better than “The Catcher in the Rye”. Lars said there had been moments that he had been identifying with the Quentin of “The Sound and the Fury”. Jozy said that she was a Medusa. It was getting dark. They drove out of the city and stopped and went out of the car and sat in the grass with the lights of the closest city farther away mirrored as thousands of stars in the riverbed reservoir. Jozy told him about a young man she had been dating with. Lars said that when he left America he might be going to study in Germany. He said that might try to stay in America longer. Jozy said that if he needed a lawyer for that plan, she could recommend her mother who was a very good lawyer. They drove to Northampton, to a Catholic church and they came out of the car and went to the stairs of the church and sat down on them, Lars one step higher, and they sat in silence and Lars felt that he had to do something and he asked Jozy if he could kiss her. “Go on and try,” she said. Lars did try and a loud smack was heard and the youth pushed his tongue into the girl’s mouth and played with his tongue in the hollow of her mouth and kissed her avidly. “It seems you have not kissed often,” Jozy said in the meantime and then they kissed more. Afterwards Jozy conceded that though she partly liked Lars, she also had feelings for Santo. Santo had his own band. He had asked the girl why she had “scooped out” Lars in the “Galileo” party. By that he had been referring to their half an hour talk, which Jozy had initiated. It was quite late night when Jozy drove Lars to his home in her car. On the way she stopped at a gas station and bought chocolate from there and offered it to the young man and ate it with him.

A couple of days after that night Lars sent a letter to Jozy.

Dear Jozy. Excuse my inexperience. Getting involved for the sake of experience has not been my field. You cannot resist Santo – how he reveals the discipline of soul which maybe only long cohabitation with music can teach people. If it is true that a part of you likes me, maybe I and Santo are not opposites excluding each other, but my readings and writing attempts have taught me partly the same that attracts you to him. For there is music in the silence of words, too. Although words are less trustworthy than notes and it takes a longer time to master them and I am not even twenty.

To succumb to you, to forget my clumsy passion (like one forgets to look at one’s racket-holding hand), to respond to you, be yours, be you.

My dear, dear love.

He did not wait for Jozy to to reply with a letter – an unlikely possibility – or by phone, but in a couple of days he sent her a new letter.

Dear Jozy:

I am proud that my first ardent kiss belongs to a woman whom I consider not only attractive but wise.

I have been a male for six and a half years and have spent more of the time among young women than among men and have experienced a lot of them.

Few of them have satisfied my spiritual thirst. None has tried to look beyond my apparent self.

It was because you scooped me with no sex in mind that I fell in love with you.

I thought: now I am ready for it. I have met her. Neither gossip nor the flow of time can hinder us. She will teach me the joy of sharing one's self, body and mind.

The magic of words or my skill in it has its limits. I cannot enchant you.

I will just repeat what many a man has said: between grief and nothing, I will take grief.

Which is probably better than joy. Yes, it is better. Yes.

Lars

He had learned in the meantime that none of the colleges in the USA would accept him, if they needed to pay for his living and study expenses. He was running short of the money got from his greatgrandmother as a bequest and he had no perspectives for a longer stay in America. He had received a scholarship from one of the committees of Estonians living abroad, but that alone was insufficient. He sent a letter to the committee, asking them to leave the scholarship unpaid. He talked on the phone with his father in Estonia and was making plans for his departure.

He could guess of course that Jozy was not sharing his passionate feelings, that the girl had befriended him just out of curiosity. But he was shocked by her irritated voice when he called her. The feeling overwhelmed him that he had committed a very bad thing. With haste he sent her another letter, seeking for reconciliation.

Dear Jozy. The night before your birthday I wrote to my parents. I told them about you, saying you were short and your nose was slightly hooked (so is my mother's). I said you and I were friends who realised the power of Venus but that we respected ourselves and each other too much to be subject to the whims of that goddess.

I overrated myself. I realise now how much my one impulsive action and even more the following letters startled and disappointed you. I failed to be a gentleman. It is of no help to say that that was an error; that I have always wanted to be slow and cautious in dealing with people and that only unusual circumstances – the proximity of my departure from America – made me behave the way I did.

In a couple of days Jozy called him. Her voice had calmed down and she said she would go out to a restaurant once again with him. They met in the afternoon of June 16 – the Bloomsday of the admirers of Joyce, and Jozy took Lars in her Toyota to a restaurant at Amherst. They were seated and received the menus, but then for some reason Jozy disliked the place and they drove to another place at Amherst and took their seats in the other restaurant.

At the very beginning Jozy told the young man she could not get romantically involved with him. The young man nodded, asserting the fact. They started eating and talked about a few things, but there were fake notes in their conversation and it lacked the warmth of the earlier times. "How do you celebrate Christmas in your family?" Lars asked. "Jews do not celebrate Christmas," Jozy said with a pointed stress. That made Lars furtively wonder. He had not actually considered Jozy's ethnicity. He did not know much about the festivals of Jews. His half-Jewish landlady in Tartu did celebrate Christmas, had brought a big Christmas tree into her room. "But you do have some kind of religious rituals?" he asked timidly. "The boys are circumcised," Jozy replied with a crooked smile. "The girls – " and she shrugged, as if thinking of the idiotic possibility that they might be circumcised as well.

Immediately after eating and paying the bill Jozy drove the young man back to the city of his residence and they exchanged cold goodbyes. At Lars' request she did not drive him to

his house but stopped at the distance of half a mile, near the thicket that grew by the Connecticut River. He felt unable to go straight home into the sight of his granduncle, feeling he needed more privacy to be taking in his disappointment. He plunged into the thicket. In a moment there was lightning flashing, he heard thunder rolling and a storm with heavy rain began. Under the slope of the ancient riverbed he found a hollow trunk of a fallen tree. The trunk was big enough for him to creep inside without feeling pressure. There was even quite light inside. He lay crouching in the trunk for the whole duration of the rain, four hours, and he got away without a raindrop on his skin. Then he walked home.

Five days before his departure from the US he sent one more letter to Jozy, the last letter he posted in America.

Dear Jozy:

I must confess you something: I have not stopped desiring you. If only we could meet once more before I leave and I could kiss you, this austere noble ending would have more warmth to it. An ending? Be as frank in your letters as you can. I feel defeated, humiliated: a noble humiliation, to be rejected by the wisest among women. I am addicted to books but you whose forbears were the first people to store up their wisdom in books, you seem to radiate a knowledge older than the Bible and Talmud. If your "I like you" meant my whole being, please call me and let us meet and let me kiss you. On Thursday when you get the letter I will still have three full days to stay.

Jozy did not call him. He waited till the end of the following day, then he called her. He repeated his request: that they might meet and he could kiss her. The girl sighed and said that she did not hate him. That he would just have to put up with there being other men besides him in the world and with her having a relationship with one of such men. With there being other women beside her and with him surely finding someone for himself. She said she believed the young man would get over what happened. Then she reproached him for the insistent tone of his letters and for him having called her now and asking to kiss her. "What do you think I am?" she said. She gave another sigh and said goodbye. In three days, the youth was taken in his granduncle's car to New York. He took the plane to Moscow and from there he flew to Tallinn.

Jozy had aroused him to an interest in Jewish matters. In the autumn, he happened to read an announcement of the Jewish Youth Society in a news bulletin in the hallway of Tartu University Library. He went to the meeting of the society, hesitant at first, but having taken his seat, no one reproached him for not looking Jewish. The following week the group was invited to clean up the old Jewish cemetery. The cemetery lay next to the Russian Orthodox graveyard and it was surrounded by a high concrete wall. The gate was usually locked but a hole had appeared in the wall which one was able to creep through. The chairman of the youth society, Stas, opened the lock with his key and they stepped into the darkness of the cemetery. They got rakes from the guardian's house. Some of the members had their own rakes with them. It was dim under the trees. They walked around a little and tried their best to decipher the Hebrew characters of the Yiddish inscriptions on the tombstones. Stas began hacking sprouts between the graves with his axe, the others raking. Stas was of light skin, with light curly hair and bluish grey eyes. The skin of his face was coming off in scales the same way as had Jozy's. Among the girls, too, there were a few whose appearance made it difficult to recognise they were Jewish. But the girl named Naomi had brown, almost black hair and her skin was darker than usual among the people in Estonia. On their way back from the cemetery Stas and Lars discussed the original meaning of the word Jerusalem.

"What is it that makes Jews stand out among peoples, that has helped us endure throughout thousands of years, despite all persecutors?" two young black-haired American men with kippahs asked from the members of the youth society, sitting on benches in a hall of a high dormitory building of Tartu University. They had gathered to celebrate the Jewish New

Year. Naomi was sitting next to Lars, as if she had shifted so close to absorb his warmth. “Jews are democratic,” someone proposed. “Hitler was also elected to power in a democratic way,” the young men with kippahs replied. “The Jews have the oldest written culture among the peoples of the world,” Lars suggested. “The Chinese have just as old a culture,” the kippah-bearers retorted. “The Jews have the Torah,” Naomi said, in a low voice and swiftly. “Exa—ctly,” the young men drawled and gave an enlightened smile of happiness. “We have the Torah.” Later Lars told Naomi that to his knowledge he was not Jewish but that his grandfather had had a surname that sounded Jewish, and he told the girl the surname. “In that case, you are a Jew,” Naomi said decisively.

In later times, Lars saw Naomi just once, the girl was walking towards him at the end of the old main street of Tartu and interchanged greetings with him, sending him a nice smile.

Years passed and Lars was working as a teacher of English in a country school near his parental home. An American woman from New Hampshire came to work as his colleague. Her name was Carol and she had been born and grown up in New York. She was in her mid-thirties. Later Lars found in the Internet that a man with her surname, who he thought might have been her relative, had been a rabbi. The woman was not religious.

One bright day in the middle of summer they went for a walk in the neighbouring town. They walked along a sea-side alley, by a field of reeds, the path running between rows of stumpy silver willows with dully shining leaves, and Lars told the woman about an Estonian poet having compared willows to middle-aged women bathing. The woman found that a fine comparison. They passed the statue of another Estonian poet, staring from the pedestal in a thoughtful manner at the bay. Lars told her who the poet had been and she said she found the statue nice, but a bit stern. Lars began to talk about the American poet Wallace Stevens, whose works he had studied at college in America, and the woman said that while living in Philadelphia she had become acquainted with a grandchild of Stevens. Soon after Carol’s arrival Lars went cycling with her and for three times they ran on village roads, both of them wearing white running shoes. For the most time Carol was running a couple of steps behind him and Lars could sense keenly her tough, watchful female body swaying in exactly the same rhythm with him, he sensed its robust warmth, every smallest movement of it. After the running, having taken a shower at home, Lars sat as a guest in her kitchen and ate a supper. Carol had placed a basin on the stove and was stirring her laundry with a stick in it (she did not yet have a washing machine). She was smoking a cigarette. After a while he felt the call of nature. The bathroom and the toilet were combined in the same room. On a radiator pipe he could see dark blue panties hanging, drying. Lars had seen his father’s underpants drying on a cord or lying folded in a closet drawer. Something in Carol’s panties reminded him of his father’s. Not the smell – he smelt nothing – but the way they seemed to have been worn, got worn out. And their fashion seemed quite masculine. There was something challenging, harsh, coarse in them. There was nothing soft, stewed in suavity in them that could have been expected from ladies’ underwear. Imagining Carol wearing them excited his imagination. He would fain have poked his nose in the panties and sniffed them, kissed them, twirled them around his neck. Coming from the toilet he was thinking how unlikely it was that she his using her toilet, and seeing her underwear hanging, pleased her. Back at the kitchen table, he looked at the photos of her family she was showing. He could see a middle-aged lady with black hair, sitting in a pondering way, her chin on her palm, in a green garden. It was Carol’s elder sister. He could see his co-teacher down on her belly on a garden lawn, wearing a sweet, self-conscious smile. He could see her together with a bulky, not quite fat, but stoutish man with a black full beard. In one of the pictures with the lawn, the man was holding up a slogan: “Long Live Estonia! Latvia and Lithuania are for losers.” In another picture the man was sitting on a coach next to Carol and embracing her from behind her back, her face bearing a mild, perplexed look. There was a picture of the man with his two

daughters who appeared to be about four or five years old and they looked similar to some persons of the Kurdish people Lars had seen in pictures taken after the Gulf War. Carol said those pictures had been taken in a garden party at his brother's, and the man was her brother. Lars summoned up his courage and asked of what ethnic origins the woman's relatives were. "Who were your ancestors?" The woman inhaled and said, with a grin: "All Jews." Lars felt as if having received a slight electric shock. Looking at Carol's thick black hair, straight nose and brownish skin, he had thought she might have been of Native American descent. One of the colleagues at the school had suggested she might be a Gypsy. Lars' last suspicion had been she might be Kurdish. Upon learning the truth about her ethnicity, Lars led the conversation to the American poetry classic Ezra Pound. He said he knew what kind of attitude American Jews had toward Ezra Pound – during World War Two, he made broadcasts in the Italian radio supporting fascism and he deserved condemnation, possibly even execution – but he respected Pound. He told her that when during a lecture of American poetry at the college a documentary was shown about Ezra Pound, first a stout young Jewish man left the lecture and one by one all the Americans followed him. They had done it as a sign of protest and because they considered Pound boring. Lars had been the only one to watch the film to its end. Pound was a clever, educated man. During the war he made his choice and who could say that this was the worst choice. Did not many people make sacrifices during the war to things that do not deserve a sacrifice? Saying this, Lars was thinking about the executions of Jews. He did not think about the Jews really having made no sacrifices. They were just given no chance to live. Carol gave him a frowning look.

She told Lars about her father who she said was a typical New York Jew. She mentioned that the lady with whom she had been living in Tartu had initiated a discussion "about the extremely rich Jews in America" with her. The views of the hostess had been rather disparaging and Carol had not told her that she also was Jewish and that her father was a historian, having formerly taught history at the University of New York. Carol showed Lars a photo of her father that had been taken in his New York apartment more than twenty years back. Only his face and upper body were visible. He had a narrow face, a sharp nose and black hair, and he was standing on the background of a couple of Abstractionist paintings. In the picture, he was in his fifties and doing good but she said he was an old sick man now. He had been married three times, the first time with her mother. He had divorced her when the daughter was five. The first marriage had been contracted in the Christian way, in a church, so had the third. The second marriage which remained very short had been contracted according to the Jewish customs, in a synagogue. Her father's third wife was a professor of French.

Carol began giving lessons in the classroom of English in which Lars had been teaching. Glued on the doors of wall closets there were pictures drawn by the students in their first classes, there were words in English written in them. One of the pictures showed a schoolhouse with a label on the door, reading "Bitches for sale": Lars wondered whether the student who made the picture might have thought of Carol when writing the label. Without doubt, she deserved the appreciative title "bitch", considering her toughness, courage and sex appeal. Lars attended a few of her lessons. They began with her talking, introducing the new material, then dividing the students into groups and giving them a task for independent work. Later they had to speak up on that topic. Sometimes she performed charades in front of students: moved her hands and body and let them guess by her gestures what word she was having in mind. One Sunday Lars presented Carol a basketful of peaches, which she had said were her favourite fruits. She came to visit him. The youth offered her a seat and gave her a plate with cookies he had just bought from the shop. They discussed further plans for the schoolyear. Before leaving, Carol said she wanted to see Lars' kitchen. She looked at his gas-

stove, his cupboards, his sink, tables and refrigerator. On the stove, a kettle with the tomato soup he had been cooking. He had poured canned tomatoes into water and added garlic. He gave her a spoon for tasting the soup. He remembered Jozy had liked food with a lot of garlic. "You have used lots of garlic," Carol said. "You might add something more substantial." The country house of Lars' parents lay by the woods two miles from the schoolhouse. The first time they walked the distance. It was a misty autumn day. Carol stopped at a briar bush growing by the path across field, she touched the hips with her fingers. On the walls of the big room of the old farm house, there were watercolour paintings and a drawing made by Lars on his schooldays – two still-lives, a human skull drawn in pencil. At his request, she scrubbed the brick surface between the opening and the mantelpiece of the big fireplace, black with smoke and soot – the chimney being over a hundred years old, the smoke did not go up properly. She went to the out-of-door privy. When they turned back, it had begun to drizzle and Lars gave Carol a mustard-coloured raincoat. It reached down to her knees. "How do I look in it?" she asked. Only her well-complexioned face, framed by black hair, with thick eyebrows, was visible from under the hood. "You look lovely," Lars said. The next time they came in a car borrowed from another teacher, with Carol driving. They took the ladder to an apple-tree thickly full of apples behind the house and she climbed the ladder and shook the tree a lot of times. Lars picked up the apples. They got two big baskets full of them. Carol recalled an autumn when she went to pick apples in Western Massachusetts, the area where Lars had lived and attended college, she said there were huge apple-gardens there. Another day, shortly before twilight, she invited him to picking apples from the trees in the school garden with her (the school had formerly been a manor and behind it a park and a big garden lay), the ground already covered with hoarfrost, the first snowflakes floating in the air.

In the evening of Thanksgiving day, Lars kissed the woman on her cheek in the classroom – she pulling her thick black hair away from her cheek. The skin of the cheek of the Jewess was delicate, salty and moist. There was no one else in the classroom but the door was open and Carol was scared that the students might have seen the kiss. For hard-working students, she arranged an extra lesson once a week. It took place in evening hours and only a couple of students attended it. A collection of stories with orange covers was used, including short stories by a number of outstanding authors writing in English from the second half of the twentieth century. Every week, the students had to read a new story, which they then discussed with the teacher. The classes were taught in a spacious front room of the classroom, rather dark because it only had one window. Little old-fashioned reading tables and cloth-covered wooden seats stood along the walls, there was a carpet on the floor. The ceiling was aslant, parallel to the roof, and it was lined with boards. There was a TV-set. In the wall there were doors to the toilets of the students and to a small room of language teachers. On the occasion of Lars attending the lesson, only one student was present, a slim light-skinned girl with fair, almost white hair, who in the course of the conversation mentioned having gone to a ballet school in her early youth and having seriously considered following that vocation, before she changed her mind. She really had a body fit for a ballerina. The last time a short story by the American Jewish writer Bernard Malamud had been read. A reading of a short story by Doris Lessing lay ahead. Lars mentioned that when Lessing visited Estonia, he had been offered the opportunity of interviewing her but he had rejected the offer because he did not know her work well enough. The student was sitting, occasionally pulling one of her legs beneath her body as in the tailor's seat, the other leg hanging over the edge of the chair. The teacher was sitting on the floor. She was wearing black trousers and a black sweater. Sitting on the floor made her limbs weary, she kept changing her position, while she was also

speaking or listening to her companions. Suddenly she lay on her back on the floor, stretched herself and raised her legs, bent from the knees, above her upper body, her bottom facing the ceiling. Lars knew from what he had learned in sex manuals that she was in a position enabling the penis better and deeper to penetrate the vagina. Carol gave a look towards Lars. Then she quickly sat up, as if in apprehension of the possible interpretation of her posture.

At the time when Christmas presents were mostly made, he gave her a hard-cover book in English entitled "The Making of Salads", implying it was to her for Chanukah, the Jewish festival of light. Carol gave him a candy as she did to all the rest of the staff at the school. She said she was embarrassed for having given him such a small present. She said that although she was Jewish, during Christmas a fir-tree had always been brought home and adorned in her family. In the spring Lars gave her eight daffodils he had brought from the flowerbed at his parents' country homestead. "For what?" she asked, accepting them at the door of her apartment. "Because I am interested in you as a personality," the youth replied. In about half an hour, they met in the schoolhouse (they were both living in its proximity). "I told you wrong," Lars said. "I gave you these flowers not only because I am interested in you as a personality, but also because I am interested in you as a woman." Carol, sitting at a computer in the computer class, made a few clicks with the mouse, sighed and said: "How many times must I let you know that I am not interested in you being interested in me as a woman?" "I know," Lars replied in a voice of surrender. "I just cannot help still being interested."

With the spring having developed a bit further, he invited her to go jogging again. She refused. "One of the reasons I will not come running with you," she said, "is that I want to keep this a working relationship." A few days later Lars rang the bell at the door of her apartment and when she opened the door, he told her he had brought salmon for her. He knew salmon was her favourite food. Carol smiled, leaned to the doorjamb and told him she already had salmon in her refrigerator, believe her or not.

About a week later, in the department store in the town, Lars bought eight pairs of different sizes of stockings – he did not know her size – and took them to Carol in a plastic bag in the evening. She accepted them, looking perplexed. In about thirty minutes, as Lars was at home – he was living in the parish home for elderly people, situated on the second floor of the parish government building, renting a little private room, but sharing the kitchen, the toilet and the bathroom with the other inhabitants, the elderly – the doorbell rang and Carol came, suppressing her irritation, and forced the plastic bag with the stockings into his hand. "I cannot accept them," she said. "I realised what they were meant for." A little bit later Lars took the plastic bag again and went and left the stockings hanging from Carol's doorhandle. She probably found them in the morning. She did not come back to return them any more.

As the exams were beginning, Lars often spent time working in her company. On a Saturday they sat inserting and designing examination questions in a classroom. They were sitting in adjacent chairs, making up the student tasks at a single computer. She was teaching him tricks of word processing he had been unaware of. They were on friendly matter-of-fact terms. The exams consisted in receiving oral answers from, and conversing with the secondary school students at desks placed together as a single big desk in the classroom. When the exams were over, Lars met Carol in the hallway of the home for the elderly. He knew – his mother had called Carol and talked with her – that she was going to America for the summer. Seizing the opportunity, he invited her to come to the sauna at his family's country house when she returned from America. He said he was fascinated by her personality. "Before I met you, I thought people like you existed only on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel," he said. Carol promised to consider his proposal. Ten minutes later she was again at his door and when the door opened she said she would not come to the sauna at Lars' place

but that he should think about their having accomplished something together, having helped several groups of young people to finish school, perform well at exams. Lars was not overwhelmed with joy at that, he was thinking of her having refused his invitation to the sauna. He would remember standing in his kitchen in the house for the elderly and boiling something, perhaps water for making instant coffee, perhaps frying minced turkey, and he was making push-ups on the kitchen floor in the middle of cooking, that had been his custom for nearly a year already, and then he stood up again and suddenly Carol's figure, shorter than himself, appeared in his imagination and he imagined her standing in front of the closets with yellow doors rising from the floor to high overhead in the kitchen and he made a few steps towards her image and crossed his arms, as if he was embracing her, and he kissed the air. His mood while doing it and in its wake was exceptionally gentle and it never occurred to him that he should not try performing that kiss in reality. The following day he met Carol in the room of the secretaries. They had to order new English textbooks from a bookstore in Tallinn. They ordered them by phone. There was nobody except them in this room or in the neighbouring rooms, no one in the whole schoolhouse, except for the bus-driver of the school, sitting in the school library. Carol was full of excitement, the day was approaching for her departure to Tartu, where the centre of American teachers was. She was to return here for just one day, for the commencement party, after which she was to travel to America. She was to see a lot of her acquaintances in Tartu, a few of whom she had not met for a whole year. Lars could see that he had been swept away from her head already – till the autumn at least. He tried to imagine what she would be doing in America in the summer, and although he had nothing to rely on – he had only happened to see, on the table in the teachers' room, an announcement about her brother-in-law's art exhibition to be opened in New York – his thoughts turned jealous. He imagined her spending the hot summer passionately in the company of some square-shouldered young American man. As she was about to leave the room and was closing her reticule, having put her notebook into it, Lars approached her with an affectionate look on his face and said in a weak, almost trembling, voice: "Before you leave –", spread his hands open, made one more step closer and tried to embrace her. The Jewess yelled, quickly raised her arms, struggled with them, fending off Lars' hands – he could only clasp her by her wrists – and shouted with a horrifying voice: "Stay away from me!" "All right," Lars said, quickly retreating, suppressing indignation, ready to resign. "All right. Calm down. You do not even know what I meant by this." "I do not care what you meant," Carol shouted. "When I said no I meant no." She left the room and the building, wearing an irritated look, full of ominous decisiveness. After a few days the headmistress of the school wanted to talk with Lars. She said she knew what had happened between Carol and the young man and that Carol had promised either to sue the school because of his behaviour or to leave it herself. The headmistress gave Lars the ultimatum not to make a single step towards Carol, now as she was coming for the commencement day. Lars promised that. During the commencement he only gave her a distant glance, observing her body in a red dress stop uneasily when she noticed him, her black hair suspended, then she pulled herself together and went to her seat in the row before the young man's almost in front of him. Her breasts beneath the red dress were bulging and looked bigger than they had during the classes. A female teacher of Russian sitting next to Lars happened to touch Carol's shoulder and quickly apologised. Carol gave a start, turned her head and looked at the young man from the corner of her eye, her face in profile similar to the bas-relief figures of Egyptian tombs, and opened her mouth a little, conjuring up a grinning look full of repulsion. Lars did not go to the teachers' party after the commencement.

In that summer, Lars had the temporary job of teaching private lessons to a student lagging behind. In his spare time he was reading Bernard Malamud's novel "The Fixer". The novel told about a young man from a little town in Ukraine, a shtetl, who loses his faith in the

Jewish religion and customs and whose young, childless wife becomes a whore – or that was how the main character put it. That young Jewish man goes to find his luck in Kiev, although Jews like him are not actually allowed to live in that city. He gets into contact with a rabbi, meets a little Russian boy soon to be killed, almost has sex with a Russian girl whose father is an anti-Semite and the leader of the Black Hundreds. The young man hides his being a Jew until the Russian girl sees him naked and circumcised. The young man turns down sex with her because she is menstruating. The anti-Semitic Black Hundreds, assisted by a fanatical priest, catch the young man and accuse him of the murder of the little Russian boy. Actually he has been killed by drunken Russians. The boy has countless knife wounds. The young man is accused of having killed the boy on the eve of the Jewish Passover so as to drink his blood with other Jews at the party table. The young man is put to prison and he is hit upon by numerous pains and ordeals in the course of which he redefines himself as a religious Jew. Whether he will be executed or acquitted remains unresolved in the novel. At the end it is just revealed that his wife who left him has got a son with another Jew, a musician. The young man generously adopts the boy to enable his wife to be accepted again by the Jewish community. He does not admit his guilt in killing the little Russian boy, although on several occasions that seems the only way to end his pain. In that summer Lars decided to have himself circumcised. He read articles about circumcision in the Internet. Several ways of circumcision were described. It offered a certain erotic satisfaction to read those descriptions. What and how much actually would be cut away was not explained there. Lars called a hospital in Tallinn and asked whether they agreed to perform “the circumcision of an adult Jewish man”. He was given the number of another hospital. Finally he got into contact with a doctor who agreed to circumcise him. He went to a synagogue and met with Jews and with the chairman of the Jewish congregation. They talked in an office with moist air in the front part of the synagogue. He asked the chairman about circumcision. Hearing the question the man gave a start (up to the moment they had been talking about Jewish culture), explaining that the edge would be cut off. “It will be easier to urinate and it will feel more pleasant for the woman,” he said. Lars showed him an encyclopedia of Jewish folklore he had bought. “Where was it printed?” the chairman asked with interest. It had been printed in Singapore. A young, tall Jewish man who had lived for seven years in Israel and had just returned, was also paging the book. He opened the book at the word “Shekinah”, which signifies the feminine aspect of God or of the holy ghost, and for a while he kept gazing at a reproduction of Marc Chagall’s painting “Shekinah”, provided as an illustration of that concept, in which a Jewish bridal couple are facing each other on the background of a farmhouse, the bride wearing a white veil, in a tree above the house a fiddler sits and over the heads of the couple a winged child is floating, supporting her palms on their heads. He then opened the page with the portrait of the murderer of Jews, the Cossack chieftain Bogdan Chmielnicki. Lars thought to himself that he might be reminding the young Jew of Chmielnicki. He said that he was not a Jew but that he thought he would become one. “Why not,” the Jewish young man said. “My mother does not always celebrate Shabbat.” “The only non-Jewish artists whose pictures have been used in this book are Michelangelo and Rembrandt,” Lars noted to the chairman of the congregation. “That is because they painted according to the theme,” the chairman said.

Lars knew there were those who let themselves be circumcised because of the narrowness of the foreskin. To the doctor, a red-haired, middle-aged woman with a Georgian surname he for any case produced that reason too. He said he was having himself circumcised for medical, sexual and ritual reasons.

In August, thinking about Carol in America, he wrote poems in English in which he discussed the meaning of circumcision, the Torah, and the grace of God. He composed them, walking slowly on a dirt road running between fields and disappearing into the forest near the

country house of his parents. Then he memorised what he had composed and wrote it down later.

The new schoolyear was approaching, Carol returned from her native country and one day Lars met her in the schoolhouse. They were alone in the room of language teachers and Lars responded to the woman but avoided looking into her eyes. He felt that was the only way he could keep physically away from her. She quickly noticed it. "Will you never look into my eyes again?" she asked in a tender voice.

At one end of the first floor of the two-floor house of his residence there was the parish government but under the rooms of the home for the elderly doctor's offices were located. One day between his classes he went to the doctor's to get his licence for going to the circumcision operation in Tallinn. He was waiting in the frontroom of the doctor's office in the company of a few of his own students who were applying for a release from their classes for coughing or for fever. The nurse inviting him in, the doctor wrote down his illness, diagnosing it as "phymosis" and saying that he had had the same operation performed on his son when he was five. Lars knew his son. The doctor and the nurse were conversing and for some reason Lars gathered the impression that they were on intimate terms.

The fear obsessed him that he would not be circumcised when his not being Jewish is revealed. Therefore, without much hesitation, he started the operation on his own. He was used to taking a shower several times a day, at least every morning, before the beginning of classes, and it was under the shower that he began circumcising himself with shaving blades. He had bought several packages of them. He was unsure how big a part of the foreskin was to be removed, but he believed that circumcision in any case meant a circle to be cut around the penis. So he started cutting off the skin which freely snapped around the top of the penis, and he did this by tiny pieces. It did not take long till the whole shower base was red from the blood running from his virile member. He went to the schoolhouse, his groin still bleeding and during his class he could smell the blood trickling from the trousers. Every day he cut away a little bit more. Then one day, being in town, in the office of his father's company, he called Carol. "Hi. I am now really, physically circumcised," he said. "I did it with blades." "Are you all right?" she asked with terror in her voice. "Ye-es," Lars drawled. "It is not so painful, actually." He was told later that right after that call Carol had phoned the centre of American teachers in Riga and told them that her co-teacher had circumcised himself. The people at the centre called the headmistress of the country school, who called the head of department who called Lars' parents, asking them what was wrong with the young man's mind. The occasion served Carol as the pretext for leaving the school. She gave classes for just a few more days, then left for Riga to return for just one Thursday, and flew back to America. It was exactly on the Thursday of Carol's last stay at the country school that Lars' final circumcision operation was to take place in Tallinn. His hesitation did not last long. Between seeing her once again and circumcision he chose the latter. Years later, recalling his last moments with her, he would be regretting his choice. If only he could have seen her once more!

He remembered her having watched him from a close distance a couple of times. For the first time it was in early morning hours. He had told her that by-watchers – he meant himself among them – might run into difficulties distinguishing between a Jew and an Arab. He had stared at her figure, at the Arab-like brown complexion and Semitic shape of her face, and he could not but wonder how come so many Arabs could hate her people. What if she was lying? What if she was not Jewish but an Arab, whose family found it easier to pass by presenting themselves as Jews? Or maybe she was Kurdish? Knowing her made Lars more puzzled at what really differentiated an Arab and a Jew. They met by the wardrobe, at the closets, next to the toilet doors. Both had taken off their street shoes and put on the house shoes. Lars had finished tying his shoelaces and stood up, straightening his back. Carol was

still bending, her body flexible, tough in nearly a masculine fashion, Lars watching her slender but shapely thighs in black trousers odorous of faint fragrances of the exoticism of the South, watching the tissue of her trousers clinging around her legs. Still a little bent, she turned and raised her head. He sensed a vague signal, as if she had said something, as if a soft appeal for him to stay silent and halt his movements had sounded, suggested by her urgent, piercing look and the ascent of her head, a smile suddenly appearing on her lips and lingering there. Her face was at four inches from his eyes, a dark, sharp-nosed, Semitic face, thirty four years old, with unexpectedly girlish features, as if she were inviting him to a play with her. The brown eyes fathoming him. She seemed to be hypnotising him, pondering some secret in him or between the two of them which had long been latent but had sprung into her view all of a sudden. She appeared to be sniffing him, having detected in him a smell that made her produce a smile of a little teasing and wonder, trying to associate something with it. Her gaze was warm and her neck was swaying almost imperceptibly. The silent staring lasted for ten, fifteen seconds. It felt as though those seconds were their common property, or she were offering the moments to him for a present. That made it more painful to sense the time coming to an end. The youth let her stare at him, frozen. He did not smile back. He did not turn his gaze kinder, nor ask her why she was staring. A suspicion may have stirred in him. He would have liked to be more responsive but he could not. The idea crept into his mind that he was not reacting quite the way she was expecting. That she failed to find all the brotherhood, compassion and confidentiality in him. It looked as if she were testing her instinct in an endeavour to get a clear view of the assets of his soul, which she presumed were good. He was afraid of having failed her expectations, making her disappointed, in a slight, perhaps even in a major way, and he felt deep dissatisfaction with his own demeanour. But the warmth of her gaze left him a lovable memory. Then her face jerked, her look turned hasty, she grabbed her bag, turned away her eyes, and they ascended the staircase, each to their class.

One day in early spring, as Carol was talking with a student at the foot of stairs in the lobby, she could see Lars coming from the wardrobe and going towards the front door, wearing a small black-and-white woollen cap covering just the top of his skull. "A nice cap you have," she called to Lars across the lobby, interrupting her conversation with the student. Her voice had warmth and cordiality. She shouted as one shouts to a friend or a comrade. With no deliberate intention, he had left her the impression that he was wearing a Jewish skullcap.

For the second time it was in spring that she looked at him from a close distance. The two of them were in the classroom and were discussing the arrangement of the exams ahead. It was an evening, the windows of the classroom faced east and lights were not burning, so the room was filled with bluish grey shadows. They were standing on the opposite sides of the desk they had happened to choose, on which sheets of paper pertaining to the exam were lying. Carol stopped silent. She was bent over the desk, her hands on the back of the chair. She was looking at him from the distance of eight inches. Her face seemed older than usual, all skin and bone. Her gaze was frozen as of a corpse. She was not so much looking into him as at a vague point in the space of air between them, and she was listening rather than looking. She seemed no longer to be expecting anything of him, her former receptivity to new experience having ceased. She merely appeared to be coldly registering the present course of events.

Lars remembered sitting in a meeting of colleagues in the teachers' room and Carol sitting in the corner of a leather corner divan in a half-recumbent position, leaning against the back of the divan only with the upper part of her back, her hands on her belly, her legs in black trousers (she often wore black trousers, although sometimes she wore a black skirt, and once she was wearing black hoses under the skirt, she and Lars were both ascending the

staircase and Carol said to him: "We are close flies," using a strange metaphor, although, Lars had thought, with her black costume of coarse hoses that comparison suited her well) a little apart. The trousers were of some clinging synthetic material and there were little folds and furrows on the thighs and on the upper part of them, including the groin. Lars' eyes flashed and stopped for several frowning seconds on the surface, the elevation between the black trousers, it was so close to him, it was almost being exposed, he yearned to look at it again and again, to press his face, his head against it, it was an expectant place, tight and abundant. It stirred his imagination to be sitting next to a dark lady almost demonstrating the middle point of her lower body, no Estonian or Nordic woman would have sat that way, staying quite natural, it never seemed to occur to Carol someone might read challenge in her posture.

Although she left Lars' life, some of her habits stayed with him. Once when he had just met her he noticed her drinking packet tea in the school cafeteria, keeping the bag in the water. He remarked that this way the packet would make the tea too strong. "No, at some moment it stops making it stronger," she replied and smiled, smacking her lips in a cloying manner, watching Lars taking yoghurt from a cup with a spoon. That was when he started drinking tea her way. During his acquaintance with her and even for a year and a half afterwards he kept performing several things the way she had done, carried his bag in her manner, bent or squatted down over the bag to take schoolwork or personal items in her manner, drank, like a lot of the mineral water "Bonaqua" that had been her favourite, he even emulated her slightest movements, the feeling of her ways being in his bone and marrow. Then, a year and a half after her departure, he deliberately began doing things differently from her ways, finally to break free from her influence, from the shackles the loss of her had imposed on him, and to erase her from his thoughts. Later, always when taking the tea bag out of the tea, or even a moment earlier, the very instant he was lowering the packet into the cup, he remembered her, intent on not doing the triviality her way, being free from her influence, and that gave him a peculiarly good, satisfactory feeling. Nonetheless, it was fun to go jogging as if she were running next to him, even two years after her departure when running in city streets, in the stadium or in village roads, he was trying to keep the joints of his legs and arms swaying to the rhythm of the run, bending from knees and elbows, with the same subtle grace he had noticed in the limbs of Carol.

Walking in the streets of Tallinn, he could imagine her standing in front of him, about sixteen feet away, her right side turned towards him, her face in a quarter profile, just as she had stood at the desk before her class when Lars was watching her from the classroom door. Her black hair, falling open to the half length of her upper body, was framing her narrow face with a deliberate, expectant, watchful look and her slender legs in black trousers were narrowing earthwards in a powerful jet, as if in an art nouveau style ink drawing. And Lars could sense his own peasant-like, rough, stocky figure with a broad face and a broad lower body and he sensed a complete, insurmountable incompatibility with the woman. And he knew that he would see her never again. Slowly, day by day, the memory of her was beginning to fade. It still recurred when walking in the streets of Tallinn, he glimpsed some dark face of a woman, some dark saviour-like face, with an arch of eyes serene from pain and sufferings.

But he went to the synagogue, the peot hanging at his ears, wearing a skullcap or a hat, went once or twice in a year, went when the horn called the shofar was hooting, calling the Jews to the celebrations of the New Year and preparing them for the ten Awesome Days when the doors of the heaven were opened and everybody was judged for their last year's deeds in heaven, and possibly on a weekday, when it was allowed in the synagogue (if he should have come there on such a day), the black leather straps of the tefillin were tied around his left arm and a little black box with black straps, containing prayers in Hebrew, was fastened to his forehead.

He reread his translation of an excerpt of Thomas Wolfe's novel "The Web and the Rock", an excerpt constituting one chapter of the novel, which he had selected and entitled as a separate short story. He had entitled it "Beef Steak". In the story the main character George Webber meets his sweetheart, a Jewess called Esther. George is both excited and worried because he would soon learn whether the publishing house accepts his book or not. He starts blaming the woman for his doubts. They get into a row and the woman, dismayed by the accusations, rushes out of the apartment, offended, apparently forever. But George softens and follows her and apologises. There is a lot of direct speech in the story, it almost reads like a play. Esther returns and delivers her long monologue. She is in a strange, elated mood. She tells him about how she went buying food in the market. At length, she describes him the counters full of foodstuff, various kinds of meat – she says she goes to the best meat-seller who knows how to cut meat – fruits and vegetables, all kinds of vegetables, describing their juicy looks, and radiant colours. She is capable of putting so much elated spirit into all those details, that her soliloquy leaves an impact which is both supernatural and strangely down-to-earth. The way she is telling it makes George's senses alert in a new way, listening to her he becomes increasingly confident that his work will be published, and they become ecstatic, Esther through her tender, moving description, George from listening to her, and at the end of the story they embrace each other and Esther calls out: "Love! Love!" with George for his part exclaims: "Steak! Steak!" The scene from the novel reminded Lars of some occasions with Carol, like his reproaching her in an empty classroom for what he thought were signs of her "American arrogance" towards the students and the school, and her rushing out offended, saying she would talk further with him when he was able to do that, with Lars immediately seized with regret and trying to make it up by inviting her to the pictures. She had not prepared food together with him, she had only offered him a meal once, and Lars had been present when Carol mixed buckwheat porridge and cottage cheese into the New York Jewish meal, kasha, at a party she had arranged for her colleagues, the language teachers in her apartment during the time of great Jewish festivals in the autumn of her arrival. And one day in that autumn, on the one hundredth birth anniversary of William Faulkner – she was not celebrating (and Lars did not mention) the writer's birthday but the beginning of school and the Jewish New Year perhaps – she offered him cookies in her apartment. They were alone, in the meantime she called her sister in America and the latter said that she loved Carol and Carol said that she loved her too and Lars looked at her bed with white sheets and the teddy-bear lying in it. Nor was Lars waiting in the company of the Jewess for the publication of his work, just once, on a spring day she had edited the language and style of a one-page-long attempt at creative writing of his. Lars was preparing tortillas filled with minced beef with Helen, four years after the days spent with Carol. He was not destined to meet his Jewess, one who would buy beef for him and prepare it with him. But he was given the acquaintance with Helen, a short Estonian woman, sometimes looking a bit askance in a pleasant way, with whom he cooked, during Jewish festivals, tortillas, the food of Mexico, the land of colour.

One autumn morning, at his parents' country place, he went into the yard. It had been raining the whole previous day. Now the sky was clearing up and a wind was blowing, and he imagined it being the wind of freedom, a wind throwing leaves from trees, twirling clouds, exposing everything deceitful, downcast. He was thinking about Frank Sinatra's song "Autumn in New York". He thought about the words in it saying that autumn in New York often brought along the promise of new love which was often mixed with pain. He recalled his having let the song sound in the teachers' room and Carol staring at him restively across the table, paler in face than usual. And it seemed to him that the short Helen he had cooked the Mexican food with was standing in the yard, shouting him: "Enough of that endless grieving! You have me to prepare meals together with! You have tortillas, tacos and guacamole sauce and taco sauce and salsa mexicana! Remember, you have your mother who

brought those things for us! Even though the essence of Mexico is dolour, our essence it is not! You are standing in your underwear out in the wind and that is the wind of freedom! Listen to birds chirping in the branches! Listen to the distant voices of cranes in the field! Just have a look at the field!”

For the festival of Simchat Torah Lars went to the synagogue again.

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