

[PHI 101]

novel

## Existential Nihilism

“I am alone in the midst of these happy, reasonable voices. All these creatures spend their time explaining, realizing happily that they agree with each other. In Heaven's name, why is it so important to think the same things all together. ”

— **Jean-Paul Sartre**, *Nausea* (1938)

## September

### Third

Back to school – after a summer that brought me nothing but shameful Phthirus pubis a.k.a crabs, and a genuine Chippendale rocking chair, the French style one, for only 500, which I accidentally bumped into at a garden sale – what a bargain that was, and not shameful at all, I must say! Eventually, I got rid of the crabs by not following the doctor's prescription and annihilating them with spirits rather than antibiotics. And I also got rid of the chair – tossed it on the garbage, because I soon found out that I actually hated it and it did not go well with anything that is in my apartment. And there's not much in my apartment.

At the beginning of each semester, I am more bored and full of contempt and impatience for this academic year to be over than I am eight months later, when it is actually over. This, I speculate, is nothing but the devilish spell of a long and wearisome summer. And it's wearisome because I never get brown, I never get voluptuously healthy looking by eating sea goodies and water melon, I never wear enough white, I never appear on the beach with flawlessly shaved and sparkling in the colors of Clinique skin, I just happen to be always profusely drenched in iced chardonnay. This is what my summer is about – pubic lice I must have picked up from some toilet seat (although I know it's a myth that you can catch whatsoever from a public toilet seat) and white wine.

- What??

Prune's voice startles me. She is sitting right next to me in the aula for the opening ceremony. I did my best to avoid her this morning, but no – she finds me in the crowd flocking in the entrance hall of the main university building and starts waving her both hands in the air with such a ferocity that I can almost see

them detaching from the elbows and flying away over the heads of the students and staff.

- I said it's so moving I can cry!

What's moving? Are we moving? Are the seats in the aula moving towards the horizon...or the toilet for handicaps? Am I still drunk from yesterday?

- Oh, the speech of the rector, you mean! – I am glad that my smartness sometimes keeps me on the alert about things I do not even notice and do not care about. Such as the rector's same old welcoming speech. When I have drifted away in the direction of my smoky winery hallucinations, it is my precious smartness that always brings me back into the world of the Yahoos. Because, you know, I see myself more as a Houyhnhnm, which is by far more than a Yahoo. No doubt about it.

Prune is so enthusiastic about the speech, I can actually *see* that and it bothers me. As a matter of fact, everybody on our row and those sitting behind us, seem bothered, too, as she constantly fidgets, and sighs, and surreptitiously smears tears of heavenly emotions all over her badly powdered face. I, on the other hand, sit still as if glued to my seat, with hands resting on my thighs like the broken wings of a beheaded pigeon. I am simply so not there that I may even not be there for real.

How can your parents name you Prune, for fuck's sake?

- How can you be so rude? – There's definitely reproach in her voice. At first, I think I must have said this about her bad parent's choice aloud. But she goes on:

- We ALL should cheer for him! He is such a smart man. The rector.

Now I can hear people clapping their hands, i.e. they are cheering for the rector, the smart man. But my broken pigeon wings can't move.

- I'll cheer for him later. (Pause, pause) AT the cocktail party. There'll be one, right?

I am almost seized by alarm that there won't be a welcoming cocktail party for the staff of our Faculty of Philosophy, because Prune is not answering, but then a soothing hand from above lays its weight upon my shoulder and there's a voice attached to it, saying: "Sure, there'll be. At 12 sharp. In the Presidential Room." So, God has spoken. Although it was only through my fellow colleague Astrid, whom I almost love because she's all I have in this closed circle of Yahoos. Astrid teaches German und ich möchte mit ihr ins Kino gehen. Which...is not true of course (I go to the movies only by myself and very rarely with this French lady, who lives on the third floor in my apartment building), I'm just exercising my German.

I am so relieved that this ...what do they call it? ... Gathering? ...will be over soon that I, on my turn, might cry. And surreptitiously smudge a 79-Euro lipstick over my cheeks. Then I can go to a children's birthday party and play the clown. I can be a good clown. A successful one. Kids love me, don't know why, because I hate them. I guess, however, it's my innate clownness they smell about me, and they simply cannot resist it. On the other hand, the profession of a party clown cannot be better paid than my doctoral position at the Department. This semester I'll be teaching philosophy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This means Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals as a starter, followed by a spicy dish of Heidegger, a pinch of Foucault, and Barthes' farts for a dessert. I cannot but viciously smirk at the idea that I will fuck with the brains of those youngsters till they drop dead. And I hope they all will do. I will definitely cheer at the cocktail party for all the beauty the anti-humanistic authors has brought into our mediocre lives of badly-dressed, Urlaub-planning consumed, constantly constipated and bride-and-groom dreaming human amoebas.

- I am sooooo excited that we are about to meet the new class! – Prune has stopped sobbing and is now in full possession of her faculties. – Every year.... Those fresh new faces – so sweet...so innocent...

- Come on, Prune! – That's Astrid's tomcat voice. – They are not innocent at all and you know it. At the age of 18 the girls have already fractured more penises that you've seen on picture in your entire 36 years of living.

- 29! – Prune corrects her, sulkily.

- Whatever! You look gorgeous though in that... is it plum? ...dress of yours.

- It's aquamarine, - Prune lays an unnecessary stress on every syllable.

- Right. Still it's pretty. Ain't it, Ira?

Why does Astrid always turn to me when she makes a mess?

I shrugged my shoulders.

- I guess, - I definitely do not want to do this right now. I am too bored stiff and too thirsty for a free drink. Or two. Or whatever number of drinks Jesus decides to solemnly bestow on us at the upcoming cocktail party.

- It's aqua...

- ...marine, yes, you said it already! Still, it seems blue to me. And to Ira probably.

Now, with the end of the official ceremony, people are eagerly heading towards the exit, but Astrid is too heavy and clumsy to make her way through the crowd. She's still stuck to her seat, uncomfortably sweating and looking nervous and claustrophobic, while people stumble over her stretched out limbs, trying not to step on her. Sie ist zu fett um zu bewegen! How pathetic that can be! She once fell in a toilet cabin, she couldn't get out and nobody could get in either because

she had blocked the door with her fat ass. They had to call for this person in worn-out blue overalls, who usually fixes the fluorescent lights in the corridors, to remove the door from its knuckles, so that they could drag Astrid out of the toilet. I remember the back of her baggy pants being all wet and covered with God know whose DNA that moisture consisted of!

\* \* \*

The head of the Department casts irrevocable glances of despise in the direction where I am standing, holding two glasses of Gewürztraminer, pretending that only one of them is mine. She hates me from the bottom of her heart (which, I seriously believe, was replaced by a swine's one when she was a little girl). But now her hatred is mixed with beans of envy to make the perfect emotional martini, I sense that, because I know that she knows about the literary award I was given some six weeks ago. And she hasn't been given even a dick for a whole decade, I can bet on that. But still she is my superior, which makes the dick issue irrelevant in a way. So, I guess I have to make a subtle attempt to wave to her with a pinky at least because my hands are busy holding the glasses. And besides, I am busy smiling with no teeth to other people whom I find decently attractive and not that sickening compared to her, that is to Mrs. I-have-swollen-a-wooden-cane.

I look around the Presidential Room. it's full of cheery faces, tanned faces, faces beaming with academic enthusiasm, spectacled faces, faces illuminated by the discovery of the modern dental replacement technology, snub-nosed faces, freckled faces (but those are more of age spots, if you ask me), familiar faces gone uglier and older over the summer, unfamiliar faces of new staff-fillers, which I hate as a general rule because eventually they all turn to be faces of opportunists and carrier climbers. I glance at the table, modestly decorated in the official colors of our university – black and yellow; the food, which of course has come into really tiny portions, is of no interest to me, because I only eat with

my eyes. And then my eyes stay fixated for ten seconds on professor Jørgensen's face. Although I have learnt my lesson from "Death is a lonely business", that is if you raise your eyes and look at someone, it is always a sign that you call for their attention, I still can't help but stare at him. And eventually, he stares back. A slight, midget erection lifts up its voice from behind the Jacquard fabric of his ugly pants. It's gross and he knows it. And what I know for sure is that he was accused and found guilty of plagiarism back in 1969 when his work on Hegel was published. And I wasn't even born yet. How can one not become an alcoholic in a world of literary pirates?! It's a vulgar, vulgar place to live in... our planet... I can tell you this.

I take a sip from the glass in my right hand. Then I wait for like 20 seconds, turn around facing the wall covered with those postmodern monstrously hideous murals and take a sip from the glass I have in my left hand – the one I pretend to be holding for an imaginary friend who has gone to the bathroom.

Some staff members have stepped out on the balcony viewing the glorious building of the City Trade Center to have a smoke. I finish the two glasses and head to the boy serving the beverages table for a refill.

- White wine, Madame?

- Tomas, don't madame me! I know you form the Philosophy of Reformism class from last year. You failed it, didn't you?

The boy seems baffled.

- What? Swallowed you tongue?

- No...I just...I didn't have courses with you...Madame.

- Isn't your name Tomas?

- No, it's Lasse.



- And I didn't fail you last year?

He shakes his head no.

- Whatever. Pour me some wine. In both glasses. The one is for my friend, who is... over there...somewhere. Smoking perhaps.

- Here you are.

- Thank you, Tomas.

- Lasse!

- Who cares?

He doesn't answer, but I guess his mother does care if someone calls him the wrong name.

### **Thirteenth**

When I was little I wanted my Mom to get me a suricate. I had seen a documentary on these squirrel-sized adorably sociable animals on Animal Planet and thought I could raise one myself. As my baby, you see. I didn't play with dolls. Dolls seemed boring, first of all because they resembled humans. If you want to nourish your fantasy and grow to be something else beside a breathing-bleeding-breeding mechanism, you definitely have to start the conscious years of your childhood by keeping away from all the objects that imitate your environment. Don't play hide-and-seek, but play aliens. Don't brush and braid the hair of your doll, but disfigure it. Don't boil an egg, but use it as a vagina stimulator. So, if you're riding already on the right train, doing all the wrong stuff and enjoying it, how can you simply not want to have a suricate as a pet!

- A what?

Mom turned around from the kitchen stove and stared at me.

- A suricate!
- I thought you wanted French toast for breakfast.
- I do. But I want a suricate more.
- Is it in the cookbook?
- No, - I rolled my eyes. – It's in the Kalahari Desert in Botswana.
- Go play with your... with whatever you're playing those days.

On this particular day, when I was 6 and a half and it was summer in our kitchen, I wondered for the first time in my life how is that possible that one can be that beautiful and that stupid at the same time.

I stop thinking about my suricate dream 34 years ago, put my reading glasses on and go back to the lecture I have to deliver tomorrow in class. It's a beautiful afternoon out there and I can't stand the thought of wasting an entire hour, or two, getting ready to stand up in front of a bunch of curly, wind-blown, slender, yet brainless cunts who'll only pretend to be taking notes about Sartre on their laptops, but will be checking their Facebook statuses instead. Whenever I have to face a conflicting body-and-mind condition of such intensity, I do one thing that helps as a rule. I take a quick cold shower, wrap up my hair with a towel in a maharaja style and sit crossed-legged totally naked on the cool sheets covering the thick, 800-Euro mattress. By removing the clothing crust which converts my carcass into the solid me as we know it from the classrooms, the scientific magazines and the deli behind the corner from where I live, I actually am capable of addressing the greatest philosophical minds of the previous century without feeling sorry for them. I mean, for feeding them to the brainless cunts the next morning.

Now, where was I?

Typing: ... *consciousness because it is nothingness, makes us aware of the possibility of choosing what we will be. This is the condition of human freedom. The choice of action is also a choice of oneself. **By choosing oneself one does not choose to exist: existence is given and one has to exist in order to choose.** From this analysis Sartre derives a famous slogan of existentialism: 'existence precedes and commands essence'. He maintains that there is no re...*

A knock on the door.

- Siri, WHAT?
- May I come in?
- No, you may not.
- Please! Ira?

I hate that girl.

Not bothering to cover myself, I open the door, block the entrance to my bedroom with my bare flesh and wait for my niece to articulate what the emergency could possibly be.

- Are you naked!?
- No, I am not.
- You ARE naked! Last time when Veronica and Casey came here to study you were naked AGAIN. While boiling pasta! Why do you always have to be like that?
- Well, I'll tell you why, Siri. Because this is MY APARTMENT, remember?
- I didn't kill my mother, so that I have to live with you, - she is on the verge of becoming hysterical, which doesn't actually worries me because at that age troubled girls are unstable more often than you can imagine. They can burst out over a blackhead. Or a ruined top because somebody vomited on it in a jam-packed club.

- As I see it, you don't have anything in particular to share, just the usual shit about your misfortune to have a cuckoo mother. So, good bye.

I am about to close the door in her face but she's faster and blocks it with her foot.

- Siri, I am working here and you're about to piss me off!
- I need to borrow your car.
- No.
- Please!
- No. Take the bus.
- Not possible. I have to be somewhere out of town.

She probably thinks I'm going to ask her where she is going, whom with, are there going to be drugs involved, when she'll be back and if she'll be pregnant by then. However, I personally don't care. I am only the woman, the unlucky relative who's managing Siri's allowance after her mother's death last August. Siri still thinks she hanged herself. The truth is that her death was accidental and resulted from an erotic asphyxiation game that went wrong.

- Please. Auntie?
- No. Release the door!
- Bitch!
- Cunt!

So much for nice family relations!

Back to typing. My hair feels almost dry.

Sartre's most famous example is that of a waiter:

*'... ason for choosing as one does. Let us consider this waiter in the cafe. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes*

*towards the patrons with a step a little too quick .. his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer .. he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things .. the waiter in the cafe plays with his condition in order to realize it.'* (**Sartre**, 1943)

What is eating me though is that Siri is, as a matter of fact, a good kid. Too good. And at the age of 17 she's still a virgin, which, let's be honest, is like a pink elephant living in a glass house.

## **Fourteenth**

- What the fuck is this?

I am looking at my desk, which is covered with flowers. As if there's a dead person buried beneath.

The class, mostly freshmen, but as fresh as dead fish can be, stare at me. In sheer confusion and idiocy, disguised behind the convenient mask of young minds' curiosity.

- Who brought the flowers, I am asking? I hate flowers. I am ALLERGIC to flowers.

Still quiet. Rage seizes me by the throat. And I was fooling myself just two hours ago, while masturbating in my bed (modestly, with two fingers, nothing elaborated because Siri had already put the espresso machine on) that it was going to be a wonderful, wonderful day at school! But it's just my luck. Instead of a wonderful day I get flowers.

- So you know nothing about the flowers?

I clear a spot with one hand and place my laptop and my purse among the pile of disgusting purple cosmos. You see my tragedy – I am perfectly, and when I say it, I mean it – I am perfectly dressed, wearing Sonia Rykiel black gloves to match my silky pleated knee length skirt, and this beautiful 1970's cream-colored blouse with Bandana inspired print, which simply cost me a fortune... and I have this airflash Dior foundation subtly applied on my fair skin... and on the top of all that grandeur I start sneezing like a damn cow...and I'm not even sure if a cow can sneeze like that! But simply imagining a cow doing it is already offensive. So, yes, I imagine the cow to be me.

The kids are now not only embarrassed, they are in awe. Do they deserve Sartre? Do they deserve ME?

- OK, I'm sorry. This was...this was a little over the top, I guess. Well, - I force a smile on my face while I am trying not to focus on any other face in the classroom, - I DO hate flowers though. I cannot drink a flower, can I?

That was supposed to be a joke, which apparently nobody got, and I felt sick to my stomach. Not because I thought I screwed up but because I felt that I was going to hate this entire group of youngsters – an impatient flock of geese that is just ...well...another flock of geese. What am I thinking? That someday I will step into a classroom that, for a change, is full of brainiacs, and I can actually see a divine sparkle... no, not a divine, but THE divine sparkle in their eyes – the one and only sparkle that distinguishes humans from, let's say, suricates. And all the other animal species, for that matter. But this never happens. Has never happened for the 12 years of teaching. First, it was the small college where they hired me to teach 17<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, which didn't interest me at all, but the money was good for someone who had just got out of the university and had never been on the other side of the teaching desk. The kids back then, however, didn't seem that dumb as they are now. Something must

have happened meanwhile... An evil bacterium of stupidity of some kind must have colonized men's sperm during the years of generation change.

When I turned 34, I applied for my current position at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Copenhagen. My resume was so impressive (with a PhD degree obtained at Cambridge) that they couldn't believe their luck to have me. A couple of months later the head of the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center died of cancer and they made me his substitute. The money was now pouring into my bank account. I was very much into this work in the beginning; very enthusiastic indeed. I kicked many asses in ferocious determination, so that by 2009 we succeeded to complete Kierkegaard's writings containing 55 volumes. Since then they've been translated into German, French, Spanish, and now some brainy small-dick ching chongs have been translating them into Chinese.

Six years ago not only the Faculty had me, but also Dr. Luca Incurvati did. Although for only a short period of time. Dr. Incurvati, 57 at that time, was so bright that at dusk one could see his brain glow from behind his shaven skull. And, seriously, can you imagine anything sexier about a man than his brain! I would happily fuck with one's intelligent brain, no matter male or female, if only that was physically possible. Actually I hardly noticed that I dated a fellow colleague. I imagined that I was dating a metaphysical creature (although he wasn't bad looking at all – reminded me of late Stanley Tucci). But then one day, I was done reading all the books he had written on epistemology and philosophy of language, and also I was pretty much done listening to his clever but insipid jokes, so I broke up with him. And not only that, I also broke his leg! That wasn't exactly the intention when I kicked him, only that had forgotten I was wearing Black Diamond Swift ski boots. (I was just trying them on in a sports store, for fun, I'd never go skiing though! I am too afraid not to break a leg myself). When his bone healed, and that took almost five months because,

well, he wasn't 27, Dr. Incurvati transferred as far away from me as possible – to some redneckish, farmyard university in Idaho, or wherever. He sure still teaches epistemology to farm sheep and chicken!

I haven't dated anyone since then. Some years ago something clicked inside my 100-million dollar brain and I started fancying people I don't know personally, famous people usually and far way smarter than I am, some of them dead, others terminally ill, and a big percentage recently deceased, and pretended I marry them and we live in a total bliss in a society where they put you in jail or even execute you if your intelligence quotient is less than 130.

- Professor, do you want me to throw the flowers away?

A feeble female voice from behind brings me back to the reality of the auditorium.

- Are you...I'm sorry, can't see you from here, but are you that good at throwing bouquets? Have you tossed one at a wedding already?

I guess, the flowers are from the faculty management, “with complements” that I have accepted to teach this course for two semesters in a row. Before submitting the syllabus, I explicitly pointed out in a mail to the management that I am willing to take on the course on condition that I will be given the full freedom to put a special emphasis in my lectures on Michel Foucault, because “for the time being I find the ideas of antihumanism very much correlative to the present state of our modern society”. First, they hesitated, considered it “tricky” because the young minds of the freshmen may confuse antihumanism with misanthropy, and besides, is it wise anyway to introduce to them an idea that they ALL know I cherish passionately myself so much that I have it tattooed on my back? They meant of course my *MAN IS DEAD* tattoo, about the existence of which ill talks and rumors have been spreading right after one of the young



assistants accidentally spotted me in my black bikini on the almost empty Bellevue Beach, near Bakken, on a cloudy summer afternoon two years ago.

Man is dead. Were you not aware of that? It is obvious.

Then, in a state of severe provocation, I sent another mail, in which I wrote: “Dear Prof. Drewes and Prof. Gundersen (the latter is the bitch who hates me for getting all the academic credits and all the men’s erections),

I believe that it is OUR job to expose students to all kind of philosophical ideas without being judgmental, or hypocritical, or too scared to be provocative in order to be politically correct or faithful to the academic snobbism. And it is MY job in this particular case to make them understand the difference between the two terms...if that will be necessary at all.

Sincerely,

I.F. “

Eventually, the Grand Jury decided to unleash me and here I am, in this spacious auditorium on the second floor, the blinds are drawn up, so that the early autumn sun can light fires in the blond hair of the freshmen (except for those two of Nigerian and Pakistani origin who have only their white lunch boxes to glitter at the wonderful sunbeams). And here they are – those cheap purple flowers, which must have cost no more than 50 Crowns to whomever lower-rank assistant they have assigned the task to buy them for me.

- Well, Miss? I had a question for you. Could you rise, please?

A mawkish looking pale girl hesitantly stands up. She mutters something indistinctly.

- Can’t hear you!

She clears her throat and this time says it louder.

- No, Professor, I haven't.
- That's what I thought. – I take off my gloves, finger by finger, which happens to be an entertainingly long activity if there's a girl standing in the lecture hall waiting for your permission to sit down.
- You may sit down, I'll call for the janitor in the break to get them out of here. And now... let us properly introduce ourselves to one another. I understand you are in your first year of study at this university. Any exceptions?

A couple of hands in the air.

- Second year? No? Transfers? Ah yes, and exchanges too. The usual academic and ethnic concoction. As you all know, I believe, from your curriculums, my name is Ira Franic and I definitely ...

I was that close to say "need a drink" but changed the course of the sentence just on time.

- ... definitely

"...don't want to be here"

"... like none of you"

"... would rather cut one of my fingers than share Sartre with you. "

- I am definitely happy to be able to share with you the thoughts and aspirations of some of the greatest visionaries of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although, to be honest, I very much doubt that this can be done in a few months' time. In the meantime, who has seen an interesting movie recently?

## Twenty-second

- On prends un verre après les classes?

This is Mademoiselle Framboise, from the Linguistic Department. Slender, around 55, already in menopause and happily horny all the time. A true little French raspberry. And she knows whom to ask the right questions. She pops her head into my office and finds me without my shoes on, playing mini-golf.

- Pourquoi pas? – I shrug my shoulders. – C’est vous qui payez?
- Bien sûr, chérie, - she smiles broadly; if she stretches her mouth muscles a bit more, she can play the Joker in the next Batman movie.

We’ll probably go to Bistro Pastis at the corner of Gothersgade and Adelgade. I don’t like the place and besides I never miss to spill red wine on the clinically white tablecloths. I’ve calculated that if they kept throwing the ones I have spilled wine on, they would have run out of tablecloths so far. Fortunately, there is Ariel, which is effective against everything – wine stains, blood stains and possibly heartaches.

- Do you feel French sometimes, toi? – Michelle asks me when we take a sit at a table by the window. – Because I personally feel French all the time, although I rarely leave this so un-French town, - she makes a face expressing something between „I am cold here” and “I should’ve stayed in Saint Chély du Tarn and baked pastries”
- You ARE French, Michelle.

I don’t bother to take off my dark glasses, neither my gloves. As I’m sitting here, by the window, and secretly observe the human flock on the street conveniently hidden behind the massive shades, while Michelle’s chatterbox keeps opening and closing in a comic mixture of French, Danish and English, I start feeling as if I am in a waiting room at a railway station. That’s why I have

my gloves and my glasses on – I should be ready at any second to rise and head towards the platform when they announce my train.

I would have never gone out with Framboise this evening, because, like everything else, she bores me, too. But still I HAVE to keep some friends... So, I guess, I have to eventually take my glasses off and focus my eyes on her pinkish lips, which close and open, close and open.

- Shall we have pastis? – And that is pronounced with perfunctory frizzy “s”-es, - Or we will stick to wine?
- Pastis. And wine...later, with the food.
- Oh, I didn’t know we’ll be having hors d’oeuvres.
- We are not. I’ll be drinking wine while watching other people eating.

Michelle must have gotten used to my little eccentricities by now, because she doesn’t pay much attention to what I’ve said but impatiently gestures towards the waiter.

- Bon soir, Mesdames. Vous avez prêtes d’ordre?

Dick! Who is he fooling with this hip-hop ghetto-like pronunciation of his? He is some Turkish kid with his hair slicked back with half a kilogram of some sticky jelly-product in order not to look “comme des gamins”, but more “comme les garçons gentiles” , so that he gets generously tipped by the old ladies.

I say this aloud. Not to the waiter, but to Michelle. She frowns for the first time today, although since we left the university at 5:30 p.m., I haven’t said or done anything cheerful, which must have given her twenty reasons at least to frown. Or scorn me for that matter.

- You used to be fun, Ira. What is happening to you? – She reaches over the table and I suspect she wants to take my hand into hers in an unequivocal gesture of comfort and understanding.
- I am thirsty. And tired. Played mini-golf the whole afternoon, you know, - I force a smile.

Nothing is happening to me.

I am not THAT thirsty, and I am definitely not tired. I am nauseous.

When I was little, I used to get car sick. And train sick. And bus sick. And merry-go-round sick. I had all kinds of motion sickness that would get aroused in the most inconvenient of times and places. For example, I would get sick while riding on the bus on our way to a school performance, in which I played a green fairy of the woods. And I would throw up all over my fairy costume; it took my mother half an hour and tons of wet wipes to clean me up, but the stink of the vomit stayed with me during the whole performance. And the kids grimaced every time they had to approach the fairy of the woods, because she didn't smell of fresh grass and pine-cones, but of tuna and fermented mayonnaise.

What I didn't realize back then was that my nausea was not a condition caused just by a disagreement between visually perceived movement and the vestibular system's sense of movement. No, it wasn't that simple. It has never been. And yes, my nausea started like an innocent motion sickness but with the years to come, it grew to be a more sophisticated, metaphorical state of physical and mental being.

\* \* \*

- Shall we share another bottle of this splendid rosé? – Framboise asks, and now, with her being drunk, her Danish is almost inaudible, drowned at the swampy bottom of her French utterances.
- I need to go home and check on my niece. If she had done her homework or something...that must be checked.

I certainly have no intention of checking Siri's homework. All I know about the kid, although we've been living together for more than an year now, is that she goes to a high school on Sankt Kjelds gade, and when the occasion calls, the pupils there have to wear those ugly uniform hats that bring on to me the picture of a provincial brass band. She studies a lot, plays drums in some heavy metal group and never fucks. This is what I know for sure.

Her mother, my bigger sister, died in embarrassing circumstances, but in general, she too was a good kid 30-35 years ago. We are Croatian. She was born in Zagreb in 1967, where our father was a university professor in literature and Latin at that time. And married to a deluded French tourist, our mother, who, in the summer of 66, was travelling around the Balkans in the carosserie of a vegetable delivery van together with a bunch of constantly stoned wankers from Marseille. This must have been "total fun" for the western derelicts, I figure. One night the van broke on the Nova Cesta Street, and my father, who happened to be passing by in his car, decided to stop and help those in need from the goodness of his most generous heart of one of the brightest young scholars of the country! How stupid he was, my father! To fall for a drunken, beautiful girl from an enemy capitalistic country with auburn, for-long-time-no-seen-water-and-soap hair, an insatiable appetite for sex and unshaven armpits and legs! So typically late 60's! That must be the reason why my father never complained about having missed the Woodstock era!

Dad helped them find a reliable mechanic who'd fix the van. They paid him with francs and ten sugar cubes impregnated with Lysergic acid diethylamide,

a.k.a. LSD. Already on their way out of Zagreb (and probably up to Mars!), the junkies didn't even notice that Francine, my mother, was missing. She was then blissfully fucking my poor father's brain out in his tiny rented apartment in the Upper Town, just some 50 meters away from where the notorious Museum of Broken Relationships is now. Is it only me who sees the fateful predetermination here? Probably so.

I walk home. Since I live in the very center, I can enjoy a brief and slightly zigzagging stroll from the bistro, along Kongens kanal and up to Magstræde, where I rent a 68-square meter apartment in this quite charming historic building. With pigeons as big as ducks nesting on the roof! Sometimes the wretched birds squat on the kitchen windowsill and quietly watch me with heads tilted to one side while I am having breakfast. I am not quite sure if they can't get enough of the picture of me standing naked by the kitchen counter, or of the slightly brown toast resting on my plate. I rarely share my breakfast with them. I suspect those pigeons are evil and when a good occasion presents itself, they are going to break into the kitchen and peck me with their carnivorous robust beaks till I bleed to death.

Last month the landlord suggested I would buy the apartment. I've been living there as an exemplary tenant for almost three years now. I said I'd think about that. But now, the more I think about the pigeons, the more I hate the idea of having this place forever. Or at least till death does part me from it. On the other hand, it's very unlikely that I'd find a more suitable apartment for myself, my laptop, and my books. I am not including Siri in the valuables list on purpose because next year Siri is finishing school, she'll get to the university and, fingers crossed, move out of here. And of my life. Besides, what I have here is irreplaceable. I have this beautiful white sofa (with a couple of non-removable stains, one of which, I suspect, is from menstrual blood, which is NOT MINE!!), this phenomenal Italian ristorante on number 17. I know I sound like a fucking

real estate agent who is trying to sell you an incredibly expensive small apartment in an incredibly expensive European capital city, but as it seems, I'll finally sell it to myself only.

\* \* \*

- Siri? You awake?

Not a sound. I kick off my high-heeled patent leather shoes and step into the kitchen. Pour myself a glass of water and study my face in the dark microwave's window. Is it a beautiful face? I've never asked myself, or other people for that matter, if I am beautiful. I guess I've never really cared much. My mother did though. She cared a lot, she would cover all the walls with mirrors, so that they could talk back to her explaining how strikingly beautiful she was. This bred feelings of profound hatred inside of me. I was a kid and already sickened by beauty in almost all its forms. I didn't realize it then, but I sensed that beauty bore the sign of death. It was Albert Camus, the morbid town-crier of absurdism, who said that at the heart of all beauty, lies something inhuman. I perceive beauty in its purest of forms that is deprived of all meaning and substance, as unworthy of idolization, as something which, as a matter of fact, only alienates humans from their true nature. My wrath, however, being not only my deadliest sin, but also the essence of my given name, comes not from the depth of my inner confrontation with the beauty concept, but from the unattainable desire to make Beauty fail in winning the competition for saving the world over Wisdom.

I was lucky enough to experience at the earliest of age the manifestation of dualism expressed through its most articulate and powerful form – the controversy between human and inhuman. And this controversy was absolutely stunningly intertwined in the passionate love my parents had for each other.



My stupid mother gave me the name Ira. Dad tried to talk her out of it because, he told her, this meant anger in Latin, mon amour, *courroux*, tu comprends! Mais no! She insisted on naming me that way because, you see, the inscription on her favorite worn-out t-shirt said DEUS IRAE<sup>1</sup>, and she thought it was the name of some groovy rock band. How can a linguistic argument brought up by a distinguished professor beat the logics of a 26-year old junkie blowing smoke into the face of her new-born daughter just to make her frown because “c’est amusant”? You simply can’t.

Back in the 1970’s, mother didn’t know it but with her moronic choice of name she actually outlined the tangent of my fate’s path written in the stars.

The abrupt materialization of Siri’s motionless cross-armed, bare-foot, lovely-smelling body startles me.

- Where...? I mean... were you here?
- Yes.
- Sitting in the dark?
- Yes, Ira, what’s wrong with that?
- Nothing, it’s just...you’re weird.
- Said she!

I start unbuttoning my shirt.

- I left you some cannelloni. Bought them at Roberto’s. By the way, thank for the money you left me this morning.
- I didn’t leave it, forgot them on the kitchen shelf. What’s the filling?
- Ricotta.
- Don’t want them.
- Whatever.

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<sup>1</sup> Deus Irae (Lat) – The God of Wrath

She shrugs her shoulders and opens the fridge. Takes out a beer can and offers me another. The light from the fridge makes the paleness of her semi-profile strangely luminous. For a second I feel as if I am keeping an extraterrestrial at home. And it can speak a human language. And bleeds on my sofa.

- Or I can fix you a sandwich? – Her voice is now softer, it's obvious that Siri can't play tough.
- Just go watch TV or something, Siri!
- We don't have a TV.
- Right.

We don't have a TV and as a rule I am terribly afraid of opening my e-mails because I always think they are the worst of news, and I don't believe in God because I haven't ever seen him (proof number 1: I don't even bother to write the pronoun with a capital letter as I must according to the religious and linguistic rule), and I despise ants, but I find human sperm magical (because I see it as a natural flow transporting the molecules of wisdom and eternity from one place to another, but on the other hand, I hate it being inside of me, because it contaminates the supreme purity of myself, hence, of my thoughts, and I can see in the dark – like cats, you know, and I am ornithophobic. It's a mental disorder. One of few that I am about to discover pretty soon.

## **Cynicism**

A cynic is not merely one who reads bitter lessons from the past, he is one who is prematurely disappointed in the future.

**-- Sidney J. Harris**

## October

### Second

One leaf of lettuce, two leaves of lettuce, three leaves of lettuce...and a cherry tomato.

I eat my salad slowly, cautiously as if I perform a brain surgery. I am in the university botanic garden. The air's chilly, yet wonderfully fresh and shimmering silver. I sit on a single chair of wrought iron, which the ghost of Auguste Rodin must have dragged from a Parisian café and left in this beautiful garden for me to sit on and have my lunch in peaceful taciturnity.

Back in class, one of my students is making a presentation on Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*. I am trying to stay cool as she mispronounces it *Syphilis* seven times in a row. Some jerks laugh. I have to admit it's laughable but it's much more fun to observe how confident the student grows with every startled look she casts at me, since I am not laughing and I am not correcting her either, so she must be thinking she's on the right track. Yet she is not. Not in a million years. Besides, her presentation is dull, lacks insight and most probably she has not even read the essay.

When she is finally done, after 23 minutes of agony resulting in brain death, I fix my eyes on her face having the exquisite bone structure of the Scandinavian race, and say:

- That was really heartbreaking... (I check my list to make sure I don't mistake one Kari with another) Miss Gudmundsson. But heartbreaking in the literal sense of the word, not in its metaphorical one.
- I really tried hard...

- Well, that's an admirable effort, but unfortunately in this world of ours if you're not a paramedic or an excruciatingly acclaimed musician this effort doesn't much count, does it?
- I... In my opinion...
- Sssssh, that wasn't an actual question!

The jerks have calmed down, probably because they're busy masturbating through the pocket holes in their jeans. I am good with that. Actually, I find masturbating in my classes invigorating and quite philosophical in a perverted, yet elevated sense. I feel as if I am in a *Théâtre de l'Absurde* play - a Vaudeville performance, a mix of horrific and tragic images. Talking of absurdity...

- Miss Gundmundsson... Sonja ?

She nods her head to confirm that she recognizes her name, and I can see she now feels extremely uneasy being exposed like that, to the full view of the class, for almost half an hour, being ridiculed by my cold denial, which is transferred to the rest of her peers.

- Sonja, I am willing to put an undeserved, but probably highly aspired grade to your presentation if you answer one simple question concerning the very topic of your assignment. OK?

Nods again.

- In The Myth of Syphilis ... that is Sisyphus...

Masturbation stops for a second, and chuckling sets in. I pretend not to notice, although I must admit, I am intrigued by the commotion coming from the back seats.

- ... Camus claims that there's only one true philosophical problem. Which is what?

Sonja seems really upset now. She obviously doesn't know shit about Camus, about his essay, and about her own miserable life in general.

- Miss Gudmundsson, are you going to answer my question?
- I am not sure...
- And is there anything at all you are sure about?
- I don't know... – her voice trembles, dark sweaty spots break out under her armpits; she doesn't look so photoshopped and confident any more as she did when she stepped out in front of the class half an hour ago in her immaculate light blue Lacoste shirt and an 800-Crown hair-do.

At this point it is already clear to everyone in the classroom that I am torturing her. I realize it seems cruel from aside, but in my defense I may say that I'm doing it because I can afford to. And besides, I am in a way obliged to do it because I am life's bottomless vessel, in which Miss Gudmundsson is first destined to drown in order for her to come out on the surface again. Stronger, as they say. Or ruined and crushed, the way I see it.

- The notion of absurd has been prominent in literature throughout history. Beside Camus, many of the literary works of Søren Kierkegaard, Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Jean-Paul Sartre contain descriptions of people who encounter the absurdity of the world. So, to throw some light upon my question, Sonja...dear... what can be more absurd than living on this planet without being aware of the purpose of our existence? What's yours for example? Doing your nails? Getting laid after a Friday night spent at the Dunkel Bar? Or, in a later perspective, getting married to a rich guy who goes to gym at least 5 days a week, eats broccoli and preferably doesn't screw his male assistant? I understand, I perfectly understand! Neither Kierkegaard, nor Dostoyevsky were aware of the problems and concerns a young girl like yourself would be facing in twenty-first century when trying to handle the meaningless of her life. But still...the question of absurdity remains unresolved. That is why we, as creatures designed to be able to work out the mysteries of our inner and

outer universe and occasionally laugh at our pathetic attempts of doing so, still dig into it. Still try to figure out what makes us tick. Or rather don't tick.

The class is quiet now. I suspect that I have succeeded in captivating the attention of the brainless. Their frozenness though is due to numbness more than to any form of appreciation of what I'm saying.

- May I resume my seat please, Professor?  
"Resume" her seat, wow!
- No, you may not, Miss Gudmundsson, unless you admit you're not able to answer my question.
- It's suicide!

Ah?

It's a voice coming from the jerks' retreat in the back of the room.

- Come again? – I lean forward, hastily. A feeling of both annoyance and excitement crawls down my stomach and settles in my throbbing twat. That's odd – a simple word pronounced by a faceless blockhead to make me get wet!
- What Camus meant was suicide.

Miss Gudmundsson is as perplexed by this unexpected outside interference as I am, but at the same time I can see the feeling of relief softening the tensed features of her dolly face. The hell with her! I want to see the intruder. This smartass who dares to break the silence of confusion and torment and turn it into a deafening blast of triumph of the renegades over the status quo set by the sovereign. That is me.

- And you are?
- Student number 7030.

I see only the top of his head.

- Could you please stand, so that I can see you?

My vagina is still sore and aching from the agitation the word “suicide” has bestowed on me.

- No, thanks, I am sitting quite comfortably here.
- Well...anyway, number 7030, you are correct. – I try to get myself together although the jerk’s raucous behavior does the opposite to my psyche. - Although I think it’s your lucky guess...

I am about to return to my desk and check my laptop for what’s coming next in the lecture when the voice from behind rises again.

- No, it’s not my lucky guess.
- Excuse me?

His impudence urges him to rise to his feet this time. Twenty-one pairs of eyes are fixed upon his lean, but robust figure; the boy looks shabby with his disarranged hair (not in an urban classy way though, but more like in an I-have-never-met-the-guy-in-the-mirror way) and dull gray clothes lacking, incredibly enough! all kinds of designer insignia.

- The meaningless encompasses the amorality or the unfairness of the world. Which contrasts with the karmic ways of thinking, - his voice grows stronger, though he avoids meeting my eyes. It seems as if he’s talking to himself. But my half-closed, inquisitive eyes are firmly stuck on the absurdly ordinary face of the **INSOLENT LITTLE SHIT!**
- You see, Professor, they usually say “bad things don’t happen to good people”. When actually there’s no such thing as a good person or a bad thing. What happens - happens, and it may just as well happen to a good person - as he says that, he gestures invisible inverted commas into the air, - as to a bad person, – and inverted commas again. - Because of the



world's absurdity anything can happen to anyone. I may be hit by a truck and I am a good person, and you can get struck by a lightning. Or kidnapped by a bunch of rapers.

Collective buzz... of approval, as I hear it.

- So, it is in relation to the concept of overwhelming awareness of meaningless that Camus claims that the only true philosophical problem is suicide.

I am devastated.

Who the fuck is this kid???

\* \* \*

Prune offers me a butter biscuit. I pretend to put it in my mouth but then nimbly spit it out in a paper napkin.

- Those, - she points at the bowl full of crumbly biscuits while talking with her mouth full and occasionally firing out crumbs, - those are baked by a student of ours. She's just had a baby, so her boyfriend brought us these. Sweet, isn't it? I told him we are ALL happy for them.
- No, we're not. I mean, not ALL of us. I don't even know who you are talking about! - I try not to sound malicious but it's really hard in the given circumstances – with the presence of Prune dressed from toes to head in a color that makes me think of hospital jelly; and with the rain pouring out as if in unison with Queen Margrethe's migraine.
- It doesn't matter if you know the girl or not, Ira! Still you have to be happy that they've brought to this world a new human being, who will maybe someday invent a medicine against MS or something.
- Or become the next “ex” drug-addict who lives on social care and methadone or some other synthetic shit that's been “prescribed” to him,

and who occasionally plays with his useless dick because there's no other occupation between two fits he finds entertaining enough.

We are sitting in the cafeteria – one of the places I hate the most in the whole world. I read in a flight magazine once that the Sao Paulo favelas, the shanty towns, formal African neighborhoods cropped up within the metropolitan area, are amongst the world's most unpleasant places to find oneself in. Yet, I don't believe that I will be feeling any worse there as I feel in this neat and highly hygienic campus cafeteria, beaming with mediocrity and fake refinement.

\* \* \*

I sometimes go to the bio-chemical lab in the building of the Department of Biology. I know there a lab technician, a 37-year old nerd, who collects miniature excavator cars and has seen all Meryl Streep movies at least six times each. I suspect that he wants to BE Meryl Streep. In another universe or so. But for the time being he's just a lab technician who takes care of the expensive equipment and makes sure that the brains working on protein synthesis and protein dynamics are happy with their coffee.

I love this department. I think it's amongst the most magical places in this university. And the universe for that matter. People here actually know what is going on with your intestines when you eat asparagus. I wonder if they can also answer the fundamental question whether love comes as a result of some proteins' malfunction. I once almost had a crush on Francиска Kriegenburg while I was reading her work on mammalian 26S proteasomes. Many nights I pictured myself kissing greedily those lips of hers while they were softly whispering, "Proteasome nuclear import mediated by Arc3 can influence

efficient DNA damage repair and mitosis in *Schizosaccharomyces pombe*”. Pure symphony to my ears!

Last December I even made a move and invited her on a date. But I guess I must have scared her a lot because I didn’t say anything ambiguous like “Do you wanna get out after work and grab a bite?”, or “How about having a cocktail before the Christmas party - you, me and your ... fiancé, who of course I’ll make feel as an extra wheel during our peaceful rendezvous?” I simply asked her out on a regular date.

- Which includes WHAT exactly? – She was nervously patting her hair although, to me, it seemed perfectly air dried and patted.
- Oh... - I said, - whatever we decide. The sky is the limit.
- Excuse me, Professor Franic, but are you fucking with me here?

I wish I was! The way she used the “fucking” word immediately deprived her from the halo of a bio molecular goddess.

- Oh, no!
- Then why would you ask me out on a...date? – She lowered her voice so much that I subconsciously lowered my body too.
- Because I admire you?

Francиска, Francиска, how could you humiliate me like that? I suffered like many other women before me – women who didn’t even make the mistake to regard themselves equal or superior to men.

Despite that last Christmas disappointment, I continued to sneak occasionally into the bio lab. In one of the side premises, they keep animals in glass cases, mostly rats. Those rats are my friends. I know that they, with their sturdy shaggy bodies, are destined to contribute to the advance of bio molecular science, and so that Francиска Kriegenburg, professor Brackebusch and others have their articles published in renowned scientific magazines. And still, my mission is to

free them. And feed them to the black cats in my neighborhood perhaps, but honestly I haven't decided that yet.

- Sahar?

I step in the poorly lit lab; it's past 6:30 and probably everybody's left. Including Sahar Ardabili, the lab technician.

- Miss Franic? Right here.

I follow his voice. My high-heeled Walter Steiger shoes rattle down the freshly polished floor. Smells of lemon flavored detergent. Sahar comes out of the store room where they keep old equipment, cardboard files and other stuff and offers me his hand, which, for a change, doesn't wear a latex glove.

- What are you doing here so late?!
- I just dropped in to say hi and...
- Miss Franic, - he obviously has no intention to release my hand, - if you allow me to say, you are so beautiful! Just like Meryl Streep.
- Well, I'm not even sure if it's a compliment, Sahar, as I am 20 years younger, much smarter, and not even blond.
- It doesn't matter, Miss Franic, - he frantically shakes his head, like a nervous kid who doesn't want to listen to other children's nagging insults.  
– Hair doesn't matter at all! What is important is that I SEE Meryl in you.
- Whatever. Look, Sahar - I struggle to unclench my fingers from his worshipping grip, - the thing is that I want to adopt one of your test animals.
- Eh?
- Yes, I know, it sounds weird, but people here don't talk flattering about me anyway.
- I always talk flattering about you.
- Which I appreciate

- You wanna sit down?
- No.
- Want me to pour you a glass of water?
- No.
- What about... - he extends the vowels in order to create a pause of suspense. - What about having dinner with me? I'll be ready in a minute, just to find my shoes, they must be somewhere here...

I now notice he's wearing ugly pink crocs.

- Sahar?

He is already down on all fours looking for his regular shoes under what seems to be a dissection table.

- Sahar?

I'm about to lose my temper.

- No need to do that. Really.
- Really? – He looks up at me. From where he is, he must be seeing me as a Statute-of-Liberty-like Meryl Streep.
- Really. I am busy tonight. And I'll stay busy in the next seven nights as well.

It's obvious that my mission won't be completed today. So I say good night to Sahar and leave the lab, taking away with me the cinematographic rattle of my Steigers.

But I will be back. Only this time I will make sure Sahar Ardabili is not there.

## **Eighth**

- Ira, I'm going to Århus with the band.
- It's a school day.
- Yeah, I know, that's why you have to sign this... that you're OK with me missing classes today and tomorrow.
- OK, miss whatever you want.
- Thanks, you're the best auntie in the whole world!

I am so deeply engulfed in a magazine article about an African tribe, which has been totally wiped out from the face of the continent during the last century, that I don't even notice the sarcastic smile smeared all over her face. Actually, I may not notice it, but I sense it. I read in another magazine that very intelligent people develop some kind of an animalistic sixth sense – not the many times fictionally abused one for seeing dead people, but a REAL sixth sense. For perceiving things which are not perceivable by a layman who masters only the five regular senses. The sixth sense is believed to be the medium of contact between the finite mind of man and Infinite Intelligence.

There is simply no way that I haven't developed the sixth sense for the forty years of my existence in this reality. I sure must have had it even when I was still in mother's womb. Otherwise, there's no other explanation why I wanted it so much to break free from the nutritious dependence on a less smart person. I was born all of a sudden in the beginning of the eighth month of the pregnancy and made a mess on board of the Boeing which was taking the whole family away from Zagreb.

From what I know, father decided to flee from the country firstly because he got fired from the university for “disseminating pro-capitalistic ideas undermining the true values of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia”. Secondly, it was mother who pushed him real hard to find another place to live, so that

providing herself with marijuana and quality LSD wouldn't be that problematic. So, Dad was left with no options but to get in touch with people who'd pull some strings among the criminal underground milieu and, risking his freedom and even his life, to arrange visas for Denmark for the three of them. The "extraction" documents were worth a fortune – there were certain people to be paid and some militia and high officials to be bribed in order for a whole family of three to leave the country "the legal way" and not "the wrong way", that is crossing borders on foot at nighttime and living in refugee camps somewhere in provincial Austria for months! Besides, they had to be well stuffed on their arrival in Denmark if they wanted not to live with Dad's second cousin Vlatko and his fat wife Milica – one of the few Croatian families who succeeded in escaping the regime in the late 60's and early 70's, and later settled down in Fredrikshavn, Holstebro, Glostrup or some other small-populated Danish town. So, Dad had to sell the family apartment, his old red Zastava and an inherited four-decare vineyard in Plešivica – a true gold mine and a source of eternal happiness, if you ask me. But... the damage was done!

In 1983, instead of having our own wine cellar we had only this shitty rented apartment in the most sickening suburb of Ishøj, which, in the beginning, we had to share with a Pakistani family. Most people living there were immigrants. The suburb had many nicknames (still has), such as Istanhøj - a merge between Istanbul and Ishøj. I hated it, hated it, hated it there! The kids in my school were sick primates, none of them Danish actually. They'd always bring a mutilated bird or a withered lizard in their breakfast boxes, which they would put between the bread slices of some girl's sandwich just to make her scream. Or vomit. Or both. They'd never bully me though. Because I was the clever one and the vicious one, too, so in my brown school bag, covered with offensive inscriptions made in ink by my classmates, I'd bring along rats. Real ones. Most of them still alive. I'd found them occasionally in the corners of our apartment, breathing

heavily, not able to move a whisker. We had a lot of them, eating through the corn flakes boxes. My mother constantly faked fainting when seeing one risen to its back feet and gazing at her with its black pearl goggled eyes, so my Dad had to frequently powder the corners and the cupboards with rat poison. Some of the monster rodents didn't die on the spot, so I grasped the opportunity they were still alive, though highly drugged, to collect them (always wearing mother's yellow gloves for dish washing) and take them along to school.

- Marhaba, Irka! You wanna suck a nicely sliced Muslim dick?

That was Kadri, a 12-year old hooligan, whose parents owned a small grocery shop on our street. I was younger than him, but I guess he fancied me a lot, and would make all sorts of elaborate plans just to “accidentally” bump into me, while I was turning around the corner, or to squeeze me into the girls' bathroom during a false fire alarm and slide his dirty hand into my panties.

- Marhaba, Kadri! – I answered in a quiet, yet seductive voice, quailing bashfully my blue eyes before his arrogant glance of a bully. –I don't know much about boys' wee-wees.
- “Wee-wees”?! Are you like nine, so that you call them that?
- Actually I am, Kadri. My birthday was in February. My mom says that since I'm Aquarius I have to find someone from the airy signs in order to be happy in love. Are you an airy sign?
- Eh? Well... doesn't matter really. Come!

He grabbed me by the hand and dragged me to the smokers' corner in the school's backyard. He looked around hastily – there was no one to be seen, everybody was in class, even the bad boys.

- OK! Now... - he pulled down his jeans and his dick popped out like a real jack-in-the-box.
- You like it?



I shrugged my shoulders.

- I guess...
- Suck it!
- What?
- Put it in your mouth! As if it's...it's a hotdog! – His whole face beamed with pride for coming up with such a workable comparison.
- I don't like hot-dogs.

Kadri started to lose patience. His drooping little dick had first raised its head in anticipation, but then suddenly dropped down again; it was obvious Kadri was nervous.

- Come on, Irka! Just a little! – Now his tone was imploring rather than commanding. – And tomorrow I'll bring you dates from my father's shop. You love dates, yes?

I shrugged shoulders again.

- I don't know. Never tasted.
- Oh, they're delicious! Yummy! Yummy! – he pretended that he's having one in his mouth right now, so that he could give me a full picture of how tasty his father's dates were.
- Ok, - I said.
- Yeah?

He couldn't believe his luck.

I squatted in front of him, folding my pleaded skirt between my thighs. Kadri's penis was almost touching me between the eyebrows.

- You have to close your eyes! – I said.
- OK.

I made sure his eyes were tightly closed, and then I fished out of my bag the rat I had found just that morning in the hallway, between Dad's slippers. I could feel its little heart bumping fast under my fingers clutched around its exhausted, dying body. I thought that I was in a way the rats' good fairy because to this one I was about to fulfill its last wish. And that was to feed it to some young Turkish boy's testicles.

The rat whirled, uttered a shrilling sound and dug its teeth into the rosy flesh of Kadri's "sliced" *wee-nee!*

As I said, rats are my friends! Always been.

### **Twenty-third**

Like every Tuesday morning, I go online and check if somebody famous has died in the course of the last 48 hours. Unfortunately, not very often am I lucky to get good news from my favorite web-site [whodiedtoday.com](http://whodiedtoday.com). I got hooked on [whodiedtoday.com](http://whodiedtoday.com) when they announced the death of Whitney Houston on my birthday that is 11 February. They put a really touching obituary and also some unflattering pictures of Whitney without makeup, so that they could send an effective message to the audience: "Kids and adults do not, and we repeat: DO NOT mix barbiturates and alcohol before taking a bath!" OK, note taken.

My bed smells of black-currant vodka and eucalyptus. Siri says that I must've slipped something between the sheets, but she cannot be right. I never bring my drinks in bed. Nor have I ever brought a eucalyptus tree.

For breakfast, I usually have 250 ml of distilled water and a bowl of cereal, home-made, enriched with linseed oil, which is totally gross in taste but is supposed to make me live forever. Like Highlander, the immortal Scottish

swordsman. To put the finishing touches of my high-in-fibers and low-in-calories breakfast, I have a shot of Ukrainian vodka.

I love vodka at nine in the morning. It brings extravagance and potential to the up-coming day.

I go and check on Siri. She's out already. Must have left for Århus. I wonder if she REALLY plays the drums and if yes, would she ever invite me to see the band play live. But not in Århus. And definitely not at that dump place at Skindergade where I got robbed and raped once. Unfortunately, I missed that because I was too drunk to realize that my body had been subjected to violation. But judging by the traces left – scratches, bruises, missing underwear, swollen lower lip, the left nipple almost bitten off – it must have been pure fun! At least for my dear offenders. I never reported that to the authorities. First, I wasn't much sure what exactly had happened. And second, I, in a way, felt ecstatic about the whole thing. The day after, when I woke up on the back seat of my car, with thirty mighty horses galloping inside my head and my nipple hanging only on a tiny thread of flesh, I said to myself that was the craziest thing, seriously! I said to myself, "Well, now, God has touched me!"

I speeded to the emergency room where they sewed the nipple back to my tit with local anesthesia, and the doctor asked me what had happened to me. I said, I fell, doctor, and then burst into laughter like a madman, like someone who should be sedated for life.

I am going to call the police, he said with the most sober expression on this highly responsible face of his, half hidden behind the green mask.

Don't you dare call anyone, doctor!

But, he persisted, you must have been attacked, obviously. Those bruises ... You should get checked by a gynecologist, too.

You're not fun at all, doctor. Are you a tea-total? I bet you're a tea-total!

And you're still drunk, I presume.

You may presume whatever you want. I am drunk, and in pain because you've just put how many... six? ... Six stitches on my breast, and ... I am totally happy! For the first time in seven hundred years. And that's a lo-o-o-o-ng time, I can assure you.

And then... then I passed out.

I haven't been happier since.

Not for a day. Not for a minute.

\* \* \*

This morning the pigeons didn't bother me. Which bothered me a lot. That's why I feel kind of tense while I am waiting for the cab to arrive. On rainy days like this and with me wearing expensive shoes like the ones I am wearing today, I prefer taking a cab to Njelsgade. I concentrate on the grey water of the canal while we're crossing the Langebro bridge and can almost see the bloated faces of the people who've found peace drowning here since the Middle Ages. Sometimes I am haunted by the desire to join them. .. But that happens only in days when they don't have pecorino in walnut leaves at my favorite deli downtown, and this fact makes me suicidal.

Before getting out of the taxi, I say to the Pakistani driver that the collar of his uniform shirt is dirty and that he should consider washing his clothes more often. He started apologizing in the most degrading tone a human being is capable of, which of course worsens the situation and I shush him to shutthefuckup. The next second I watch him jump out of the car and open up a black umbrella for me. I decide not to tip him anyway. I hate when people are making fools of themselves more than I hate the actual fools.

It's Tuesday, so it's time for my anti-humanism class.

I can now put faces to the names in my attendance sheets. And I've already figured out the dealings within the five different strata distributed into clusters of approximately five to six people. First, there come the patricians. These are all kids coming from wealthy families, some of them with drug problems already; designer clothes, new-generation I-phones, and the inevitable I-am-fucking-bored-to-be-here expression on their faces (they know that no matter what, even if they fail 80 percent of their exams, father will comfort them with a trip to Bali or a check that will ensure them at least 120 hours of constant powder-sniffing). They could have easily been accepted to some Ivy League university across the big ocean because, as a matter of fact, they are quite smart as a rule, and besides, are well-stuffed with family money. But no, their parents have wisely decided to place them in close proximity, so that they could keep a doting eye on them. Copenhagen may be a cold city, but here anyone can be easily led into temptations.

The most prominent of the patricians is Magnus Hinsch, whose father is an executive director of the Bio Nordisk medical company, which is at this moment 90 billion dollars' worth. Magnus is the absolute epitome of genetic excellence but one powerful "bug" has been eating his immaculate system from within – he is terribly afraid of Muslims. I know that the Muslim phobia has turned into a modern curse and many people now have it, but with the young Hinsch it has reached colossal proportions. The situation got worse when in many social-orientated forums some disturbing statements have recently occurred.

- Professor Franic, what do YOU think of that moronism?!

As I step into the classroom, he jumps of his seat and rushes towards me. I involuntarily raise the folders I'm holding as if to protect my face but he's faster and he tucks an iPad under my nose. His face is red with anger.

- What the f...?
- See?
- See what, Mister Hinsch?

He reads aloud:

- *“Original dervish wrote: “Fuck’em.....blaspheming Islamophobes. All Danish products should be banned throughout the Muslim world.”*
- So?
- Well, we’ve been having a discussion just a while ago...

I look at the class. One of the girls is studying intently her richly dipped into mascara eye lashes into a pink pocket mirror with Snoopy on the upper lid.

- I can see that the class is overly agitated and was just wondering why the commotion! – my sarcasm, however, is left underappreciated by Magnus, who is much too agitated himself to pay attention to other people’s emotions except for his own.
- Do you think that they are going to kill my father?
- Doesn’t seem like.
- But it’s obvious!!! The oppressive language, the rage and everything. They hate me.
- They don’t hate you, Mister Hinsch, they’re just fucking with the idea that stands behind the company.
- Yes, but...

He looks helplessly around the room searching for support and understanding from his peers. He finds neither, because the rest of the class is busy staring at my seemingly braless outfit. I’m wearing a black collar white transparent chiffon shirt and straight cut jeans. The audience may see no bra under but at the same time no nipples are visible to it either. The trick is to use skin-color plaster tapes to disguise the nipples.

- I'd appreciate if you tell me your opinion anyway, - Magnus tries a different approach in order to extort a fellow-feeling from me.
- OK, Mister Hinsch. What I think about your...let's call it "problem" about the Muslim threat is the following: In 2006, if I remember correctly, they tried to boycott Danish products but now they are all buying them again because they cannot live without those medical products. Which, all in all, means that Muslims need Denmark more than Denmark needs them. Although we have given billions in aid to poor savage Muslim nations and welcome their refugees for decades.

Awkward silence. The inquisitive glances have swiftly transferred from my transparent blouse to a skinny boy sitting close to the branched philodendron by the window.

- I... - the boy clearly feels obliged to explain the common interest. – I am Somali.
- So? – My eyebrows go up.
- Just saying, - the boy gives me a rueful smile.
- And you're not from Somalia, Ahmed! You're from northwestern Copenhagen. Tingbjerg, I suppose. It's written in my files.

With which we come to the second caste, the one of the non-natives. Only Ahmed is Muslim, but because of his almost invisible presence Magnus the Mighty does not consider him a threat to the security of his family and to the national medical industry. This group is actually the slackest of all because they all try to fit into other groups. I almost like one of them, a girl from Slovakia who always brings to class the smell of chamomile shampoo.

Then it is the group of the "ideal women". There are the four of them and because they all must share one brain, I've never seen them separated. I've never thought that a social cliché may be that authentic in real life. For those

four girls - Kirsten, Silje, Tilde and Ulrike – puberty must have been a wonderful event that magically changed their bodies into objects of worship and desires. As Marge Pierce ironically wrote in her Barbie Doll poem, they were “healthy, tested intelligent, possessed strong arms and back, abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.” Well, Pierce of course was trying to send a message about society’s unrealistic expectations for women. But that was in 1982. Nowadays, the expectations have stayed the same, though now they are one hundred percent realistic. And they all have been excellently accomplished by Kirsten, Silje, Tilde and Ulrike.

One of them raises her hand, and I am almost certain it’s Silje, because she is the one of the quartet who always wears something shimmering whether it will be a Fendi purse or a hair-clasp.

- May I go out for a second? I have to take this! It’s my boyfriend – she points at her mobile and rolls eyes.
- Is he dying?
- Not for now but if he doesn’t explain to me why he wasn’t tweeting me back yesterday evening, he’ll be dead pretty soon.

I encourage the moderate violence in an intimate relationship, so I let her go. She squeezes her slender thighs sidewise between two rows of desks. Someone, against whose chair Silje rubs her ass, makes the logical remark that some poor bastard won’t get laid tonight. This is Anton, the leader of the jerks, who also like to think of themselves as pure-in-heart socialists. In the very beginning of the semester, they made it clear to me that they are taking my class only because they are fans of Louis Althusser, to whom the anti-humanism term is mostly attributed and who was desperately trying to defend a reading of Marx from what he saw as a detrimental influence of humanism. As if I care why they’re taking my class! The gang is an exemplary antipode of the Magnus-like Übermenschen, but despite the obvious ideological antagonism between the two



groups, the jerks avoid any kind of confrontation. As we know from real life situations, a barking dog doesn't bite.

The angry socialists group dress revolutionary, drink revolutionary and listen to revolutionary music, that is local progressive and power metal bands like Manticora and Wuthering Heights, and, as an "exceptional exception," some death metal heads from Aalborg.

The fifth and final ideological-slash-social stratum is the one of the "faceless". These are normal kids, usually from outside Copenhagen, studious, yet mediocre, all of them coming from families of humble means, dairy-farmers or something, I don't really care, but all in all, they are here to actually learn something and provide a better future for themselves and the blond clones they'll give birth to in ten or so years. Another popular social cliché, which I simply can't believe!

The truth is that the kids from this last group plagues me the most!

So, five groups and 25 students.

No, correction, my lists says 26. I must have excluded someone... deliberately or not.

## **Twenty-sixth**

It's Friday. On a Friday evening, I usually go to the Vester Vov Vov cinema on Absalonsgade in Vesterbro where they show only mostly independent and foreign films and sometimes documentaries that cannot be seen elsewhere in the city. It has this inimitable funky atmosphere, which hasn't changed a bit since 1982. I remember father taking me and my sister to this theater almost every Saturday afternoon. We'd sit in the small café first, father would order a beer for himself, and orange squash for us. My sister was usually upset because they

didn't sell pop-corn (and they still don't), but I was numb to her complaints because I was all engulfed in the most adorable feeling, that is being with Dad, pressing close to his hairy arm, sipping the foam brimming over his beer-mug, smelling his freshly shaved face... 30 years later, I still sit for half an hour or so at the café bar and drink wine while watching some students play pool. The game doesn't interest me; I am more concentrated on the soft sensation caused by my heels sinking into the newly changed green carpet.

- Professor Franic?

A slightly familiar voice startles me. I look up. Fuck, it's one of my students. I hate seeing their stupid faces outside the class room or the cafeteria. In many cases I am not able to recognize them if I run into them in an environment other than the academic one. This one, however, I recognize at once. This is the kid who plays it a smart ass, and yet, is quite successful in staying invisible most of the time.

- Hi! – He gives me a two-finger salute like a Cub Scout would do.

I am flabbergasted by the fact that his greeting smile actually looks unplanned and genuine.

- Would never expect to see you here, though it's been my initial guess you may be a fan of Lukas Moodysson. Have you seen his 2009 piece by the way? Mammoth? It was a blast, man!
- What if I've seen it, Mister... forgot your name...
- 7030! – The smile gets even broader. And with a pinch of sardonicism at that! I feel so uncomfortable that I take a mighty gulp from my glass to buy me four more seconds before I can answer.
- Yes, sure, the guy behind the number!

And congratulations to me because I finally find back my tongue!

- I liked your lecture on Tuesday, - he keeps smiling, idiotically and absolutely discouragingly. I wish he dropped dead and sank to hell. –You read us this absolutely enticing lecture on Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*.

And again – the sting of irony pierces my left ear.

- Aren't you going to be late for your movie? – I ask.
- No, - he doesn't even care to look at his watch, or phone, or whatever to check the time. – Besides, I suppose we're going to the same movie, so I'll just keep you some company if you don't mind.

If I don't.... What the hell is he thinking??? I DO mind, as a matter of fact, I mind a lot! But then I just say:

- Sure.
- Cool, - he takes his hands out of his jeans pockets, pulls out a chair and crashes down. – So, Professor, how's life?

Life sucks right now.

- Never been better, thank you.
- Well, I seriously doubt it, - he raises eyebrows in simulated disbelief.
- What is that supposed to mean? – I squeeze my eyes as if someone has blown cigarette smoke into them.
- Well... you know... you look into someone's eyes and see that something's not right.
- And you've looked into MY eyes and seen something's wrong?
- Yeah... or at least tried to. But you always avoid my eyes, so I can't be sure about my hypothesis.

- Look, 7030, don't you have friends to go back to? I am not in the mood to talk. And least of all with students of mine.
- Mmmm...no actually. I'm by myself. Don't have many friends anyway. And the few I have will never come to see a movie by some nutcase Swedish director. So, I guess we can sit together...if you don't mind.
- I'm not seeing this movie, sorry.
- You're not? I thought you're here for the 9-o'clock show.
- No.
- You're lying, Professor!
- Look, - I pour the rest of the wine into my throat as if it's a disgusting medicine, - I am not here for the Moddyson's film, OK? I'm waiting for somebody and...and I don't know why I bother telling you that since it is none of your concern.

I am lying my head off here! And I almost never lie because I don't have to. Because I don't care if the truth will hurt someone, be it even myself. To me, lying is for the insecure and vulnerable people; a lie is a drawing medium, a black pastel, which makes one look like one's own cartoon animation twin – a meager body with short limbs and an abnormally big head.

- Fine, - he shrugs shoulders, - then I'll keep you company until your friend shows up.
- No!
- Why not? Am I bothering you?
- You'll miss the beginning of your movie.
- Not a big deal.
- Besides, he may be late...
- Oh, it's a he!
- Yes, it's a male friend, yes.
- Cool.

- What do you mean?
- Nothing in particular. That it's cool that you are having a date in a movie theatre lobby bar. Although it's a bit strange since you're actually not going to a movie.
- It's not a date.

.. and it's getting worse with every stupid word I utter. And besides, I desperately want to see the Moodyson's movie, for which I bought a ticket online three days ago. I may pretend that someone's calling me and it's my "male friend", who tells me that he's waiting for me some other place. Yes, it's totally doable.

I reach into my purse and take out my Nokia.

- I didn't hear it ring! – 7030 intelligently notes.

The plan is about to fail before it has been put in action.

- It didn't. I've received a message. It vibrates. Ah, it's from my friend. (I pretend to read from the blank display.) He's waiting for me at this... burger place down the street. I must have got him wrong when we spoke this afternoon.
- Ok, then I guess I should be going, too.

He gets up and smiles.

- Good night, Professor, and have fun! See you on Tuesday.

I imitate a tortured semi-smile and clumsily rise to my feet.

While walking hastily towards the Vesterbro metro station, I can hear my own voice as if coming from a distant radio - I am talking to myself with fury and indignation like a mad person.

What the hell has just happened!?

## Twenty-eighth

Astrid, the solid German fishing trawler and an exemplary lesbian of the bear type, also runs a small independent theatre group, which rehearses every Sunday from 5 to 9 in a dusty auditorium somewhere in Nørrebro.

This morning she calls me and ruins my leisure bare-nude Sunday meditation over a cup of hot distilled water, a bowl of only brown M&M's, and the Sunday paper. Siri is in her room, watching a bad video of their band's gig in Århus someone has uploaded on YouTube.

Astrid asks if she can meet me "so schnell *als möglich*".

- Why the hurry?
- It's about a *very important* play I am willing to stage.
- Are you staging it today??
- No, but the group is meeting later, so I have to know whether I'll be able to tell them the good news or not.
- And I guess the good news depends on me?
- In a way, yes. But not entirely.
- You want me to go out now?
- Well, yes... But since I'm standing in front of your building anyway, I was thinking you may invite me in for a minute.

I look down at my untrimmed mons veneris and say,

- I am not properly dressed.
- Oh, don't worry, I'll tell no one I've seen you in your slippers.

Her monstrous laughter resembles stones trundling down a steep *mons*.

- Yes, my slippers, - I repeat distractedly.
- Shall I come up?

- Sure.

I slip on one of Siri's baggy t-shirts I find thrown on a chair's back and go to open the door for Astrid. I didn't make sure my private parts are all covered, so logically enough, I can feel Astrid's eyes fixed on the curve where my but ends and my legs start while I'm leading her to the kitchen.

- You've got yourself a comfy place here, - she says without even caring to take a look around.
- I'm thinking of buying it.
- Good, good, good, - now she's trying with tooth and nail to concentrate on the very purpose of her visit.
- Coffee?
- Yes, with a pinch of rum, if you don't mind. It's a bloody wet weather outside.

I put a half-empty bottle of Rogue Dark on the table and Astrid pours herself a generous portion into her mug. It's been a dull and unexciting morning, so when I see the opportunity to play a little, I play a little. I sit on a chair a bit aside from the table and opposite Astrid's with my legs apart and offer my guest a generous view of my under-t-shirt goodies.

- I...I guess I am lucky... - her voice trembles like the hand with which she holds the mug.
- And why is that?
- Well... For what I know, I am the first from the faculty to ever come to your place. For so many years... People talk, you know, that you never invite people to you apartment.
- I do actually.

Only they don't know it. I once had somebody from the faculty over to my place. That was before Siri came to live with me. There was this boy,

moderately retarded, twenty-something, who worked at the canteen counter – he'd pour out soup into bowls and slit into two the French rolls. I kicked up a hysterical fuss once because he handed me a roll without wearing gloves. Everybody in the line looked at the boy with pity when my rage hammered him in the face with a blast. The tears streamed down his pale cheeks, his expression of total moronic numbness, however, didn't change. He was staring right at my face – furious but insensitive. His spontaneous urge to jump over the counter and squeeze my throat till I stop breathing moved me with its genuine naivety. He pushed me on the floor and lay on top of me, the whole weight of him holding me down. I didn't struggle to free myself from his grip - I was too breathtaken by the magic of the moment. Some men who were queuing right behind me threw aside their trays with frozen yogurts and salmon salads and rushed to save my life. And they did save it. Back on my feet, I said it was OK, it was my fault for what happened, that there should be no punishment whatsoever for the boy because, anyway, he is...well, look at him... not well. But I wasn't really sorry and spewed out all this apologetic horseshit just because I had already set my mind on committing a vicious deed.

They let him go. Soothed him and all. I had my classes cancelled that afternoon, went back to the canteen, asked for the boy, they told me he was in the stocking room, eating his lunch – he was too shocked after “the occurrence” to go outside and enjoy the spring sun or whatever. Yeah, yeah, yeah, thank you, I said, and followed the instructions. I did find him there, squatting beside some flour tins; he looked up at me – his anger and his fear were my all-winning weapons. I took him by the hand, he clumsily rose on his feet – enormous like a polar bear in his slack white uniform. He followed me out with faltering steps, through the dining hall and the main lobby, across the freshly sprayed lawn and one hundred meters more to the faculty parking lot.



I took him right home, never spoke a word to him, neither did he dare to utter a sound. Already in the dark apartment, I took off my trench coat, I poured myself a water glass of vodka, and gestured to him to sit on a chair. No, not the sofa, the chair! That one, yes. Pushed up the tight pleated teed skirt around my waist and mounted his lap facing him, so that I could watch the beautiful dance of anger and fear on his panicked pace while I was fucking him.

So, yes, I've had people over to my place. Not exactly faculty members, but still... quite amiable guests they were!

What happened to the canteen boy after he paid me a heartwarming visit, I don't know. Maybe he got fired anyway because of the incident, or some smartass from the social services decided the job was too stressful for "a person in his delicate mental condition" and found him another, less stressful job – in a public garden maybe, cutting the grass. Or maybe I've killed him. I don't quite remember. I was so out of my senses that night...

Astrid's idea is to stage a piece by an American gay author, who died just a couple of months ago in San Francisco at the age of 88 – miraculously enough, untouched by HIV. So she wants to make a tribute to his "colossal" work. Not that any of the Copenhagen citizens, not even the craziest gays, have ever heard of him, but what the hell... her enthusiasm must suffice for ten thousand of them, cultivated homosexuals with discriminating taste.

- And what do you exactly want from me, Astrid...dear? – I ask in the appealing voice of an exemplary lady of the house.
- You of course... your Sprache, I mean. Sorry. It's hot in here. Is it hot? Maybe it's the rum. It's definitely hot here.

Hell, yes, it's hot.

Siri shows up, frowns at the sight of me wearing her t-shirt and the lines between her eyebrows get ever deeper when she notices I am naked under it.

- Siri, this is my colleague, Frau Linden. Astrid. A dear friend of mine.
- A dear what!? – Siri's going to be pretty wrinkled pretty soon if she continues frowning at everything she doesn't like about me and everything I say.
- Hello! Pleased to meet you, – Astrid waves at her. Siri is not sure whether to wave back or what.
- I'll just grab a beer and will be out of here. We've got a rehearsal at Andreas'. Shall I call you some time later, Ira?
- Not necessary. Just if you want to.
- Fine. Bye, Frau Linden.

Sixty seconds of silence after Siri's gone.

- Is she your lover?
- What? No. My niece.
- I thought...sorry...
- It's OK. She behaves as if she's my lover. Or a grown-up at least. I mean – look at her – beer at 9 in the morning! - I say this with pretentious concern and indignation.
- Who can blame her! It's Sunday alright, – Astrid tries to laugh at her own attempt to make a joke out of the awkward situation.
- You have a really nice apartment!
- Astrid, what exactly do you want from me?
- Oh yes! Of course... You see, this guy, George Birimisa... his parents were Croatian, his mother's family name was Gjurovich. Do I pronounce it right? (I nod.) While George was still a child, his father died as the result of injuries and imprisonment while under arrest after speaking on

behalf of the Communist Party at a labor rally. Birimisa's mother remarried but his stepfather rejected him and his two older brothers.

- Can you spare me the bio stuff?
- Sure, sure... My point is that I want to have lines in Croatian in the play.
- Didn't he write in English?
- He did, but it's my vision...as a director, you know. To bring a touch of authenticity. What do you think?
- And you want me to translate them for you?
- You're Croatian, right?
- Half.
- And the other half?
- French. For my regret.
- So you speak Croatian?
- I haven't spoken it for ages.
- But you can, right?
- I suppose.
- And you'll be willing to do this for our company?
- Your company?? Astrid, it's seven people, one of which is deaf-mute; it's not a theatrical company.
- Are you coming tonight to our meeting? We'll have refreshments. And beer!
- No.
- Please?
- No.
- May I? – She points at the bottle, apparently frustrated. I feel sorry for the expensive rum that will indulge her fatty intestines.
- I'll do the translation.
- Would you like to know what the play is about?
- Not really but you gonna tell me anyway, I guess.

- It's one of his last, - her eyes glow of excitement, - and is called *Viagra Falls*.

Jesus Christ! How lucky for Him for having been dead for two thousand years now, so that He doesn't have to listen to such bullshit.

- It's about a young gay man's long-term sadomasochistic relationship with a closeted ophthalmologist. Wonderful, wonderful play indeed!
- You should go now. I have to take a shower. Mail me the text.

Who knows why (I personally don't) but Sunday makes me uneasy. Not any Sunday though. THIS PARTICULAR Sunday.

## **Twenty-ninth**

I start making a plan how to set the rats free from the bio-chemistry lab, which must be executed before 15<sup>th</sup> – that is when I have to be in Rome for that conference on modern philosophical trends. I'll be staying at a hotel in Trastevere. The conference will be a total bore. What I am more interested in is drinking prosecco on Piazza Romana. Bottles of it!

I am sitting in my office, it's an almost bare room that usually smells of my shoes' leather, and trying not to think about tomorrow, that is Tuesday. I sense I am on the verge of starting hating Tuesdays as well.

When we moved to a better place to live in 1987, with no other families with kids uglier than run-over animals to piss in our bathtub, I, for the first time in my young life, started hating particular days of the week. These were Monday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. The days when father took shifts as a tram-driver. With every month passing, he grew sadder and sadder, he'd no more read opera librettos to me and my sister. (I loved those more than I loved fairy-tales.

Actually, fairy-tales I knew almost nothing about. I only had a vague idea who Sleeping Beauty and the Seven Dwarfs were; I knew, however, all about the romance between Gilda and the Duke of Mantua, or the secret love uniting Norma and Pollione.) He'd rarely sit in his favorite chaise en osier and read Gaius Petronius and Apuleius in Latin. And when he did that, I'd sit cross-legged on the floor, my skinny elbows pinned in my thighs – that was my absolute preferred pastime: watching Dad read his Latin books.

Dad died of sadness. He didn't like Copenhagen, and the city hated him back. Mother, however, has lived for both of them. For all of us as a matter of fact. She'll never die. She's like a weed that'd grow anywhere. Now she lives in her own house by the sea in Esbjerg. Because of the humid weather her bones are killing her but she's stubborn as a mule and says she'll never leave the place. At least not until her lover, a 49-year old entrepreneur dies or goes bankrupt, or sells his oyster business there. I rarely speak to her. She rarely calls. I saw her last at my sister's funeral; she didn't shed a single tear. Looked impatient though for the official part to be over, so that everybody could have a glass of white wine at the mourners' home reception after party. Or a dry martini. Or seven martinis.

I don't say I hate my mother in me. It would be a farfetched statement. Actually, the drinking part, which is her all-rights-reserved part, is the one that I like the most about myself – it's casual, mood-fine tuning and self-explanatory. So, logically, I hate what would be left from mother if she was subjected to dealcoholization and stupidity reduction. Because it's stupidity and drinking that make her almost tolerable; without them, she'll be a two-dimensional monster. Mother never worked a single day in her life. She used to say with this perfunctory, ridiculous accent of hers, "I don't have to work – I'm French, you know. C'est suffit."

A knock on the door.

Shall I say “Entrez!” or “Fuck off!”?

Without waiting for my permission, the door opens, and here comes one of the “normal” kids, asks if I can answer some questions concerning his semester paper.

- Why?
- Why what?
- Why do you want to ask me questions personally? Haven’t you heard of e-mail?
- It’s your office hour, Professor!
- Is it?  
Damn, it is!
- Ok, ask me.

His name is Julius and he has pig ears. It’s out of the question to concentrate on his questions. When he’s done talking, I keep silent for thirty seconds, as if I’m contemplating on my answer, and finally say:

- What was your question again?

Julius stays in control, he doesn’t move a muscle. He is tough - I give him that.

- I didn’t quite get from your handouts last time what the relationship between Antihumanism and Existentialism is. And it’s important for me to understand that because I’m writing a paper on the possibility of an anti-humanism anarchism.

What the fuck is that?

- You have ugly ears and you make no attempt whatsoever to hide them, - I say.
- Eh?

- You heard me, Julius. If I defined myself as a humanist, I wouldn't have said that to you. But I am not anti-humanist either, because I'll give you this 200-Crown bill.

And I hand him the bill, which I happen to have in the upper drawer of my desk.

- This act makes me an existentialist, because as such, I create my own values and determine the meaning for my life. And the value which I have just decided to create is the one of generosity stemming from my sense of guilt. Take the money!

Like in a hypnotic state, Julius doesn't blink, his eyes stay fixated upon mine, and his arm, as if on its own, reaches out for the bill.

- Now go write your paper.

So, my point was that I am in a way grateful to my mother. She taught me how to be the perfect *Ira*. Involuntarily of course, because the only thing she is aware of is her own meaningless cunt. It's my belief that in order for one to be able to see above the tree tops, one should first stand on one's mother's coffin lid and look up towards the sky. I am still waiting for that moment to come. But then... then all will change. Or it won't.

I have to stop doing this because it's pathetic and not creative at all, and concentrate on the Rats Liberating Plan instead.

In the afternoon, after I'm done with the office hours (fortunately, Julius has told all the other potential volunteers that I am in a dress-to-repress mood, so I had no more visitors after him), I call Siri to check if she's back from school. She says, yes, and I did some shopping, we had run out of ...well, almost everything except for wine, vodka, rum and soya beans. You're my treasure, I say. Yeah,

right, she says. Do you want me to burn in hell, Siri? I wish, but I know that “hell is other people” (she mockingly imitates me citing Sartre).

My conversations with Siri over the phone are heartwarming.

Then Astrid calls me. How do you find the text I sent you, she asks. Just had a glimpse, I say. So, what do you think? It’s manageable, the translation, but the dialogue is flatulent and stiff despite the obvious intention to be a good fun. To put it simply, it sucks. And to my opinion, no decent gay will sympathize with the hero. Did you know that they paid 69 \$ for a ticket when it was last staged in New York? Astrid asks with an offended touch in her voice. No, but I’m glad I wasn’t one of those who paid them. Fine, she snaps at me. Fine, I say, and we hang on simultaneously.

Then the Dean’s secretary calls me to ask if I’ll be attending the party on the occasion of professor Jørgensen’s anniversary. How old is the old plagiarist getting? I ask. Pardon? The secretary probably thinks she heard me calling the professor “plagiarist” instead of “polemist”, but it was exactly “plagiarist” I said, and not “procommunist”, or “proverbialist”, “provincialist”, “polygynist”, although he is all of the above.

The professor will be 70 in five days, the secretary has come to her senses. I sent a mail to all faculty members last week but since you didn’t reply, I decided to check personally if you’ll be attending. Where is it going to be? I ask. In a place called The Old Bear House, she says. Sounds like the province, I say. It is actually, she says hesitatingly, not sure if this is good news or bad news. And then she adds temptingly, though even more hesitatingly, it will be fun! They’ll be serving wood pigeon with spicy chocolate sauce and roast parsnips... Now you have convinced me, I say. Oh, good! she sounds relieved. Then I’ll put you on the list.



I don't have even slightest intention to be in The Old Bear House and eat a pigeon.

The final call for the afternoon comes from Framboise. Shall we go out for a drink? I can't, I say, I have something to do. School stuff. The truth is, however, that I feel uneasy because of Tuesday. Don't know why.

Soon I am about to find out.

## Motivational Internalism

Farmer Franco is concerned about his prize cow, Daisy. In fact, he is so concerned that when his dairyman tells him that Daisy is in the field, happily grazing, he says he needs to know for certain. He doesn't want merely to have a 99 percent probability that Daisy is safe, he wants to be able to say that he *knows* Daisy is safe.

Farmer Franco goes out to the field and standing by the gate sees in the distance, behind some trees, a white and black shape that he recognizes as his favorite cow. He goes back to the dairy and tells his friend that he knows Daisy is in the field.

Yet, at this point, does Farmer Franco really *know* it?

The dairyman says he will check too, and goes to the field. There he finds Daisy, having a nap in a hollow, behind a bush, well out of sight of the gate. He also spots a large piece of black and white paper that has got caught in a tree.

Daisy is in the field, as Farmer Franco thought.

But was he right to say that he knew she was?

The farmer did not really *know* it; his justified true belief was actually operating independent of the truth. Herein lies the core of the problem of 'knowledge as justified true belief'.

**--Martin Cohen, *Philosophy problems* (2007)**



## **November**

### **First**

*I need to shave because it's been eight days since I last pointed the razor to my ugly mug. Right now I look like Chewbacca. I made a scary face to a kid in the subway the other day and the kid grabbed his mom by the skirt, truly terrified by my looks. Plus, we have classes with Franic today and I don't want to scare her, too...in case of course she lowers herself to our level and finally looks at me.*

*I'm blessed with no roommates. It means that I'm free to listen to my music without headphones on and wank off at any time. Which is great because I wank off a lot. These days the wanking has been especially intensive. That's because I spent the whole weekend at home and my sister had been following me everywhere, getting on my nerves with her endless confessions about boys she is secretly or half-openly (whatever that means) in love with. So, with her harassing me with petty annoyances all the time, I didn't have a minute by myself, which eventually had a gruesome effect on my dick. But she's my baby-sister and she looks up to me and still lets me plait her hair as I used to when she was six or seven and mother would leave early for work, so I had to get her ready for school. I personally prefer that she never dealt with boys, ever! Or at least not until I'm dead and buried. But she'll be 15 soon and with me not being at home anymore, supervising all her doings, I can't keep fooling myself that she'll stay virgin for much longer. For now, we're still good. I mean, what she does is talking and not fucking. The talking part will be eventually substituted by the fucking part and it will be not in my powers to hammer it into her stupid little head that fucking brings only troubles. I mean, look at me; I broke up with that hollow cow, Ingrid, because she thought that, as any other woman, she too can manipulate men (that is me) with sex. Actually, I wouldn't have had*

*anything to do with her (and with any other girl for that matter!) if only I didn't want to check by myself what it was "to be in a relationship". You know how it is, when you leave high school it's all about being grown-up and having a "serious" thing with a girl (that means going out with her for at least four months) is considered a part of it. But after hanging out with Ingrid (four complete months, I swear!) and with Sylvia afterwards (three fucks, only one of them decent), I've decided relationships are not for me. And that sex is overrated. Sex with other people, I mean.*

*So, here I am beating the shit out of my little friend down there while listening to Raintime's Rolling Chances. I shoot the load so high that it slops onto the bathroom mirror. I sweep it with some toilet paper before it drops into the sink. Now that I am unloaded, my hand feels steadier and I can shave my face. And become as much presentable as possible. Today may be the day when Miss Franic finally lays her eyes and love (ha-ha) on me, who knows. I'm young, anything's possible.*

### **Seventh**

*I never, never remember my dreams. I wonder if this is normal. I asked Aksel, who is dumb but is really talented in imitating famous people, so I don't mind hanging out with him. He often comes over to my place. He never misses to exclaim it's too suspiciously tidy for a 20-year old dude who lives by himself, and then jokingly (or not!) throws out that it's more becoming of a gay. I say, "I AM gay, didn't you know!", which totally kills Aksel and we listen to Vertical Horizon till we drop dead. Aksel refuses to believe that I don't drink. I've explained to him that I hate not being in control of myself. He shakes his head with disdain and for a moment his face resembles the face of a 90-year old Asian guru who only speaks in metaphors and shit.*

- *You know, man, I try to do the opposite – not being in control of myself. In order to make the pain go away, you know. And it works miracles for me. You should try it, too.*
- *What pain?*
- *This, - he touches the logo of his Polo shirt, - inside. The pain of living.*
- *You're fuckin' drunk.*
- *Yes, - he readily agrees, - and it's beautiful! Jeg dritter i livet.*

*Aleks is Norwegian. And he has a fabulous life. Or at least what a fabulous life is according to the luxurious magazines – you know, those which weigh a ton and always have on their cover some incredible half-naked chick with her tits popped up as she playfully bends over the wheel of a crazy polished Bentley Continental .*

*He is OK when we are alone. Behaves almost like a normal guy. When we are among other people though, he becomes mean. Starts teasing me that I've slept only with two girls, that I don't do meth (“not even for fun when we are out on a Saturday night, can you believe that schmuck!”), that I don't hate my mother and that I am, according to them, the only not-senile citizen of a country whose nominal GDP exceeds 330 million dollars who does not have a Facebook account. Or any other social network account for that matter. Why the fuck should I?*

- *To be normal, dude, - they say.*
- *Normal how? Like you are??*
- *Fuck yeah.*

*But they all are scumbags, people with no sense of propriety, or decency, or discretion. All of them want to get fabulously rich and fuck princesses in pink designer dresses in front of a wall-to-wall mirror. While their little designer dogs are watching them. While I think of ...of... well... the emptiness. That I may*

*not even exist right now and this is my holographic image that sits on that worn out holographic sofa, drinking from this half-empty holographic glass.*

*I lay down and watch myself floating in a holographic universe.*

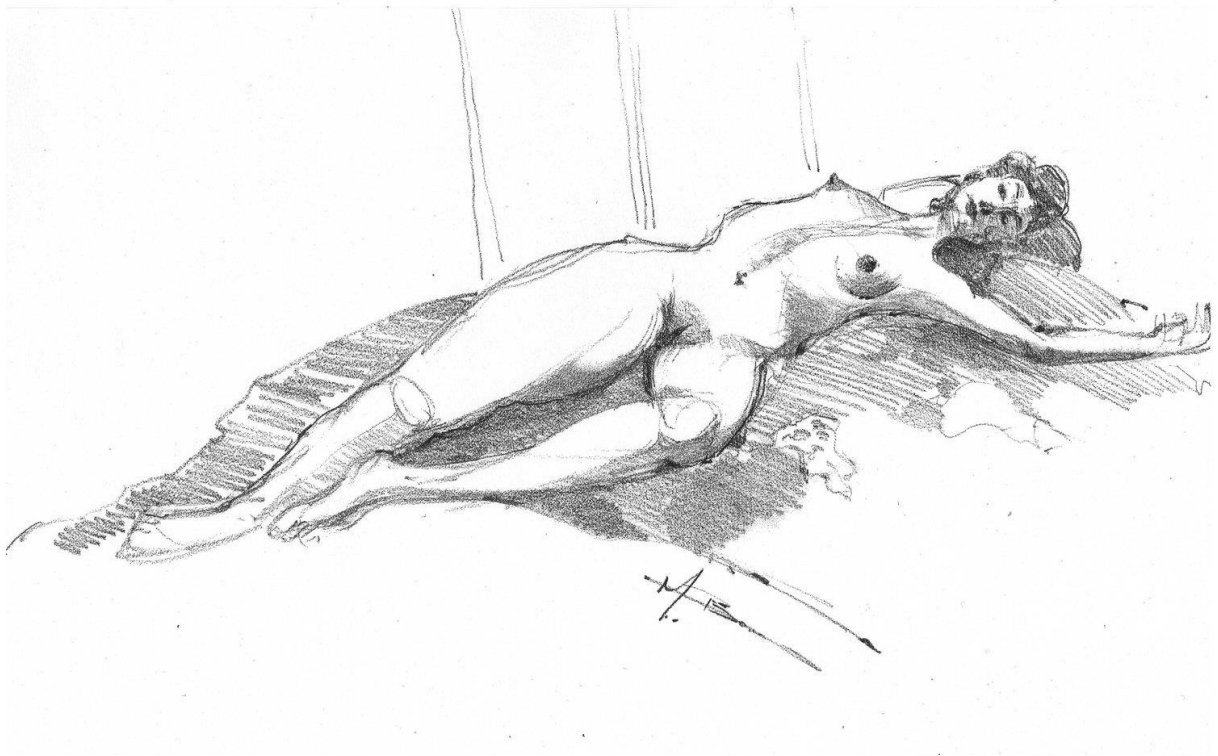
***Nodate, justNovembercontinues***

*I've never understood the world as it is. I used to be curious before, yes, but whenever I listened to those people smarter than myself who tried to explain it to me, I got lost. So, I took my own brain, as simple and unsophisticated as it is, in my own hands, and used it as a tool that would reveal to me the mysteries of my existence. I draw pictures. Try to understand who I am and where I stand. Sometimes it's useless. I am the fish in the aquarium this guy, David Bohm, is using to exemplify the holographic universe. You are unable to see the aquarium directly and your knowledge about it and what it contains comes from two television cameras, one directed at the aquarium's front and the other directed at its side. As you stare at the two television monitors, you might assume that the fish on each of the screens are separate entities. After all, because the cameras are set at different angles, each of the images will be slightly different. But as you continue to watch the two fish, you will eventually become aware that there is a certain relationship between them. When one turns, the other also makes a slightly different but corresponding turn; when one faces the front, the other always faces toward the side. If you remain unaware of the full scope of the situation, you might even conclude that the fish must be instantaneously communicating with one another, but this is clearly not the case. This is what is going on between the subatomic particles.*

*The faster-than-light connection between subatomic particles is telling us that there is a deeper level of reality we are not able to apprehend, a more complex dimension beyond our own that is analogous to the aquarium. And we view objects such as subatomic particles as separate from one another because we*

*are seeing only a portion of their reality. Such particles are not separate "parts", but facets of an underlying unity. And since everything in physical reality is comprised of these particles, the universe is itself a projection, a hologram. If the apparent separateness of subatomic particles is illusory, it means that at a deeper level of reality all things in the universe are infinitely interconnected. The electrons in a carbon atom in the human brain are connected to the subatomic particles that comprise every salmon that swims, every heart that beats, and every star that shimmers in the sky.*

*...and in the morning I wake up, and again I don't remember anything about my dream, but I am so aroused I can hardly drink my tea... so I grab a sheet of paper, which happens to be my phone bill...and frantically draw on its back side. Is it my dream?*

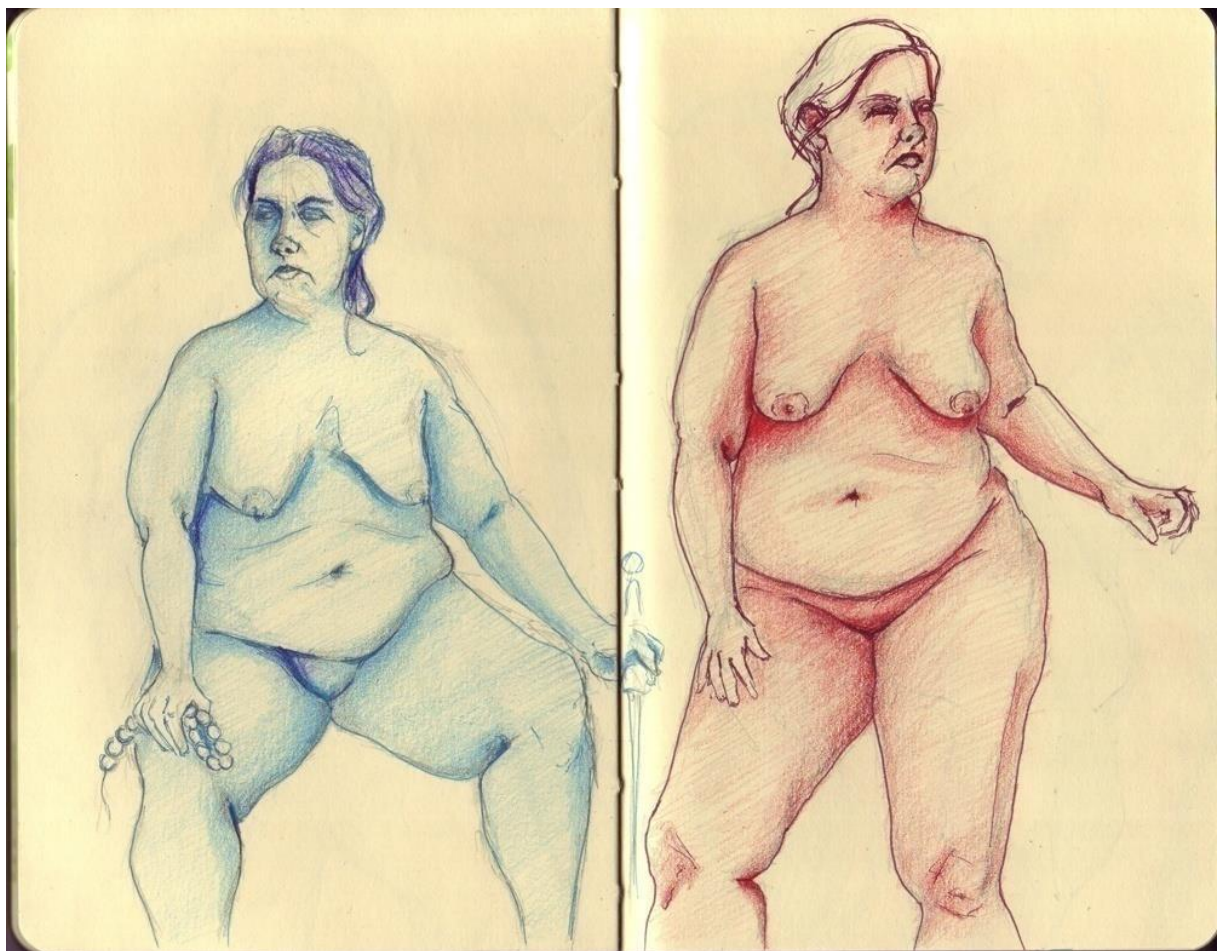


*This must be the holographic image of a female fish I swim with in the holographic aquarium. For eternity.*



## *Eighth*

*We have German classes today. I am a total fan because I read The Glass Bead Game last year and I can't wait to learn German perfectly, so I can read Herman Hesse in original. Well, for now I can only say "Wie geht es Ihnen?" and "Herzlichen Glückwunsch!" but I have made some real good drawings of Frau Linden...not teaching, obviously.*



*I'm taking both German and Franic's philosophy class as electives, although my semester curriculum is pretty heavy already. My parents went berserk when I told them I had enrolled in the History of Art Bachelor program. My father said that the most I can expect for myself in the future is to teach a bunch of peasant*

*ten-graders in some village up north how to draw a nature mort of a glazed vase and a shriveled orange. Mother tried to calm him down (because of them both he was the more enraged one) by mentioning I draw well. “And I fuck well, as you may have noticed, darling, but I didn’t become a porn actor. Instead, I went to law school and now I advise private businesses on company and tax law. And earn the money that buys you all that expensive shit we hardly ever come to use!” Father’s logic is as solid as steel.*

*- Why don’t we ever buy lamps or paper napkins from IKEA like all the normal people do!? And he kicks a silk, draped Chinese cushion as a sign of protest. I must have really enraged my father, because later that day he decided to act like a venerable and sullen Old Testament character and officially declared over dinner he wouldn’t pay for the apartment I had already rented. Fine, I said, I’ll get myself a job.*

*- Oh please, shut up! – He forced a sarcastic laugh. – Go draw something!*

*So, with father being that furious about my decision to study history of art and, as he may think, jerk over Dali’s Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee, I had to figure out a steady weekly income. I’m a modern kid after all; I simply had to leave home. And my baby sister. And, fortunately, the dog, which nobody was taking care of, but me. And the fucking dog was shitting all over the house, I was sure it was doing it on purpose because it hated us, it hated its life with us and especially it hated my sister because she was always neglecting its needs, although it was her who insisted on taking it home. I left them all... Not that I moved to Jupiter, but still... I quite accidentally found this swell little room on Tagensvej - 2500 per month, no dog hairs, no sullen fathers, and no curtains either... Which sucked because it was the beginning of summer and it was irritatingly bright day and night, day and night, so I called Mom, and she brought me some neutral in color near-linen curtains she had bought from IKEA(!), and a real cactus in a clay pot (also from IKEA, the garden section),*

*and also some other stuff I needed. She seemed desperate when she crossed the threshold of my poorly-furnished, still dusty rented room.*

- *You cannot possibly live here, baby! – She exclaimed and placed her sublime-manicured hand on her chest as if to stop the throbbing of her tormented heart of a mother.*
- *Sure I can.*
- *But it's a hovel!*

*I didn't know that word. Mom is well-educated (which means she often uses words I don't understand), and bored, and this, I guess, can be a bad combination, which may lead people to engaging themselves in practices of deliberately inflicted oblivion. Drugs, you know. Or booze. Mother had them both at that time.*

- *It is a HOVEL! – She repeated melodramatically without even noticing that I had no idea what exactly she meant.*
- *I'll survive, Mom, it's not so bad! Look, someone before me has left a half-full shampoo bottle.*
- *Disgusting! You have to come back home, sweetheart!*
- *Not negotiable, Mother. Come on! Don't be like this.*
- *OK, OK, - she finally agreed, not because she was convinced by my words of assurance, but because, I suspect, she wanted to get out of this "hovel" as quickly as possible and cure her shattered psyche with a bit of shopping downtown at the boutique owned by this hollow model-turned-designer Stine Goya. I love Mother but she is full of shit! Father is her opposite – rigid, serious, sober, stingy, constipated. Sometimes I wonder how exactly two people like themselves end up together. Is it by chance? Is it intentionally? Is there love involved? I don't know. I don't know shit about relationships. I do not look for one. I am better being all by myself. Girls...I find them attractive only on magazine covers, otherwise I find*

*them repulsive. I think a lot. I lay on my bed and I contemplate. Also I eat a lot. I am always hungry. When you're almost 20, you can swallow anything: apple pie, ice cream, pizza, tears, death, pity. I mean anything. And also, when you're almost 20, they say you have the whole world in your feet. I am not sure about that. I guess I'm waiting for somebody to prove that to me.*

*Sometimes...just sometimes... rarely, in other words, but I think this "someone" might be Miss Franic. I look at her and I can actually see her. The way she is. Beyond this pretentious air of hers that she want us to buy for real. Bullshit, man! She is more than that. She is like... I don't know... beautiful. And so out of the matrix. If she could only look at me! But she never does. She ignores me. She even doesn't know my name. Keeps calling me 7030. Which is partially my fault, of course, but still... If she cared, she would've learnt it by now. But no! She is so absorbed in the stupid shit she's teaching. Just look at her. She smolders everyone and everything she comes in contact with. Her touch is the touch of death. I cannot be more fascinated.*

### ***Thirteenth***

*Professor Franic, they told us, has left for a conference in Rome, so all her classes will be cancelled this week. Fuck! And I intended to... Never mind.*

*I unpack my sandwich. It's with feta cheese. I never eat meat. I haven't eaten meat since I was four. My parents thought there was something wrong with me, but all the doctors they took me to said no, he is fine, he just doesn't like meet, leave him alone, he won't die.*

*Actually, I do mind, I bought tickets for Amorphis's gig on Friday in this really hip venue near Amager Strand. For me and her... possibly. But she'll be in*

*Rome. Whatever. I'll go with Aksel. He'll be drunk all the way but it's fine with me..*

### ***Fourteenth***

*Fuck, yes!*

*I found a picture of Miss Franic on the internet!!! She doesn't have an account in any of the social networks familiar to me, so it must have been an ex-boyfriend or a roommate of hers who tweeted the picture years ago. Maybe ten, or more. I hacked the Twitter profile of someone under the name of Maurice L. Samuels. I'm not sure if it's a boy's or a girl's name, but I couldn't believe my luck. No doubt it's her. Only her hair back then was longer and tied in a bun.*

*I skipped the Renaissance and Mannerism class (fuck it, I'll think about Mannerism when I go to Basilica di San Girgio Maggiore in Venice and see Tintoretto's Last Supper with my own eyes).*

*I have to call Mom.*

*Mother doesn't pick up. She must be busy shopping ...useless stuff.*

*I draw some things for the rest of the day. Didn't bother to go to other classes.*

*I'll just go to work, I guess. My shift starts at 12 p.m. I work at the Crown Hotel, near Tivoli Gardens. I'd never seen before so much shit in my whole life! I mean, other people's shit. I scrub it from the bathtubs. Which means that they shit in the bathtubs while they're taking a bath, can you imagine!*

*And also I've had enough of sheets covered with menstrual blood stains. And sperm stains. And vomiting. Sometimes I check what people are reading. There was this lady in 1305 who was reading ... attention! "How to make your man happy, happy, happy". No need to read this bullshit, lady! I'll tell you how you make your man happy, happy, happy and I'll give you my advice for free (not*

*counting the decent tip of course). I tore out page 167 of her book and wiped my ass with it after I took a dump in room 1307's toilet. Not that it had run out of toilet paper. It was more of a symbolic gesture.*

*Sometimes I wank in people's sinks. I love to think that I am a member of an underground revolutionary movement, whose purpose is to destroy this part of humankind that denounces spirituality and let themselves being easily absorbed into the material world. In other words, the Paris-Hilton-part-of-humankind.*

*Most of the time, I don't bother changing the sheets every day. When I make sure they are not covered in suspicious stains and are not crinkled too much, I just straighten them up and move on.*

*If I'm lucky I find useful stuff the guests have left in their rooms before checking out. Once, I found three pretty good oranges thrown by some stupid schmuck in the waste basket. I've also collected half-full packages of nuts and even hard-boiled eggs. They were good to eat. It can be trickier with the half-eaten pizzas, though. You never know – they might have stubbed out their cigarettes in the dough and when you find that out, it's too late. I'm blessed with an appetite for leftovers. I don't mind they are cold. Food is food.*

\* \* \*

*I'm lying on the floor in my Spartan-like (as Mother would call it) room, finishing a caricature drawing of Aksel wearing his favorite blue polo shirt, when my phone starts vibrating. It's my supervisor, Pernille, she wants me to fill for Ngvanko, the Senegali guy, who obviously hasn't showed up for work today. I say OK, and she says she wants to see me first "in her office". I didn't know she had an office but this doesn't bother me right now. What bothers me is the perspective to go out barefoot in that weather. I start looking for my left shoe, which I remember kicking out somewhere in the dark hallway on coming home very late yesterday evening. Since I cannot find it, I have to cycle to the hotel*

*wearing a pair of shockingly muddy once-white plimsoles I bought one hundred summers ago at the Gammel Strand flea-market for like 30 Crowns. It's fucking cold for them but I cannot go out with only one right shoe, can I!*

*So, I cycle down to the hotel and the rain's pouring down on me, I simply can't hate the city more right now.*

*I ask Dávgon, the guard at the entrance, where Pernille's office is. Dávgon is Eskimo and he lived in Greenland till he was 12, he is also a great Tarantino fan. He tells me, I don't know, dude, probably in some fucking basement where bitches assemble. We laugh the laugh of the revengeful subordinates, and I come in.*

*I eventually find Pernille's office. It's not exactly in the basement but it's close enough. She deserves to be eaten by dust mites for treating us, the housekeepers, like parasites. It's not that I care about her attitude. My life doesn't depend on this shitty job. I am not like those Vietnamese fuckheads who always compete for the employee-of-the-week prize. Each one of us is ranked according to 1-to-100 evaluation sheets. If you go below 60, it's not good at all and you can get fired.*

*Pernille reckons me to step in with her clean as a baby butt middle finger and starts talking.*

*- There've been complaints, Matthiessen. About your looks.*

*- What about my looks?*

*- I told you when you first started here that you HAVE TO LOOK SPICK-AND-SPAN, didn't I?*

*Wow, she's really fuming. Her moustache is nervously twitching.*

*- Did I tell you, Matthiessen, that you have to shave EVERY OTHER DAY, or did I not?*

- *Yes, you did, but I can't. There's hardly anything to shave on the second day.*
- *Don't bullshit me, Matthiessen!*

*I'll become a Buddhist, Eskimo, anything, if only she stops repeating my name with that master sergeant voice of hers.*

- *And your hair!*

*I keep quiet this time. I'm not frightened, I'm just bored. Pernille doesn't seem to have a rich repertoire.*

- *Your hair is...It is...*

*She puffs, and sniffs and spits.*

- *It's...that hair of yours... it's simply ...your hair is long and messy. You have to cut it short. That's the regulation.*
- *OK.*
- *OK? Is that all you gonna say?*
- *What else do you want me to say, Pernille? I'll have a haircut tomorrow. Now, can I go to work?*
- *Not yet! – She raises a menacing forefinger and for a second she resembles an Old Testament prophet, who is about to speak the words of wisdom.*
- *One more thing, Matthiessen. The regulation says you must not listen to music while on duty. Understood? I'll confiscate your i-pod or whatever that is you always have in your back pocket.*

*Oh no, no, no, no. Not this! Not my music!*

- *How exactly is my listening to music while changing stinky sheets or throwing out the garbage in conflict with the regulations? Pernille?*



- *For you, Matthiessen, I am Miss Vestergaard!*
- *I simply can't!*

*I feel wrecked. They cannot deprive me from my music. Take my heart instead, you monsters! Torturers! Not now that I've just found this absolutely awesome band from Ohio – Trivium. Those last couple of days I can't have enough of them. Seriously! I've been zombified. I've browsed through all their albums so far, but the third one, The Crusade, simply kicks ass. And now, this fat cow tells me to let go of it. No way. I'd rather quit.*

- *I want to speak to the manager, - I say in a surprisingly calm and confident voice.*
- *What?!*
- *You heard me, MISS VESTERGAARD, I want to speak to the manager!*
- *He's not available. You speak to me.*
- *I've had enough talking with you.*
- *How dare you!*
- *Well, - I spread my arms like a wounded duck spreading its wings in a futile attempt to fly off, - here I am... daring!*
- *Submit you i-pod and you may be excused for now! You'll be doing the rooms from 4020 to 4040.*

*She tucks her expectant sweaty palm under my nose.*

- *I'll submit no shit to you, Miss Vestergaard. It's a very precious personal item and I don't feel like trusting it into your hands. Or in anyone's hands for that matter, so I intend to keep it. I have my rights. We are not in communist Korea after all.*
- *Wow, a revolutioneer!*

*I shrug shoulders, but now I feel I don't want to argue with her anymore.*

- *Look, Miss Vestergaard, what if I keep me i-pod and not listen to it while being in the shared premises where the guests may see me? And I promise to get a hair-cut tomorrow.*
- *And a shave!*
- *And a shave.*

*She hesitates for a moment, and then gives out a sound like a tire being punctured.*

- *You're not a bad kid, Matthiessen; you're just so fucking mulish.*

*I smile contentedly to myself and allow myself this little moment of happiness. I am a bit restless till the end of Ngvanko's shift (that is my shift) because I'm not used to doing the cleaning routine without listening to music, but I manage somehow to close the day.*

*When I go home, I heat a bowl of noodle soup and eat it while drawing a crappy self-portrait.*

*I must have fallen asleep at some point because when I wake up, it's already dawn.*

*And it's **Fifteenth**.*

*I'm skipping again the Danish Art class, I'll be so fucked up at the end of the semester, I can feel it. Can you blame me that the only class I'm interested in is Professor Franic's one! And it's not only because of her, although she's like...a hurricane, man... sweeps you off your feet... it's her aura, I see it in black and ink, and I can tell you it's an amazing aura of an amazing person. Yet, I have some doubts. I think she hates everybody primarily because she's not happy doing what she's doing. I'd like to change that, but so far I find no way to get even close to doing this. So, I guess, I have to be patient. Or just give up... at some point. But I prefer the patience part better.*

*Today, in the hotel, I found a hundred-crown bill in an envelope with my name on in one of the rooms on the fourth floor I'm responsible for. There was a note enclosed.*

*"Dear Matti (they must have seen the name on my badge while walking past each other in the corridor yesterday), thank you for your services!*

*X x x xx*

*Tatjana, Svetla, Masha"*

*Oh, yes, this must be the nice Russian lady with the two cute little girls. I dart a glance at the side-table. Some of the kids' dolls and books are scattered around. I pick up one of the dolls - it's impossibly blond, and abnormally huge, like a real 4-year old, with bulging green eyes and a flashy pink dress. When you lean it backwards, it gives out a lamenting mooommyyyy sound.*

*I play with the doll for a minute or so; the mommy sound may be irritating in the beginning, but then it takes a different course and you start to actually enjoying it, so that at some point you find yourself fascinated by the movement-sound correlation thing.*

*I have to put the doll back before I rape it or something, for I start to get really weird cravings toward it. Her, it's her really. The doll must have a name! An exquisite creature like that cannot go around without a proper name.*

*For once I assiduously straighten up the sheets and scrub as hell the toilet in their bathroom. Before I leave, I place four oranges in the faux crystal bowl in the center of the table and tuck a note among them, saying,*

*"Dear Tatjana, Svetla and Masha,*

*Let your day in the cold and cloudy Copenhagen be painted in sunny colors!*

*Kisses, Matti"*

*I feel good. I don't mind cleaning shit, and hairs, and wine stains, and ketchup smudges for the rest of the day, because I can't get out of my head the moving picture of the adorable Russian girls hiding bashfully behind their mother and smiling like angels. I'll have two of those myself someday.*

*Even Pernille jabbering at me for not doing ...well, for so many things actually that I can make a list... even she can't spoil my day.*

*In my lunch break, I go to the nearest 7-Eleven and buy two sandwiches with tuna and basil pesto. I pay with the hundred-crown bill. Wonderful sandwiches indeed! A bit out-of-date, but still the best I've ever had. While I eat them and the cold wind is blowing in my face like hell, I feel as happy as I can get.*

*This evening, I masturbate with the greatest pleasure, and then, with even more pleasure I play War Craft-3 for like five hours.*

*Before I turn off the lights, I call Mother to check on her, and I find her at some noisy party, although it's already past midnight. I can hardly hear what she's saying. But since I know her, probably it's not much... what she's saying. And she's drunk. Obviously. So I sigh and pull the sheets over my head, so that I can get the feeling that I am no longer...*

\* \* \*

*One year and 9 months ago, I am in bed with Ingrid and she is playing with my parts down there, so that she gets my dick ready for a second round, when she suddenly utters an ear-piercing laugh (or cry, I can't be sure), and pulls out her hand from beneath the sheets in such a haste as if she's been burnt, or..or...been stung by a bee.*

- What?!
- You have... urh! – She makes a disgusted face. – You have something. It's gross!

*I reach down cautiously and run my fingers along my almost fully grown dick. Can't feel anything wrong. Then I lift the sheet a bit and take a look at it. No, it's just the old faithful buddy – it's not crooked or turned blue or something.*

- What?! Ingrid?*
- You have this...third ball?*
- I have what?*

*Now I can feel it. It's smaller than the other two, but it's perfectly round in shape. My first reaction is to burst out laughing. I am officially a sex god. Who can do better than me now that I have three balls! Then, the laughing fit turns into hiccups, and the hiccups turn into sobs.*

- I have cancer.*

*Ingrid says nothing. She probably thinks the same and doesn't want to upset me more than I am right now, so she keeps silent while picking up her clothes from the floor.*

- Are you leaving already?*
- Well... you know... maybe it's better if you think this over by yourself.*
- Think this over? It won't go away only with me thinking it over!*
- Look, Matti, don't be angry with me! I have nothing to do with this ...thing, Ok? And maybe... it's me who should be angry with you because it may be something contagious and now I have it, too. Where's my purse?*

*I can't believe how stupid she is!*

*I tell my parents about the third ball over dinner. Dad stops chewing his fillet and frowns, Mom goes pale. Nanne, my sister, is oblivious to what's going on because she's too much engaged in chatting on her i-phone. She has this new... "flame", a guy almost my age, whom I already hate. I've talked to her many*

times, told her she has to be careful with him, because boys like him (and like me for that matter) think about one and only thing that is to get in some stupid teenage girl's panties. "That's OK with me!" she shrugs her shoulders as if she is about to go on the market and sell her virginous vagina for like... for nothing really, because, as far as I know, girls don't like it as a rule to do it for the first time. So, what exactly do they bargain for! Jesus! I wish I could be able to beat the shit out of this lover-boy Nanne is texting back and forth with.

My parents agree that I should get an appointment with an oncologist first thing in the morning. Dad plays it cool and says he "knows people". Of course he knows people! He is a fucking elitarian who'd suck a dick just to get a member card to some super-exclusive yacht club. "I'll call doctor Sørensen right away." "Are you sure it's a good idea, Arild? It's eight-thirty." "Damn, it's my son's life on stake here! Do you think I give a fuck what time it is?"

I don't know why the memories from back then come to me right now, when I'm trying to fall asleep. Maybe I miss father bossing everybody around. Or I simply miss having someone different than myself holding my balls...

First, I got an ultrasound testing, which, however, proved unclear, so they sent me to a CAT scan. Mom would accompany me to all procedures I had to go through, and the medical consultations, and stuff, and because she was much more scared that I was, she had to be drunk all the time. I was more preoccupied about her than about myself having a testicular cancer. Sometimes, I'd imagine a life with no testicles, and this image would haunt me for days, while waiting for the results of the next test to come out; and I felt not exactly terrified that I might lose my life, but pathetic in a way... that I was only 18 and something and (probably) already on my way to the cemetery. And I had slept with only one girl. Who had run away from my bed disgusted and worried that she might have caught some venereal disease from my would-be testicular cancer.

*They took also some blood tests to determine whether I have high levels of certain proteins indicative for cancer. While waiting for the results, Mom got herself almost unconsciously drunk. In the waiting room, I supported her not to slide down from the upholstered faux leather coach, and adjusted the silk scarf around her neck from time to time.*

- *Mrs. Matthiessen?*
- *Mom? Mom? Wake up, it's the doctor.*

*She wakes up, a little bit disorientated she may seem, but in seconds she is fully alert, although her whole body's shaking with nerves. The doctor reassures her with a smile that no traces of alpha-fetoprotein and human chorionic gonadotropin have been found in my blood samples, so it's highly improbable, by ninety-nine percent, that I have testicular cancer.*

- *Let Jesus be with you! – Mom cries out with relief, and reaches out for the doc's hand to grab and cover with kisses of divine gratitude, but he elegantly makes a step aside to avoid her snatching him by any part of the body, and says:*
- *Well, I'm Muslim, Madame, but thank you! However, I'd recommend for your son to give some sperm sample as well – just to make sure his white troops are fully armed, - at which he playfully winks at me. I dare not reply with a wink myself, so I just timidly smile. The Muslim doctor probably thinks I have no idea what troops he is talking about.*
- *Thank you, doctor, - I said the words my mother should've said if she was able to. – This means I won't get it removed?*
- *Removed? Oh no, no, it's not malignant, as I said. You can have it, hahaha. Enjoy your third ball, young man! I wished I could use at least one of my own, but alas!*
- *I will thank you.*

*They sent me to some clinic for reproductive medicine where they had my sperm tested to see if the lump had in some way affected it.*

*When Ingrid realized my third “ball” had nothing to do neither with the pimples on her chin, nor with her itching pussy, she called me eager to reconnect with me again. In bed.*

- *I can't, - I said.*
- *Why not? I'm so horny that I'm gonna suck your marrow throughout your dick.*
- *You can't, - I said in the most placid tone of voice I'm capable of.*
- *Why not? – She sounded offended.*
- *Because... Never mind, Ingrid, I simply can't see you tonight. The doctor said I had to abstain from sexual intercourse for at least 48 hours before taking the test.*
- *What exactly does this mean?*

*Uff, I have to get myself a smarter girlfriend!*

- *That means we can't have sex tonight. And... also not ever!*

*I actually surprise myself by saying that last thing. But my mind has a way of its own.*

- *Are you breaking up with me?*

*Her voice is now hesitant, uncertain.*

*I hate doing this.*

- *Yes, Ingrid, I am.*
- *Why?*
- *Look, I have to make a sandwich for my sister, so I'll hang up, OK?*



- *You fucker! You DON'T HAVE to make a sandwich for your sister, she's not four – I've seen her! You only say this as a pretext to break up with me.*
- *Exactly.*
- *So, you admit it?*
- *I admit it.*

*I'm starting to feel tired of this conversation, and of Ingrid as a whole, and I'm afraid that this too may affect in a negative way my sperm's quality. So, without troubling to offer any further explanations I hang up.*

- *Here are some magazines you might find of some use. And this plastic cup. Make sure you do your job right into it. Take your time and enjoy!*

*The lady at the clinic speaks in a detached, not exactly cold, but rather unemotional professional voice, which, however, doesn't affect me in any way. She leads me to a small, barely furnished room at the farthest end of the long corridor smelling of antiseptics, and accommodatingly opens the door for me.*

*I can come in two seconds only by thinking of coming but I give myself a couple of minutes – I surely don't want to be considered a premature-cummer! Even by the nice middle-aged nurse at the reception desk. Although I haven't even masturbated for two days, I know that even after coming up in the cup, I'll be ready to reload in twenty minutes. It's too bad there'll be no one to witness that.*

*The unemotional lady tells me my results will be ready tomorrow afternoon. Should I worry? She shrugs her shoulders. I dunno, she says, you're 18 and you're here. I guess you should be preoccupied.*

*But somehow I am not. I have this premonition I'll live forever. And it comes from my conviction that I don't even exist right now. At least not in the sense other people understand physical existence.*

\* \* \*

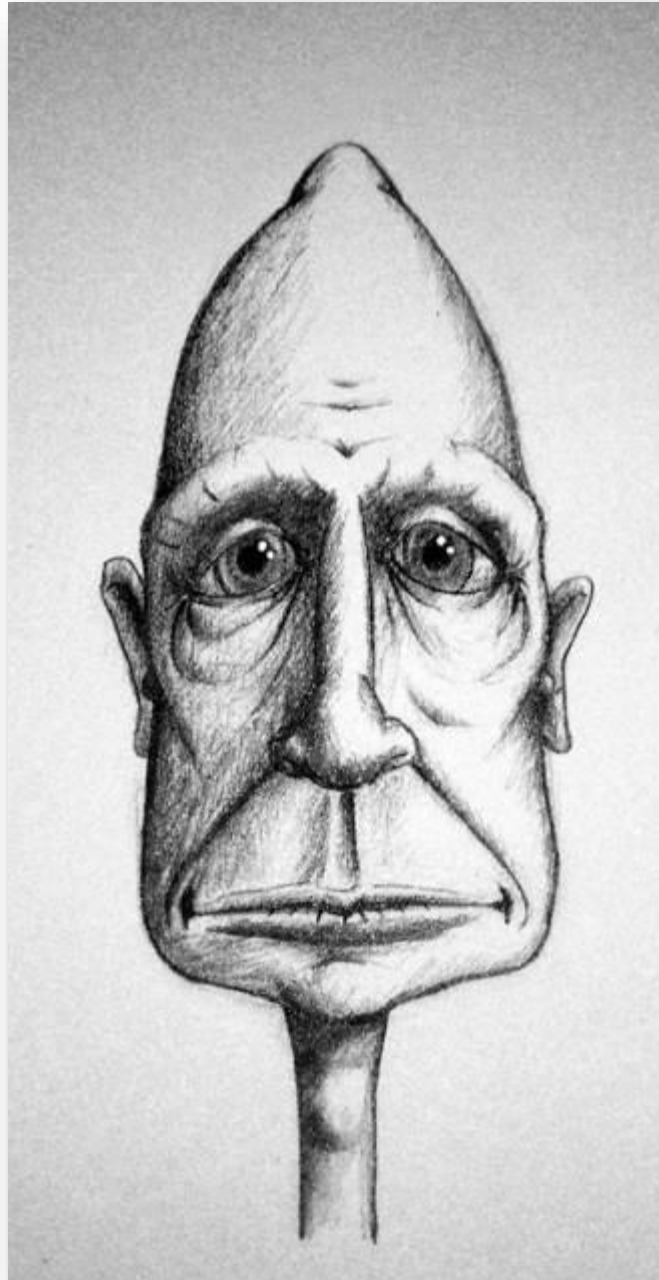
*Eventually I drift away. Tomorrow I won't be remembering any of my dreams. So, what's the use of me sleeping anyway!*

### ***Sixteenth***

*I have two days off from work in a row. I go to the library and look for some of the materials I'll need for my semester project. I haven't decided yet what to write about, that's why I am now in the library, browsing around the isles of the Art History section, idly, aimlessly. By the end of the semester, I am supposed to make a presentation on a specific subject matter, be it in the sphere of Visual Culture, Globalization, Danish Culture, and such shit.*

*I stare blankly at the loaded bookshelves and see nothing. Nothing that can possibly interest me. And I had to submit a project draft three weeks ago. Which I didn't. The professor wagged his finger in my face and said he'd make sure I wouldn't get the credits if I didn't move my ass and show him SOMETHING. So, since it's a live-or-go-to-hell question, I have no other option but to submit SOMETHING on Monday to professor Opitz, the program coordinator. I don't like him because I cannot picture him naked. Or rather, when I picture him, I get nauseated.*

*This is how I see him, Mr Opitz.*



*I am interested in aliens. I read a lot about them. But I never draw pictures of them because my mind is somehow contaminated by all those imposed images of cult characters from other worlds who look remarkably similar to humans. Klingons, for example. I, however, don't think that they are oxygen breathing bipeds. But they do exist. And I'll try to do my best to present myself as an*

*amiable earthling when they eventually come, so that I won't suffer the consequences of their justifiable rage towards our civilization. That is, I mean, when they officially come and it's over with all that vague signaling through gigantic crop circles in Guatemala and England, and lunatics with bipolar disorder claiming aliens talk to them through chips implanted in their skeletons.*

*Sometimes, when I lie in my narrow bed and listen to, let's say, Mutiny Within, I get haunted by the question how, for fuck's sake, an alien would perceive our music. I try, and try, and try to imagine that, and I fail. I also wonder if they "made" us, why they haven't uncovered themselves to us yet. There are relatively good odds about there being countless potentially-life-supporting planets in the universe, and the earth not being the only populated planet. But, see, we've received no feedback, or a clear hint that anyone else is out there, so people in general assume that we're alone, or the distance is too great for our current technology. As a result, we don't really try to communicate.*

*What if all the other aliens in the galaxy thought the same thing?*

*My mobile vibrates, and I rush to the toilets to answer because mobiles are forbidden in the library.*

*I found two other boys talking on their phones in the men's room. They squeeze in to make room for me.*

- *Matti, where the hell have you been lately, freak?*
- *Aksel, I am in the library, can't talk right now.*
- *In the lib.... Fuck! Evacuate from there as soon possible and drag your ass to Einar's place right now!*
- *Why? What's the emergency?*
- *Eighty grams of high-quality Mexican grass is the emergency, you moron! And my girlfriend has brought along two of her really easy-going*

*girlfriends, if you know what I mean. Come on, don't be a cunt at least once in your life!*

- *I have a paper project draft to submit on Monday. And you too, by the way.*
- *I have not, for I'm dropping the course.*
- *You can't.*
- *Fuck yes. And I can fly, too, if I want. In fact, I am unsubscribing myself from the university. So, we have to properly mark the occasion.*

*I'm not very enthusiastic about the whole thing, but I'm a bit preoccupied about Aksel, so I return a rueful smile to the young librarian who had offered me her help a while ago, and dart off.*

*I have a really bad feeling about me going to Einar's, but I'll accept it as a noble quest in the name of friendship and ... well... not-being-a-cunt.*

### ***Seventeenth***

*The monstrous ache is splitting my head into one burning and one completely anesthetized part.*

*I lie in my bed and dare not to set myself up straight, because I am sure I'll throw up if this happens.*

*The fucking weed! I took only three drugs, but obviously it was devilishly strong and got me well.*

*Aksel was already drunk when I arrived at the party, and when he saw me standing in the doorway, he dragged me by the sleeve into the messy room, where ten or so people were doing nice job turning themselves into pigs, pushed me on a shaky couch, and rested his top-heavy body on me. Those who were enough conscious and noticed that, cheered for Aksel and me as if they were witnessing a wedded couple's first kiss. The next thing I knew was Aksel's*

*slippery, vodka-dipped tongue into my throat. When the courtship game was over, Aksel unsteadily rose to his feet again, and announced:*

- *This is Matti, everybody! For those of you who don't know him, he is my other lover... beside this sugar cake here! – he pointed his thumb to a girl standing by a tall floor lamp lacking the lampshade, holding a Carlsberg, and sent her an air kiss. She aired kissed him back.*

*For the next hour they tried to get me drunk, and stoned, and fucked, but I found an excuse to retreat to another room where I almost stepped on a full Stars Wars DVD collection. I quietly closed the door and set Attack of the Clones into the player.*

*I had watched one-third of the film, when Aksel's girl uncovered my secret lair and without saying a word, started undressing herself with one hand, while burying the fingers of the other one into my hair and forcing my head towards hers.*

*My mobile vibrates. I grope for it trying not to move my head.*

- *It's me.*

*It's Aksel.*

- *Are you awake?*
- *Hi, Aksel, almost. What's up?*
- *And I thought you were a cunt! How could I not know I've been nourishing a serpent in my bosom all this time...? A serpent that is... a venomous beast that serpent is... which is like... eating me from within... the serpent... that is you, Matthiessen!*

*I say nothing because Aksel's phone monologues are often meaningless and there's no point in interrupting his wise saying.*

- *Do you understand what I'm telling you, dick? – He raises his voice and now it sounds strangely threatening, the reason behind which is a pure mystery to me.*
- *No, I don't.*

*I truly don't.*

- *Did you or did you not fuck my girlfriend?*

*Aha, that's what it the angry voice and the serpent metaphor were for.*

- *No, I did not.*
- *Serpent!*
- *Can we talk about this later, Aksel, my head is killing me right now.*
- *It'll be me though who'll kill you for sure. Not your fucking head.*
- *Look, Aksel, I didn't fuck her, OK? She wanted to... - maybe I shouldn't have said that! – but she was drunk and you were in the other room, and I pushed her, well... not pushed – pushed as in make her fall or something, just I told her to...*

*Actually, what I said was that I was not interested in having sex with her right now, when Obi-Wan was about to track Jango and his son Boba to Geonosis, where a new droid army was being created, but she kept on sticking her tits into my face, so I had to tell her that I don't find her attractive, “and besides, I never go to bed with girls I haven't even spoken to”. And then pushed her slightly aside. But she was drunk, so she lost balance, and bumped her head in the wall, which was a humiliating thing to watch, but this is how it was. She must have gotten a lump on her forehead and in order to explain its occurrence to Aksel, as well as to gratify her own wounded pride, she must have told him a distorted version of the event.*

- *Anne will never lie to me! Tell me the truth, you ...you... serpent... you despicable other's-girlfriends-seducer.*

*I hang up and decide to stay dead for the rest of the Saturday. And possibly work on my project draft. I am considering writing about the Skagen Painters – as banal as the topic may sound to some, it still has a lot to offer. Besides, just like Peder Krøyer, I am also mesmerized by the light of the evening at the Skagen's beach, which makes the water and sky seem to optically merge. When I last went there two summers ago, the light didn't seem to have changed since he painted it in 1899.*

*Unexpectedly enough, later today I feel better and I play Cataclysm instead of writing about the Skagen Painters.*

### ***Twentieth***

*Pernille wanted me to take the eleven-o'clock shift, but I insisted on having my afternoon free as we had agreed last week, so I could attend Franic's class. I haven't seen her for two weeks because of her conference in Rome and me missing some classes. I knew she would again ignore me big time (as she always does), and would prefer to listen to her own voice. Or to Adam's voice, which seems to be most pleasing to her ear. Adam is a „late bloomer“, as Franic herself refers to him; he enrolled at the university when he was 34, before that, he explained, he lived in the Emirates and other exotic places. I didn't listen attentively when he was telling his life's story to the romantically inclined Barbies gathered around him; I only happened to hear that he has officially recognized seven children born to six different women, to none of whom he has ever been married.*

*I play with my pen while waiting for Franic to enter the room – a graceful, consciously seductive, yet highly a condescending and even arrogant kind of Sharon-Stone-in-Basic-Instinct appearance, which, as a rule, gives you the*



*creeps. And when she casts her empty lake-like blue eyes over the classroom, it's like a heavy Roman cohort crashing down the enemies' bones, and you can literally hear the Iron Man introductory music theme by Mathew Libatique throbbing inside your head.*

*I keep nervously clicking my pen but at one point I just stop. Because, even before I know that for sure, I sense she's not coming.*

*Then the head of the department comes in and informs us professor Franic is in a hospital and will be off for a while. Some sigh with relief, others pretend to be worried about her health, but it's only Adam who actually raises his voice and asks what is wrong with her.*

- *I am not supposed to reveal to you this kind of information, I'm sorry. But I can assure you her life is not endangered anymore, as it was in the first 24 hours after her hospitalization. You will be further notified about the future rescheduling of your classes.*

*So, this is it.*

*She's not coming. She's sick. Gravely, as we understand from the head's brief and callous matter-of-fact announcement.*

*That's too bad. I had this intention to finally start a conversation with her after classes; block her way to the women's toilet or something, so that she won't be able to duck me again, as she did so many times before. I wanted to talk to her about a movie she may be interested in seeing, now that I know her secret passion for movies... But she's sick, and twenty-four hours ago maybe dying. And that was when I was playing War Craft 3 with some guys from Manchester, who probably looked uglier than me. And I ate seven chocolate muffins, and then a bowl of quick Chinese-style vermicelli (which tasted like damp toilet paper, but I had nothing else at hand and was too tired to go to the local store*

*and buy food), and then a strawberry yoghurt, which was stale, but I didn't quite realized that before I had to rush to the toilet and see that my shit was coming out in the form of piss.*

*I put my pen in my old weather-beaten pigskin bag (which once belonged to my grandfather, the rabbit-hunter) and look around the room as if I'm four and I'm lost.*

## Twentieth

I finally come to myself. It's a gruesome awakening from horrid dreams and a feverish wandering between consciousness and sub-reality. I was a flat liner but now I'm back and I'm not sure if I want to be here anymore. I still feel nauseated, my joints ache, and my parotid glands are still pretty much swollen, but at least I stopped vomiting. Chills have gone, too. So has my desire to live. I guess, in a moment of physical distress, a human being like myself will always feel that way. The reason being that one is not in control. And what is even worse is that now I look at my face in the concave part of a hospital spoon and I see a stupid face. A face of a failure.

Nurse Stockman comes in to take my temperature. I want to tell her that I have no temperature whatsoever because I am a non-person, but I cannot force myself to utter a single word.

- Soon you'll be out of here, I heard your doctors talking in the canteen an hour ago, - she said in an uncalled-for optimistic voice. – I guess your relatives will give you a heartwarming welcoming party. This is what they usually do when somebody has been that close to...

Yes, right, go ahead, you stupid cow, say it: "Close to death"! But you won't, will you? Because it doesn't sound that op-ti-mis-tic!

- Well, have a goodnight sleep!

And she turns off the main light. Only the slightly lime-green fluorescent lamp above my bed's headboard keeps buzzing.

I close my eyes slowly and open them even more slowly, then close them again, and open them again in a tranquilizing slow-motion rhythm – it feels like breathing through the eyeballs.

In my hectic dream, I float in the ether to reach that spot of eternal stupidity I happened to find myself six days ago...

## **Fourteenth**

Today I am supposed to take the 16:35 Alitalia plane to Rome. The electronic ticket is folded into four and is tucked among the pages of my passport. My Ralph Lauren travel bag is fully packed and ready to serve me with its beautiful content whenever I need it. I always pack light but extremely functional. And I always have clothes for any occasion at hand. I can never be caught by surprise, no matter if it's the weather or an accidentally spilt glass of red wine. I don't know how I do it! It's a miracle, they may say, but I claim it's more of an inclination to foretelling.

It's Wednesday and I have informed the faculty well ahead about my one-week absence.

I call a cab and while waiting, write a brief note to Siri, who has left early in the morning. As always! For a girl her age and with decent looks, she has an unorthodox liking for going to school and doing uninteresting and unthreatening her physical health things. The drumming for the metal band she's in doesn't really count because she's sitting most of the time and nobody expects from her to bite off the heads of flying mammals or climb on the shoulders of the bass-player.

The note says:

Off to Rome.

Don't burn down the apartment!

And use a condom in case you decide to part with your virginity!

Auntie

P.S. Don't feed the pigeons!

I guess that's enough for a responsible adult supervision on my part. I head for the door, but then change my mind, go back and strike out the condom-sentence. After all, I'm not her mother, so in case she gets pregnant, I won't be responsible for the baby as well. However, before the apartment becomes all mine on paper, I am definitely responsible for it. Here's the clear-cut difference between a condom and a burning cigarette abandoned by some long-haired metalhead on a sofa pillow.

When I get into the cab, I surprise myself by saying "Take me to Bar Duo" instead of "Kastrup Airport".

At 15:50, Bar Duo is not properly open yet but they know me there, so Margret, the chief concierge, lets me in and personally pours me a drink without even asking what the reason might be for me standing at the doorway with a Ralph Lauren travel bag in my hand. Margret is a friend. Although I won't quite classify a person who pours you a drink prior to a bar's opening hour a friend... But in this particular case she is such. Margret knows me because the bar is not far from the science faculty building, so I often come here. Now I prefer to arrange my thoughts over a strawberry daikiri, which I take mostly as a diuretic. I have to stay sober if I want to accomplish what I have to accomplish.

And this has nothing to do with the conference in Rome.

- So early? No classes?

Margret tries to keep it casual, as if she doesn't see what she sees, and that is me on the verge of committing a crime.

- No classes, - I answer as if under hypnosis, - just having some time to kill.

Margret nods with understanding. I take out my mobile phone and send a message to Sahar Ardabili: “Meet me after work, say at 6, at Bistro Pastis. Ira”. The content of the message is simple and out-of-matter because it’s intended not to arouse suspicion – neither in Sahar’s mind, nor in his burning loins. He knows I often go to Pastis – by myself or with Framboise, so the place shouldn’t seem to him as coming from nowhere. Of course, there’s the possibility for him to smell a fat rat – why on earth would I suddenly decide I want to go out on a date with him? But I have to take this chance if I want to have the bio-chemical lab all to myself. Whatever happens, I have a decent alibi – most of my colleagues know I am flying to Rome, and meanwhile the lab assistant is shaking with nerves while waiting for me to appear at a French bistro quite distant from the Science Department building. I may be a beginner in crime but I sure am no fool.

Two hours and four vodka-martinis later I am not that sober I wish I could be, but I am sober enough to be attentively spying on Sahar from behind a delivery van at the Science Department parking lot. He throws his bag on the front passenger’s seat of his Volvo and gets behind the wheel. Although the lot is dim-lighted I can see his lips moving, he must be nervously talking to himself.

I can easily open the lab because I know Sahara’s password to the electronic system. It’s “Lemonade”.

I should have been in my hotel room in Rome right now. Drinking chianti and considering with a skeptical eye what a breathtaking dress to wear at the opening party. But instead, I find myself in a sterilized laboratory, feeling my way through expensive technical appliances, freezers containing samples of hostile-to-humans microorganisms, and massive filing-cabinets.

Using the display of my mobile as a flashlight I light up the glass cells. The rats shuffle troubled and disoriented by the blue glow.

- Hello, my dears, - I whisper and gently unhook the side door of one of the cells. I quickly pick a rat to be the first liberated. It's an albino rat! He is medium size and with the most mesmerizing red eyes. I insert my gloved hand into the cell. My intention is to transfer all the rats into my travel bag, which I had emptied before leaving Bar Duo. Margret gave me black garbage bags, so I could put my stuff in them (including the two staggering cocktail dresses I had packed earlier this morning with the greatest of care but now I care little about). I hope my grey little friends will feel comfy in a Ralph Lauren. Everybody does!

I wrap my fingers tenderly around the stout body of the albino and start pulling him out of the cell. Suddenly, he twists violently to the left and sticks his sharp teeth into my hand. I drop the mobile, it clings on the glazed floor and falls apart into three parts. The prospective liberated rat is now truly liberated because there's nowhere I can see him. I even switch on the lights, but still nothing. The other captives-to-the-science are now in total turmoil - they must have sensed that some kind of a revolution has been instigated. Unsuccessful so far.

At first, I feel nothing, but when I take off my glove I see the skin around the deep punctures growing red and swollen. I freeze for ten seconds to reconsider the present situation – should I continue the crusade, or should I walk out? I've already lost a warrior – the God's most beloved one has misunderstood my intentions and has decided to take up the battle against the oppressor on his own.

I pick the miserable remains of my mobile phone from the floor, turn off the lights and retreat.

I wash out with soap and water my wounded hand in one of the toilets on the first floor and with shaky fingers try to reconnect the pieces of the phone. The moment I do this it starts ringing. I stare at the display. It's Sahar.

- Yes?
- Yes, hello. It's Sahar Ardabili.
- I know.
- Have you forgotten about our... - he is not certain whether to use the word "date", - our appointment?
- No, I haven't, Sahar, but I had a minor accident, so I might be late. Or not coming at all.
- What's wrong?

God, he sounds genuinely concerned. And that's after having to wait in vain for more than an hour in a crowded French bistro, where, he certainly doesn't feel at ease, because it's far from the cozy familiar environment of the Arabian joints drenched in the heavy smell of coffee beans, falafel and rancid butter.

- I fell.
- How? Where?
- In the bathroom.
- Are you OK?
- I think I've dislocated my... elbow.
- Do you want me to come over?
- What??
- I know where you live.
- NO!
- Why not? You sound upset. I'll be there in ten.
- I said no, Sahar!
- Does this mean that our appointment is cancelled? Or just postponed?
- Sahar, I have to take care of my elbow. Bye.

Actually I do feel my elbow stiff and aching. And the whole arm, as a matter of fact, right up to the shoulder. I hurry back to Bar Duo, I instinctively keep my



bitten hand tightly pressed to my chest as if it's bleeding heavily. It is not, but I can feel my pulse throughout its vein system.

It's almost 10 and I sneak home like a burglar with a disfigured face. Siri's there, obviously NOT waiting for me to come home because I am supposed to be in Rome, remember?

- What are you doing HERE?

I find the little slut in bed (where else!). Not cuddling with a boy, though. These are girl's feet, as far as I can tell at the dim light of her room. Correction. My room!

- I'm sick. I didn't go to Rome. And good evening to your guest. And mine, since it's my apartment... no matter what you've told her!
- This is Rhea.

Rhea uncovers her head from under my jungle print bed sheets. She sure looks embarrassed, but in the main, she looks like someone who's just had an orgasm. Or two.

Siri, however, doesn't seem bothered at all by my sudden arrival, she gets out of the bed, all naked as she is, and approaches me with a genuinely concerned look into her eyes.

- What's wrong with your hand?
- Let me see! – She reaches out in what seems to me an attempt to stroke me. - Did you fall?
- Don't touch me, Siri!

I am shaking with pain and nerves, and more pain, and repugnance, and... and... and *ire*, of course. But, basically, it all comes down to simple pain.

- Fine! – She raises arms in surrender. – Don’t take it on me if you had a shitty day! Because mine was GREAT, you know!

I turn my back to the lovely couple and head to the kitchen, where I hope to find some peace and quiet, and not so much of teenage bodily fluids smeared all over my expensive bed sheets. Siri’s voice follows me through the slamming doors:

- I’ve made cheese buns!

I don’t care about her fucking cheese buns. I eat some vodka for supper and pour some more on my bitten hand.

## **Eighteenth**

I thought I could get away with only properly rinsing the wounds. I remember from when I was little that whenever I dropped a bubble gum, a toffee or a pastel crayon on the floor, my mother would pick it up with a graceful casualness and dip it into her glass of whatever she was having at the moment – gin, white wine, triple martini. “Now it’s worms-free and you can put it back into your mouth without worrying that you’re going to die. You’ll never die, my love! Do you hear me! I won’t let you die! At least not of worms!”

And because mothers know best, I must have subconsciously picked it up from her – that habit of drenching things in alcohol to cleanse them “from worms”. After all, I figured, how come two tiny little holes, hardly visible, be life-threatening!

After the misfortunate attempt to liberate the rats, I stayed at home for 48 straight hours. My phone rang and rang and rang and kept ringing till the battery finally ran down. I had missed calls from Astrid, the Dean’s office, and some unknown numbers, some of which beginning with +39, which meant that somewhere in the heart of Rome a diligent academic administrator with sweaty spots under her arms had been worried sick that I didn’t show up at the

registration procedure before the first conference session. And there were missed calls from Sahar (twenty-seven, to be precise). I wondered if he'd crept around our neighborhood waiting for me to show up at the window sill and let my braided hair fall all the way down the brick wall, so that he could use it as a rope and climb up to my chambers. And another question that plagued my feverish mind: Did he find the runaway albino? Or maybe Sahar was careless enough to trample it to death with his ugly crocs.

This morning I woke up with fever, all sweaty, my teeth chattering. Tried to call out for Siri, but only a cracked "Srrrrrrgrrrrrr" came out of my throat. Before even trying to crawl out of the bed, I got a stomach muscular spasm and vomited into my lap. On my second attempt to leave the now stinking bed, an excruciating pain in both my elbows and my knees knocked me on the floor.

Then, a totally irrelevant thought struck me: I hadn't bothered to change the sheets after my niece's satyric recreation activities the other day. It's not that I'm not squeamish. In fact, I am very much squeamish, only I was too sick and tired at the moment to care about the bed sheets. Now, it didn't matter anymore if these were fresh sheets or a girl with a slightly olive skin had squirted in them.

It's past 2 p.m. on a very cold Sunday afternoon and it's quite probable that I will die till the end of the day. Siri must have left while I was still asleep. If she cared to have checked on me before leaving, she would have seen me all wriggling and delirious. I wouldn't know how death felt. But this must be it. Death.

I call an ambulance; they ask me about the symptoms. Fever, vomiting (I hardly squawk the words), joint aches. I stare with red, watery eyes at the inflamed skin around the two punctured wounds on my hand, a rash that appears purple has also spread around the area. Besides, I say, I have this rash on my hand where...

where a rat bit me two days ago. The lady on the other side says with a detached, informative voice that they're sending an ambulance in two minutes.

I wrap myself in a blanket and strain my ears to hear the siren of the approaching ambulance.

Such a disappointment. The ambulance arrived quietly.

### ***Twentieth***

*I go home, I am starving but an uncommon feeling slightly displaces the overbearing hungry monster that lives inside my bottomless stomach. To put it simple, I am a little heart-broken by the news of Mrs. Franic being in a hospital for God-knows-what reason. I only hope she wasn't hit by a truck that will leave her disfigured till the rest of her life, or mentally hindered or something because it'll be a great loss since she's so everything – smart, and pretty, and independent, and... well, everything, no matter what the other schmucks say behind her back.*

*I open the fridge and I find a bottle of ketchup, two slices of the Sunday-night Margarita, each of them separately wrapped in plastic folio, a bunch of white grapes gone almost brown and rotten, some apples, a half-squeezed tube of caviar spread (it's not really a caviar, you know, because it was cheap, I guess it's some vaguely caviar-flavored mayonnaise shit), and something that I bought from the deli the other night on my way home from the hotel, but obviously hadn't finished for some reason, which looks totally eatable even now.*

*Now, that I take a second bite of what, at a closer look, seems to have been a falafel wrap in its previous life, I remember why I didn't finish it.*

*I check who's online on Skype. My sister, for example. I ask her how Mom is doing, but she doesn't have time for a "gibberish chat"; she's going out with girlfriends, so unless I am not willing to lend her a 500 "for this cute pair of*

*jeans at Abercrombie & Fitch", she'd better run. Then run as fast as you can, I say, because I am not willing at all to give you money.*

*Before falling asleep, I do my special masturbation technique that gives me an exploding orgasm without cumming. I've been exercising to do that for a couple of months now. First, my spirit was almost crushed by the repetitive failure but I kept trying because I enjoy jerking very much, but I certainly don't like the deadness I experience for several hours, and sometimes for even more than a day after cumming. But eventually I, single-handedly (ha-ha, so not metaphorically said in this particular case!), arrived at the secret. You don't tease the head, you even try not to touch your dick. Instead you can fool around a little with the balls, and then find your way through your prostate. You can totally arouse it from the outside, without sliding your fingers inside your butt (although I've tried this, too and I even touched it – it felt like a round bulb of tissue or something). You can also stimulate by rubbing other parts of your hole and I'm talking full blown huge orgasms without a hard-on.*

*When I first start rubbing the area, I go slow... tiny movements at this stage is all I need, I'm trying to get that first "hit" from some great hormone that is released and somehow it shoots all through my body in a second. Now I can keep this up for as long as I like. Then I push with my fingers on the part between my balls and hole. The orgasm starts in the spine and the bowels muscles – I can feel a solid spasm where the solar plexus is. I start speeding up the rubbing and as it builds I get my pumping motion going with the inside bowels muscles and inner thighs... all my core strength stuff... it's great. There is a point where it feels like I've been able to "milk" my prostate. I sort of feel liquid that gets released and I change pace and easily go into orgasm.*

*Right after orgasm I like to stimulate the tip of my soft dick to encourage all the wonderful after shocks and enjoy a "pre-cum" ejaculation, which I spread over the tip of my dick. I don't always produce pre-cum and it's just a tiny amount but*

*somehow the pre-cum "validates" my orgasms...completes them mentally, if you want.*

### ***Twenty-first***

*Professor Franic has been taken to Riget.*

*After I'm done with my shift at the hotel, I take the bus to Tagensvej. I'm not sure which ward she is in, so I go to the ER reception desk and ask the receptionist about her. She asks if I'm a relative. I say, yes, a nephew, I live in Velje in the south, I am coming to visit her, and what do I find? What, echoes the black receptionist staring at me with big, black African eyes. I'll tell you what I find – everything, but my beloved auntie. So, seeing me desperate and roofless, and hungry, and fragile in age as I am, a nosy neighbor is that nice and cooperative to inform me that she'd been taken to the hospital almost two days before. But she's been kept in the dark by the rude paramedics about her condition, that's why she can't possibly tell me what kind of medical emergency that might have been. Could be anything – from food poisoning to stroke!, she says, lowering her voice as if she's afraid that by saying this aloud, she might inflict an irreparable tragedy on my poor aunt's health. And she'd die because of her.*

*So, here I am, trying to figure out what has happened to aunty, scared and still hungry. Famished, as a matter of fact.*

*You're here to see your aunt just because you want to get access to her fridge? the receptionist suspiciously and pretty much accusingly squints her otherwise heartwarming mesmerizing African eyes. "No! Fuck no!" She shushes me!*

*Yes, sorry, I apologize, I shouldn't be swearing in a place like that.*

*No, you shouldn't!*

*Well, will you check now where they took her after she was hurried to the ER the other day?*

*No, she won't.*

*You should've been born a slave to some bestial slave-owner in South Carolina, lady! I hear myself saying on my way out of the reception hall. I undertake a reverse withdrawal because I want to be fearlessly gazing into her heartwarming, yet inhumanly arctic-cold eyes till the very last second, so that she would shiver at the memory of my reproachful look when she goes to bed tonight and tries to fall into a peaceful sleep.*

*I return home, throw my wet jacket on the nearest chair (there's been raining and snowing simultaneously out there, the nastiest of all precipitation combinations there is!), I'm cold, and soaked, and famished (now on the verge of actually killing with my bare hands a deer if one happens to ring the doorbell right now), but rage is topping all of these, and I fall down into the sagging sofa, my butt hits the under-cushions springs and I want to be that wicked-nature slave-owner from the American South who'd break the receptionist's bones one by one.*

*I go online on Skype and in the add-contact field; I type "Ira Franic". "Skype name not found". I try with just "Franic", and with no space between the two names – "IraFranic", and with "Ira" and her year of birth (I checked her academic bio on the Department Staff info site) – "Ira1972", and "Ira\_72", and "Franic\_1972", and finally I typed "irafuckyou", but still I got the same result: "Skype name not found".*

*You are not on Facebook, Google+, Twitter, MSN, not even on LinkedIn!*

*I decide to go back to the hospital.*

*It's past 11 p.m. and it'll take a miracle or a kamikaze to let me in.*

*The receptionist is different, a guy this time, not much older than myself, so I decide to take a chance and talk to him after he's done processing on his computer the admission papers of a drunk patient with an open wound from falling down the subway escalators. I don't know what exactly my tactics is going to be, all I know is that I hate not finding professor Franic online.*

*The receptionist looks and acts tired although his shift must have started only one or two hours ago, so absent-mindedly he listens to my clumsy explanations, and when I lapse into silence, he says, "I can give you her phone number."*

- *You'll give me her number just like that?!*

*I am so stunned that I almost sound insulted and critical.*

- *Do you want it or not? – It's obvious the guy doesn't give a fuck whether I'll treat him with a candy for the information or pull a gun and shoot him between the eyes.*
- *Sure I do.*

*He writes down the number on a post-it and pastes it on the back of my hand resting on his desk.*

- *She's your lover?*
- *Wha...no!*
- *Then why the urgency, man?*
- *It's just... I got upset because I couldn't find her on the Facebook.*
- *She may be one of those wackos, who don't own a TV, hate internet and recycle even their toe nails, man, that's why she's not on the Facebook, - the guy shakes his head disapprovingly, and goes back to his computer. I don't exist for him anymore.*



*I dial the number while pacing down the street, under the naked crowns of the chestnut trees dripping with rain water.*

## **Twenty-first**

I have a streptobacillosis form of rat-bite fever. If untreated, doctor Halvorsen (“but call me Thor, please!”) said, you could have had a septic shock and die. He actually pronounced it with a prolonged vocal as if he’s an exorcist and due to his divine intervention the evil spirit has left my body.

They treat me with erythromycin. Because of the rapid and unfavorable progress of the infection, they intend to keep me under close medical surveillance for the next seven days. Why? I can take my erythromycin shots also at home (along with some tequila shots, which I have no intention to declare). “Because!” is the sullen answer. They insisted on investigating the circumstances at which I got bitten, and I lied, of course. I couldn’t just tell them I broke into a bio-chemical laboratory in a heroic, yet doomed to failure attempt to liberate the lab rats, my brothers.

Fine, I surrender. Treat me! Dress me in cheap hospital pajamas! Feed me pea puree! But do give me a phone, for God’s sake!

I called Siri yesterday and told her to bring me my sunglasses and my laptop.

- Anything else? Don’t you need some underwear? Your toothbrush?
- Don’t drivel! If you feel guilty for being a lesbian, don’t, because I don’t really care. Just do not talk as if you care whether I have clean underwear on or not.
- You should’ve been bitten by an alligator, bitch, not by some rat!
- Find me an alligator in Copenhagen and bring it in here...bitch, and then we’ll talk again!

Despite my spiteful language Siri insisted on seeing me, so they let her in.

- You look awful, Ira! As if a rat has bitten you...
- I appreciate the irony attempt, although it's as pathetic as you are yourself, Siri! Give me my laptop!

She looks fresh; her coat smells of acid rain and her favorite pizza place, where she must have spent the last hour or so. Right on my bed sheets, she unloads her heavy 1.500-crown suede shopper bag (which is mine actually, but Siri never pays enough attention when rummaging in the wardrobes looking for something "comfy" to wear... or bear), and I can see my Vaio almost falling down. She, however, is swift-handed and averts the crisis.

- And I've brought you also your phone. Here!
- Oh, this! Sure...
- Ira?
- What?
- I am sorry that I wasn't at home when you felt bad...the other day.
- It doesn't matter. The only thing you could've done anyway was to call 112 for me.

She makes a frail attempt to smile at me. The look on my bloodless, somber face, however, makes her change her mind.

- OK. Then I'd better go. Unless you don't want me to do something else for you. No? That's what I thought. Call me if...
- I know... I will. You're my only available relative anyway.

This time she allows herself a full smile. Which I again decide to break into two by saying:

- And don't you or your girlfriend dare touch my liquor cabinet.
- You don't have a liquor cabinet!

- It doesn't matter how I call the cupboard where I keep my bottles. Still you're not supposed to touch it. Because... well, you're under 18 in the first place.
- Whatever, - Siri rolls her eyes.

After she leaves, I lie back on the repulsively lemon-scented sanitized pillow and surrender myself to an after-feverish oblivion. I deserve it. My oblivion.

I must have slept for hours. The wretched Nokia is the executioner of my innocent dream. 14 minutes past 11. And nobody has come for the past five hours to check if I'm dead or alive!

- Hello?

Or maybe they have and, given my light-as-a-dove-feather breathing, concluded I was still alive and let me sleep on.

- Ira, hi. It's me again.
- Siri, I am in a hospital! People shouldn't be bothered at that hour when in hospital.
- I know, I know... Listen, I've given you my phone by mistake. You should've bought me different than yours! Anyway...So, I'm calling from yours just to warn you in case you receive some strange calls.
- How strange?
- Like ....I don't know... Migé from the band, for example! Farting in the phone...
- I see.
- Tomorrow I'll come before school and we'll switch.
- Fine. Good night now.
- Ira? One more thing.

I need to ring the nurse to bring me juice or something. My lips are cracked and ache.

- Some kid from your class called a minute ago. That's how I realized I have your phone. By the way, I gave him your Skype name – it was an emergency, he said. Some delayed class paper.
- Stupid girl!
- Good night.

### ***Twenty-second***

*The digits 00:34 are glowing in red on my alarm clock.*

*I am again in my fortress of no hope, the cold den I return back to every evening.*

*I type “Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath” in the Skype name entry box and write down my request-an-invitation message: “Hello, professor Franic, I am student 7030 from your Philosophy class and I’d appreciate it if you accept me as your Skype friend”. I delete the last word and substitute it with “contact”.*

*Send.*

*In just 30 seconds, professor Franic’s nickname appears in green on my contact list. She has accepted my invitation! I greet her with a You-Tube link of a local band’s performance. This is a risky step, but I take the plunge because, frankly, I don’t know how to start a conversation. Especially with her. And especially now, when she’s in a hospital. It will be a massive lame masterstroke to begin by asking her about her diagnosis. Fortunately for me, it’s her who starts the conversation and I can clearly sense the blow of annoyance in her opening line.*

*[00:35:22] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: 7030? Was it you who called my niece and stole private information from her?*

*[00:35:58] Cataclysm\_Child : Do you like Mercenary?*

*[00:36:30] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: You didn't answer my question, but, yes, as a matter of fact, I do. Happy?*

*[00:36:44] Cataclysm\_Child: ☺*

*[00:36: 48] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: You wanted something particular?*

*[00:37:13] Cataclysm\_Child: Well..yes, and no ☺*

*[00:37:28] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: I'm not into dualistic statements.*

*[00:37:49] Cataclysm\_Child: why not? nothing can be either black or white, positive or negative...*

*[00:37:57] Cataclysm\_Child: Nothing is what it seems 2 be. ☺*

*[00:38:16] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Would you please stop with the smiley faces!*

*[00:38:17] Cataclysm\_Child: i'll stop if you are willing to listen to one piece by Mercenary, it's from their 2006 album, the better one than Metamorphosis, I'm guessing.*

*[00:39:01] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Yes, yes, I know... The time when René Pedersen filled in the void left by Kral...what was his real name? Andersen?*

*[00:39:11] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Benny Andersen?*

*[00:39:29] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: No. Henrik Andresen. Old man Henrik "Kral" Andersen!!!*

*[00:40:02] Cataclysm\_Child: dude i'm impressed!*

*[00:40:30] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Look, Matthiessen, you were still in the kindergarten with big globs of snot hanging out your nose when I was listening to their First Breath, playing hide-and-go-get-it with some friends in my then rented apartment.*

*[00:41:58] Cataclysm\_Child: you know my name?????????*

*[00:42:02] Cataclysm\_Child: (This message has been removed)*

*[00:42:08] Cataclysm\_Child: sorry sorry, these were smilies*

*[00:44:15] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Of course I know your name.*

*[00:44:17] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: (This message has been removed)*

*[00:44:17] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: (This message has been removed)*

*[00:44:44] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Look, Matthiessen, I have to go. I'm not well.*

*[00:44:48] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: See you in class next week.*

## **Twenty-second**

It's early in the morning. I dare not move. A nurse has just checked on my bandaged hand and wrote something down into her white and shiny medical tablet.

I dart a secretive glance at my non-white but shiny laptop.

When the nurse leaves, I defrost myself, reach for it and place it on my lap. Go online on Skype and reread my short conversation with Cataclysm\_Child from yesterday. Right now, however, he is in a do-not-disturb mode. Probably he is at the university. Or doing some kids' stuff. Like smoking grass. Or fucking a roommate while she's still sleeping in a drunken stupor.

It's late at night.

Siri was here several hours ago, accompanied by some kid with pock marks on his cheeks; seemed a little bit like the young Calvin Klein, but no, “he’s Migé from the band.” I see, I said, so this is Migé the Farter. Siri’s arms sank to her sides in a shameful helplessness to beat my tactless remark. “Brought you your mobile phone. Here!” Thanks, you shouldn’t have bothered. “Alas, I did so!” she exclaimed. And then she said I looked better. As if she cared... The Farter thought it was polite to confirm her words, so he did confirm that I looked well, although he had never seen me before – nor when I was 32, neither in the first 24 hours after I was bitten by the albino rat. But probably she does care, because if I had died (which, given the circumstances was highly probable, as doctor Halvorssen put it), she would have been placed with some foster family and almost certainly been made to wash the dishes or walk the foster parents’ other children, still toddlers, in the park. Or been fucked by the foster daddy in the semi-darkness of her new bedroom, lit only by a kitschy super cute lady-bird mini table lamp that is supposed to keep the monsters away.

I hesitate for some seconds before typing: “Matthiessen, how’s life on your planet?”

Twenty minutes pass, but the red do-not-disturb sign doesn’t turn a hair.

I am almost asleep when Cataclysm\_Child flashes a message.

[00:13:02] Cataclysm\_Child: as usual, you know, the Little Prince stands alone and only the sad talking fox keeps him company ☺ ☺

And for the first time since the creation of the universe my face cracks a smile.

## **Twenty-fifth**

Let me put it that way: my chat sessions with Cataclysm\_Child have made my hospital sojourn less monotonous. It’s not that I have something against monotony, it’s the hospital. Show me a person who loves spending one’s days in

a hospital (doctors and personnel do not count), and I'll tell you this one is seriously disturbed, and with no chances whatsoever to find a cure.

7030, Matthiessen that is, has been a torchlight in the darkest of nights, a piece of bread for the starving, a tequila shot for a raging alcoholic in the state of severe abstinence crisis.

He told me he used to be as outgoing as he could be. In his school years. A real people person. (And these statements all should be in inverted commas, indicating that I can't get any more sardonic than this!)

In high school, he felt like a mouse, which gets trapped into the snake's cage and just sits there, frozen, trying to blend in. He might have been happy when he was a kid, though... Back when you just naturally expect good things to happen to you. Before you get your heart being broken for the first time.

Now Matthiessen just expects the worst. And tries not to get his hopes up. I've never encountered anybody of his type for quite some time now. I haven't even given this type a proper name. That is why I'll just plagiarize. Matthiessen has never been, according to his own words, "a quality anything": not a quality son, not a quality mate, not a quality boyfriend, not a quality hire, not even a quality student, not a quality anything. And that's because "I can hardly find anything that can truly captivate my attention".

You know, it's not that he thinks he's too good for anything. On the contrary, his innate prudence leads him to one place only, and that is his own soul. This is the place where he finds solace.

He is very much into conspiracy theories. He, for example, believes that we are all holograms ruled by humanoid reptiles, which are incarnation of evil.

It's so cute!

That is seriously... so-o-o cute that I am about to throw up.



Reptiles? Somebody took a photo of the British Queen with a dark spot on the side of her neck and this makes her a reptile offspring that has been sent to Earth with a vicious mission?

On Friday afternoon, on YouTube I watched four hours of ...no, let me repeat this – FOUR HOURS of this cuckoo guy, David Icke, giving a motivation public speech in...I don't know...was it New Zealand? Matthiessen recommended him. Warmly! He was like, "you HAVE to see that guy. He's amazing. And then you'll know for sure how I feel about the world we live in." OK, I said to myself, I'll give that guy a chance; I have no laundry to attend to...

And I forced myself to watch the whole video, and got sick and tired, and learned nothing new and exciting about "the world we live in", and on the following day I talk to the boy, and he admits, laughing hysterically at my stupidity probably, that he himself had seen only the first seven minutes.

What else?

Oh yes! Matthiessen believes the world is full of "jankholes" (is this even a real word?!), but he also believes there are purists out there, and actually that's why he's been so persevering in his attempts to get to talk to me... outside the classroom. Do I buy this? That there's someone who thinks I'm a purist? I don't think so. But let's see where this is going to take me. Take us!

My first guess is that he has some kind of an emotional disorder. Honestly, he does not behave the way his peers do. But then I ask myself, what is normal? Who is expected to draw up the definition of what is normal and what is not? Is it God? Is Andrei Chikatilo, the Russian serial killer? Or is it the 9-year old that's playing in the back yard of his gay parents' Victorian house? I don't know that.

Besides, there's his passion for music. He listens to mostly melodic death metal, and when I say "listen", I mean that he really *listens* to it. He often cites lyrics. About the illusion of the world we live in. Very Platonic indeed, only he doesn't know it because, as expected, he is not familiar with any of Plato's works. "I don't dig that much into the past," he says. But he sure does want to go back and live in Ancient Greece. Why? I ask. Because of the open-minded community back then, he wrote, how exciting this must have been to have sex with everything except for women!

I don't know, I said, don't you think it sounds a bit too farfetched? I mean, they must have reproduced somehow...

- Time for your shot, Miss Franic.

Shoot me, goddamit!

I spread my bare arm and the nurse voluptuously looks for a protruding vein to hit.

Matthiessen tells me about his shitty job at the hotel and sometimes he gets pretty detailed. Yesterday, for example, I got to learn he rarely takes a dump. Once a week tops. The funny thing is, he says, I don't really feel like taking dump at all, it's not that I'm constipated or something, it's more as if there's nothing in my bowels, you know, as if the food I intake disappears and in one hour my stomach is totally empty again. The only explanation is that I am an alien, hahaha.

That's probably the reason why his favorite fictional character is Darth Vader – they both live in outer space, on planets different than ours.

Matthiessen speaks... well, writes actually, but I am convinced that I hear his voice in my head, he speaks candidly, with the natural smoothness of an unobstructed mind; he never sees things the complicated way – a haircut is

never a hairdo and tiny piece of grilled Gouda and avocado garnished with a single blade of lemon grass is not gourmet - it's simply an I'm-still-fucking-hungry dish. He seems like the kind of guy who would rather step back than go and fight for a cause. He asked me once, "Tell me, Professor, what's worth fighting for?" And for the first time in my life I didn't know how to answer. My fingers froze over the keyboard. I mean, even the liberation of the lab rats now seems beside the point. I simply do not know where to look for the supreme meaning of life.

Being the quiet warrior as he is, Matthiessen will just silently wait for the aliens to descend on our morally devastated planet and offer him a ride.

### ***Twenty-sixth***

*Monday again.*

*I was at Aksel's last night. They smoked pot again, I restrained (again), went to the bathroom and stayed there for a while. Then some boy came in to take a piss, he was pretty drunk and tried to grab me by the balls. I excused myself and left. Not only the bathroom, but the apartment.*

*I went home, went green on Skype and told Franic the whole story. She laughed. I've never seen her laugh outside the digital reality, but I am certain she is capable of doing that alright.*

*Last week was madness. Pernille punished me again for not doing my duties "conscientiously" enough. That's why for the first two weeks of November I got a huge pay cut and no right to complain. I caught myself being eager to go back to my unhappy dwelling and complain to Franic. In the beginning, she was scarce in words, but then she kinda flipped and flew into a rage I'd never seen before in any human being (off-screen!). She spoke dirty like an one-eyed-crippled-all-high-on-morphine-18th-century pirate sailing under non-specific*

*national flag, and made me swear I was gonna fight for what was right, and lead the downtrodden all the way to victory in the name of justice. It was at that point when I got so much lost in regular words and swear words that I had to switch off – both my brain and my computer - and go for a walk, although it was past 11 p.m. and minus eight degrees outside.*

*I walked, and walked, and walked till all the frost had melted off my chest. And when I came back home, I caught her, professor Franic... Ira... the champion for justice... listening to one of my favorite bands that is Sonic Syndicate. And she said, I feel your pain.*

*It was at that point when I felt as if I had won a battle for Jerusalem.*

## **Twenty-sixth**

When a delivery girl brought me a 300-crown yellow-roses-and-saturated-hues bouquet ordered from *First In Flowers Shop* (with a get-better-soon card signed by the dean), I felt both humiliated and infuriated. I hate flowers. Everybody in the Department knows it! That's why the fuckers sent me not just an ordinary bouquet, but a deluxe one! A hit in the center of my black heart! I almost see the smirk on their faces marked with the hereditary cryptograms of Scandinavian beauty and far-north dullness.

I distributed the flowers, one by one (it's a *deluxe* satisfaction to mess up with the wonderfully arranged bouquet!), among the nurses in the ward – the ones who take my temperature and were not very sympathetic regarding the fact that I could have died (I give them that! Oh, the stamina of the stone-hearted nurses – how can you not love them!)? I especially like nurse Naja, the first one whose face emerged from the feverish blur of the delirium a week ago. She was checking with her VERY COLD HAND if I had peed myself. I had, as a matter of fact, but that's of no relevance right now. Besides, they had dressed me in one of those nondescript and lacking style hospital nightgowns, having deprived me

beforehand of my underwear. And when I am without panties, I feel unprotected and vulnerable, as if I've slept through forty complete years and I am again 14 months old, and I can pee all over my new pink Frenchy dress (but no, Mother claimed it wasn't pink, but salmon!), and our new second-hand couch.

Astrid called the other day, asked me how I was doing, I said, I will survive and do your translation, do not worry. And then she exploded, "I don't worry about the translation, Scheisse, Ira! I worry about your health. And, by the way, we are at a deadlock here; the morale in the company's been very low lately."

- How's that? You seemed very inspired! – I said.
- Well... you know... we can hardly afford a roast chicken with our budget.
- You are artists. You must starve for the sake of your art.
- Don't be vicious!
- I'm not. This is what art is all about. Hardships and inspiration.
- We don't have a scenic designer.

Astrid's voice betrays her feeling of defeat.

- Yes, you do! – I say in a matter-of-fact voice.
- We do?
- I know a boy. He's going to make your sets.
- For free?
- Don't worry about that, Astrid. And don't talk to him about money! I'll settle that. Just tell him what you want.
- Well then... thanks, man!

- I have to go now. Time for my last injection. Tomorrow they'll discharge me.
- Do you need a lift or something?
- No.

In the evening, I talk to Matthiessen again. I tell him I'm going to be released tomorrow and for the first time I mention the reason for my hospitalization. He laughs his head off. Asks me whether I have a pet rat or I live in such a poverty that rats reside in the breadbox. I say it's the latter. Then he asks if I'll show up for classes tomorrow, since it's Tuesday. No, I say, probably next week. I still feel anemic, need to spend some time in my kitchen, surrounded by my favorite liquid antidepressants, and watch the wicked pigeons watching back at me from the windows still. You shouldn't be drinking that much, says Matthiessen. Says who, I ask.

[23:30:17] Cataclysm\_Child: me

[23:31:15] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: And you don't drink because?

[23:30:17] Cataclysm\_Child: I hate not being in control of myself, I guess. when I was 17 I got so drunk I thought I'd die. but the worse thing was that I did some things I would've never done when sober. and I hated myself for that for quite some time.

[23:33:44] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: What did you do?

[23:33:59] Cataclysm\_Child: ate an ashtray full of fag-ends.

In that precise eye-opening moment I see an archangel descending from the snowbound heaven above Rigshospitalet, holding a golden scepter or something, and with a sweet smile upon his feminine lips he whispers to me that I should invite the kid over to my place and feed him other than fags. But I bit my lips.

Instead I write “See you... when I see you.” And close the laptop lid. My heart is bumping; there’s nothing I can do about the situation, at least not now, but I see pictures in my head that do not belong there. Not in my head. A sophisticated mind should be free of sentiments. But alas, it seems I am a fucking cliché.

I cannot meet the sleep-maker for another two hours. In my mind, there’s going on a perpetual unveiling of truths that are not mine.

I squeeze my eyes really tight and wait for the dawn to break upon the sulky waters of the Nyhavn canal.

### ***Twenty-seventh***

*I sit with my head between my knees and try to think. I’ve just confronted Anja, who is the one responsible for the second-hand personnel in the hotel – the unprivileged, unqualified, the ones wearing unfashionable, worn-out t-shirts and sneakers, in which one’s feet slowly rot and stink like hundred pigs fed on lepers’ limbs and drunkards’ livers. That is us. That’s me. I told her I’d stuck my finger earlier today on a used needle while taking the trash out. The needle must have pierced the plastic bag and probably had already given me AIDS, or at least hepatitis B. Anja said that if I had some worries about the incident I should go to a doctor. She is not a medical expert, what do I want from her! Isn’t that what they call a workplace accident, I asked.*

*“So?”*

*“So, you have to take some measures.”*

*“We don’t actually. You’ve been neglectful. I didn’t stab you with a needle.”*

*“But that was a discrete occurrence in the course of work, which may lead to physical or mental harm.”*

*“Come on, are you really harmed, Matti? You seem perfectly ok to men. Stop bullshitting me and get back to work!”*

*“I may not seem harmed now, but in six months my face may be covered in dark spots, you know.”*

*“Or it may not!”*

*No use to argue with Anja.*

*I took this extra shift because Ira said we won't be having classes with her today, so why waste a perfectly good Tuesday?*

*But then – this! There is this old guy living in 3021 – quiet, American, and sick, as I understand. I clearly remember collecting a whole bag full of used syringes from his bathroom. I carefully tied the ends of the bag and put it in the bigger one I'd been dragging with me the whole morning from room to room. What if I were attacked by insects or aliens instead? How would have Anja reacted then?*

*I eat my sandwich hankered down in the warmest corner of the storage room on the third floor. I listen to a track entitled “Fear is the Weakness” by In Flames, and with every bit the sandwich get more and more enraged. I don't fear AIDS. Or hepatitis B.*

*Let's not pretend*

*This is the first time, we just don't belong here*

*It's not meant to be, we are losing identity*

*I'm never gonna die. And I have to tell Ira this. Because I can feel her anxiety. And although she claims disturbance is her guarding angel, I know it's her haunting demon.*

*She really needs to calm down.*



## **Twenty-eighth**

*“I’ve always tried to keep my mind free from prejudice. Being objective though is not as easy as it may seem. “*

*This is the beginning of a paper I have to write for Ira’s class. And submit it next week. The assignment has been given to us by her substitute – some spectacled kid, not much older than me, who calls himself “assistant professor”, but whose face is so pimpled that he looks like a 17-year old jerk. I myself had pimples... three or four years ago. And I was fat. Weighed almost a hundred kilos. And I was smart. Actually that smart that I failed almost all the subjects I was taking. My parents were in awe. They suspected that I needed special treatment, someone to prescribe me little pink pills, someone who’d talk to me in the pretentious calming voice of a phony horse-whisperer with the diploma for a human-soul healer. I was a classic study case of a kid whose miserable self-esteem caused him some serious social traumas.*

*The other kids would first befriend me and make fun of me later. Slowly, I withdrew myself into a place where I could watch the life of others from a safe distance. Then, I caught myself of kinda liking this girl from our class, she was super good in chemistry and biology, had told me once she wanted to become a doctor like her mother. And you, what do you want to be? When I grow up, you mean? I asked trying to be funny, although I wasn’t. Asking a question imitating a 5-year old does not really count as funny. Yes, when you are like...old... 35, let’s say, she specified with the sweet smile of a nurse, who is paid to be nice to everyone trusted into her care. I guess, I wanted to be married to her at that time. But the way I see it now, I didn’t really want to MARRY her, I must have wanted only to have somebody milk me solid with their bare hands. These were the desires of the immaculate mind of an infant!*

*The girl had walked away. And somehow she wrapped the whole world around herself and left me with nothing but my bare doubt about the validity of everything I had known for sure so far.*

*I don't even remember her face. The face is irrelevant. So is the girl.*

*I've decided to write about stereotyping in postmodern society as a reaction to scientific and objective efforts to explain reality. I won't be citing names and postulates. Ira might not like this. But I'll take the risk. I don't really care if she fails me or praises me, hahaha. Ira is unpredictable. But only I know that the others think she's harsh and cynical and hard to talk to. They all are afraid they'll fail her course because of her high expectations and rigid requirements. And most of all, because she hates them and considers them not worthy of her thumb-up-let-them-live gesture of godlike benevolence. Even Hinsch, the golden child, is not safe. Nobody is. They all fear the worst imaginable.*

*"I have this favorite saying that goes like this: "When people laugh at you because you're different, you should laugh back at them because they are all the same". I'm not saying one should be acting against the society's values and preferences, but if they don't work for him, he shouldn't force himself into fitting in because the only thing he will get eventually is the sense of disappointment.*

*I myself have never confronted the social environment I function in. Instead I've always tried to find the balance between the society's stereotypical expectations and my own free will. Unsuccessfully so far. I realize it's not healthy at all because my strength drains away like running water and my heart feels like being made of wax – it melts away inside my chest. And yet, I'm too young and I am afraid of picking a side. I'm afraid of picking even my own side in this clash of truths. But since this paper is on postmodernism, according to which there is no absolute truth, I guess I'm on the right track in my speculation."*

*I hang out for a couple of hours with Felix and Frits, the twins, who define themselves as “societal derelicts” but in reality are ordinary assholes with dirt under the nails and tits in the thoughts. But I’ve known them since eighth grade and I feel the opposite of intense in their company, so we still do all kind of pranks together, and hit the night clubs when cool bands are playing and afterwards, we just walk along the tram lines when the night is deep and our old lives shed skin... Lights from the lamps beacon at the entrance of saddened lanes. The twins know the city. And they want to fuck cats and cripples, but that’s another thing... Then, we find ourselves lost on slumber, behind the white stars...we take a break. It’s minus eighteen degrees. I can literally see my own spirit grow in flesh before my own eyes; it resembles me and yet, it’s not me at all, because it’s made of crystals and cold vapor.*

*I stare with non-blinking eyes at the laptop screen covered in dust-and-spew-and-palm-oil- fingerprints.*

*“...Children soak in every piece of information they are exposed to, and the content of this aggressively submitted information shapes their perception of reality and moulds their thinking in a certain twisted way. Inevitably they will end up long-time-scale damaged. Today’s modern society is nothing more but a sinister path to self-destruction. The fundamental values like love, compassion, tolerance and conventional wisdom are replaced by greed, indifference, selfishness and never-ending lust for money and power. We’ve been taught that the more we possess the better life we’ll have. But if that was true, then why do more and more people feel dissatisfied, frustrated and lost?*

*We are the decomposed generations of all-consuming fucked-up monsters in human forms...”*

*Suddenly it gets black in the room and all the human and inhuman forms disappear. Only the laptop screen continues to glow in the dark but this won't last long because the battery gets exhausted pretty quickly.*

*I must have forgotten to pay the electricity bill last month.*

## Epistemology

“And although I have seen nothing but black crows in my life, it doesn't mean that there's no such thing as a white crow. Both for a philosopher and for a scientist it can be important not to reject the possibility of finding a white crow. You might almost say that hunting for 'the white crow' is science's principal task.”

— Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World*

## December

### Tenth

*“...decomposed generations of all-consuming-fucked-up monsters in human forms. If life is only about possessing things and people, then why is the quality of life decreasing, and by that I don’t mean its material quality; people do live longer, have more stuff, but just because we breathe doesn’t make us alive. Unfortunately, we’ve become targets of our own idea of being superior, we’ve been blinded by our own arrogance, which slowly led to the state of decay we are living in now. The media is all about selling things we don’t need. This hunger for more and more synthetically manufactured things is not in our nature – we are only made to believe so. It is not that difficult to program people to want certain things – just implant the idea in any of the society’s units and they will do their part and spread the news like a virus.”*

I take a sip of my bandy flavored peppermint tee.

I’ve locked myself from inside. Because I’m not wearing my skirt. I’m grading those hideous, hideous, hideous papers wearing only my thick brown winter tights. And a white turtle neck sweater. Earlier today I dropped some carbonara sauce on my Zeena Zaki tailored skirt and I had to soak it in soaped water for twenty minutes if I wanted the greasy spot removed. This incident immediately reminded me of the fact that I was absolutely forbidden by my Reiki nutrition specialist to eat before having placed my hands over the dinner plate for a few seconds. I skipped the hands thing and that was why I made a mess out of my expensive Zeena Zaki skirt. This is what my Reiki instructor would tell me. That I am negligent, and awful, and I do not deserve a place neither in Christian paradise, nor in the Buddhist one.

Blah!

As if care!

I got my personal paradise when I again got access to my personal wet bar at home! Nobody can get that nirvana away from me. Except for maybe this little guy here, whose writing I can hardly follow because ... well, the text lacks paragraphs, but thanks God he's put some punctuation marks here and there. Otherwise it's a total gibberish. I got a headache reading it. It's just... I'm wearing only a top over my brown tights and I don't feel comfortable reading a student's paper that goes...that goes... let me be honest for once in my life!... that goes beyond my comprehension although the words are as simple as they can get! In fact, when I read it aloud, it sounds as if a 9-year old kid has written it. Listen... listen to that:

*“The difference between men and sheep I see as insignificant. Sheep follow one of the others, and that's never the prettiest one or the smartest one for sure, and if any of them tries to break away from the flock, the shepherd or the dogs will eventually herd it back into the line. Yes, our species has been lucky enough to have developed opposable thumbs, but still, in many other aspects we haven't advanced much. If a person stands out of the crowd, the rest will do anything possible to drag him back where he belongs. Or where the mob thinks he belongs.”*

I rub my eyes. I swallow a big gulp of my brandy/tea (I can hardly scent the peppermint in the beverage, as a matter of fact). A drop of the already cold beverage lands on my chest and this irritates me big time because this is real cashmere and I'd rather give it to Siri than wash it... or dry-clean it. At least Siri doesn't pay much attention to what she's wearing. I mean, unless she's not naked at minus 12 degrees, she's ok.

I finish reading Matthiessen's paper, which, in comparison to other students' works, is simply ridiculous. The other kids have quoted a mass... a multitude

really of huge names in the sphere of modern philosophy. Their papers resemble real pieces of applied art. The reference section is a whirlwind of titles, some of which I have never heard of. The striving towards intellectual recognition and admiration is understandable. In our world, a world of deteriorated inner values and of extrapolated such, which in reality do not exist, but are made to believe to exist, I must grade those immaculately written term papers with the highest possible mark. And I would have! I would have, I swear to God, if it was still last year. Or at least three months ago. But now...

I start writing my annotation. It begins like this: **“Reading a text without the obligatory for the format two-line space between the lines gives me a headache. Besides, you do not seem to care about “breaking” your thoughts into smaller, more logical and more intelligible units. That is why it is hard to follow them (your thoughts) and the reader eventually gets lost in them. It is like reading James Joyce’s Ulysses, only that he knew how to control his stream of consciousness better. “**

His reference list consists of one sentence which reads the following: “I’ve taken some pictures from the internet and I used some info on stereotyping from Wikipedia.”

My sweet Jesus, you are so lucky that you’ve been dead for so many centuries now. And me... I’m doomed to spend some more years on this Earth suffering the throes of death while reading papers like this one, without a decent reference list!

**“If I was not convinced by the lack of proper spelling and amateurish, almost laughable choice of words and argumentation that your thoughts were, in fact, your OWN thoughts, I would have been obliged to fail you because your work is deficient in whatsoever information on the sources you have used - authors’ names and books titles. It is not how we write a**



**research paper, Mr. Matthiessen!!! You have to keep that in mind next time you are given such an assignment. Otherwise any other colleague of mine would consider a paper like this one a plagiarized piece of writing. And not without a solid reason, I have to assure you!”**

Yesterday, when I was trying to get asleep and I couldn’t because I was thinking of Cataclysm Child, I got a message from Cataclysm Child saying that he’d love to take me to this live gig performance of Before the Dawn at the Tex Bar on Saturday. If, of course, I didn’t have anything more interesting to do. I didn’t reply.

**“Your work lacks integrity and orderly structure.”**

The best thing you can do in communication is not to share your riches with the other, but to reveal to him his own.

**“Yet, I find your work truthful enough, for it is obvious the words are coming from the very bottom of your soul. And...”**

And what?

I sigh. I don’t know how to finish the sentence I’ve begun. I look for inspiration in the brandy bottle, but I find none, so I just scratch the “and” and put down my signature.

I feel exhausted. As if I’ve just had a date with Matthiessen and we tongue-kissed.

## **Eleventh**

I take a long forgotten pair of jeans out of the wardrobe and I put them on. I cut my hair short. Very short. My coiffeur, Denis, wept when he slid the nib of the scissors through the thick shrub of auburn hair. But since Denis is not the polka-dot-cravat type of gay, but an ordinary one, I am prone to assume that he was

genuinely suffering about me losing my massive quantity of hair. What's with the hysteria about cutting one's hair anyway? Does it have to do with the Samson and Dalilah myth?

When one loses one's hair, one loses one's strength...

Siri tiptoes around me. She hardly dares to breathe.

She is unnaturally considerate. I tell her to stop treating me like handicapped. I just wanna be kind, you bitch, is her answer. The tension between us can be cut with a knife. She hates my new haircut, I can see it in her eyes and the way she holds her coffee cup. It's all in the small gestures - body language never lies.

I donated almost all my clothes to ... I don't actually know to whom. What I did was leave a whole suitcase full of clothes beside something that looked like a mailbox but with bigger slots. I presumed this was a Red Cross box or something. Some ugly kid with disfigured arms will be wearing my Prada sweater tomorrow.

But you know what? The funny thing is that I don't give a fuck about the Prada sweater. And I can even shed a tear about this Edward Scissorhands kid.

I fed the pigeons on my windowsill for once!

### **Thirteenth**

I'm sitting in my office again and nibble on the top of my pen. The department secretary comes to check on me, if I need something. Like what for example?? Herbal tea, a piece of crumbly carrot cake from the canteen, a razor to slit her throat?

- You look nice with your hair like that by the way, - she says.
- Thank you, - I mumble.

- Did you get the flowers we sent you at the hospital?
- No.
- Oh!

The shadow of disappointment makes her placid face slightly distorted, as if she's just had a stroke.

- But thanks anyway.
- Those were beautiful! – She says in defiance.
- I have no doubts they were, and that is why some vicious nurse must have appropriated them and used the bouquet as an appeasing gift for her mother-in-law. But I appreciate the gesture anyway. Now, I have to go back to my grading those term papers, so would you mind...?

Am I kind or am I kind?

- Oh, sure, I'm sorry. How can I be so unthoughtful!

Maybe because you are a stupid cunt who graduated from high school only because she learnt how to spell "constitution" and "penis".

The Christmas spirit has descended upon me.

- Thank you, Suzanne.
- Slavina.
- What?
- My name is Slavina, - the cunt corrects me again. In an obediently docile voice, though.
- Of course.

I force a smile.

Only three minutes after Slavina-Suzanne has shut the door after herself, there's another knock. I am about to say that I am not in my office, when the door opens, so I don't have the time to hide or lock myself from inside, or pretend that I've passed out.

It's Matthiessen.

Radiant his face is.

- May I come for a minute?

Without waiting for my answer, he takes off his jacket and throws himself on the sofa next to the water dispenser.

- Wow, you've got your own water dispenser! Cool, I love water! May I?

And he thrusts a plastic cup under the slot without waiting for my permission... again.

- I don't really use it, – I say and it sounds as an excuse for his reckless behavior.
- So? Are we cool for Saturday? You, me, and the awesome Finnish boys?

He's gulping down the cooled water and talks, talks through fountains of saliva and mineral water.

- They'll be performing songs from their latest album, which...
- "Rise of the Phoenix". - I simply fired it out in the air. - Released on 27 April through Nuclear Blast Records. "Massive changes in the line-up during 2011 ended an era of great frustration and brought back 110% dedication and professionalism into the band. The newfound energy and motivation steered us into a victorious European tour and made it possible

to produce the strongest, fastest, heaviest and definitely the most epic BEFORE THE DAWN album so far!"

- What ...what is that?

Matthiessen now stares at me with confusion. I know, it was unexpected. I mean, I would stare at myself with confusion if that was physically possible.

- I' m quoting Tuomas Saukkonen, the frontman, - I say.

- Does this mean you wanna come?

Jesus, he doesn't get it. It's not about whether I want to go to the stupid gig at the stupid club. For the last 48 hours, since I got this message, I've listened to 89 of the band's tracks, some of which were really bad, and now I am already so familiar with their style, and touring history, and discography, and drinking binges and everything, that I can become their manager. If I want to. Or if they want me to!

Matthiessen's eyes are beaming with joy and what he fathoms to be shared enthusiasm. It is, ... well... in a way so ... because, he doesn't know this, but back in 1998, before Before the Dawn even existed I slept with Tuomas, then 18, at a party I hardly remember. I was back in Copenhagen for my summer vacation and a friend of mine persuaded me to accompany her to this shabby club in Nørrebro, where, she claimed, she had to meet a prospective boyfriend. She didn't make any friends that night, let alone sexual ones, but I ended up sucking off this cute, pimpled Finnish kid in one of the storage rooms; he came very fast and I insisted on being fucked or at least licked in return, but he excused himself with the fact that he had to perform on the stage in a little while. I couldn't believe this envious sun-of-no-human-woman! I mean, I sucked him slow, and deep, and very wet, didn't use any teeth and didn't jack him off as many others would do while mouthing someone off (huge mistake as it is!). And... tadaaa... swallowing was the gooey surprise at the end! It

happened accidentally because I choked with my own saliva and instead of coughing, I grasped for air and what was there in my mouth went naturally down my throat. Disgusting! I hated myself for this for seven years in a row. One of the reasons being that I didn't expect an 18-year old in the given circumstances to appreciate what I did. Besides, he was drunk as a fucking Caribbean pirate and sang awful that very night. Who would have guessed then that ugly teenage with the snail-like skin would become famous!

- So you really wanna come?

I heard him the first time when he asked, I just lost myself in sweet memories. Or not that sweet. I still can feel the tart taste of eager Finnish sperm in my mouth.

- Sure. I've been to their gig...once.
- When?
- In 1998.
- Impossible. The band was founded in 99.
- I mean 2008.
- Cool. You're sooo ahead of me. I have so much catch-up to do.
- You don't, really.

I wouldn't have even known that such a band existed if it wasn't for Matthiessen and his Monday message!

I watch Matthiessen – with his messy brownish hair and cheap clothes. He is sitting with his hands tucked under his bottom, which he often does because “they are cold because of bad blood circulation”.

- I graded your paper the other day, - I say.
- Was it bad? It was bad.

I hope he doesn't notice that I watch him without blinking. I am afraid that if I close my eyes even for a nano-second, he'll disappear and take away with him the water machine and the smell of mackerel sandwich from the cafeteria he's eaten for breakfast, and the air that we breathe...

- It wasn't bad.

He smiles. And because I don't say anything more, he changes the subject and asks me about my hand. I show it to him as if it is some kind of a valuable exhibit – it's fine, you see, five fingers and all.

- Well... I'd better leave you work.

He rises and puts his jacket on. I hesitate before I say:

- If you can wait for another hour or so...
- Yes?
- We can have lunch.
- You sure?
- Yes. But not in the cafeteria.

It's not that I don't want to be seen with him around the campus because I'd feel embarrassed or something. No. The thing is that since father died, I stopped caring about people who were not him. I know, I know, everybody who ever did Psychology 101 can tell me what my problem is. And I don't care about this, either, I mean, about lame people diagnosing other people. And as for Matthiessen... I hardly ever speak to him in class. I don't even look at him. I act as if he doesn't exist. And Matthiessen doesn't really mind. Doesn't really notice. I guess he's used to not being paid attention to. I secretly checked his academic record in the students database the other day. He is a mediocre student. But as once he himself said in a chat, education the way it is offered nowadays by the official institutions has nothing to do with real education.

Probably he knows what he's talking about. He doesn't care about grades or being patted on the back when doing well. Matthiessen is anything but a student who can be dragged to one's degree. It's too much of work and too stressful, he says. So he must believe what he says.

- Let's go to Smithy's, - I suggest. – I have my car.
- I can't wait! – He cheers up like a small child who's been promised an ice cream after a long period of keeping the bed with bronchitis. – I've just had breakfast and I'm already hungry. Can you believe it!? Call me when you're done.

He has almost completely disappeared through the door, when his left arm makes its way back a little, so I can see the torn patch on the elbow of his jacket. I decide for a nano-second (it seems I'm seeing the world in nano-seconds today!) that he'll follow his arm and will return to my office in full size – messy hair and cheap clothes, and will shorten the distance between the door and my desk in two jumps, and then kiss me with the humble extravagance of the extraterrestrial species he represents. But instead I only hear his voice being a bit too indiscreetly loud for the one of a student leaving a professor's office:

- I like your hair that way.

He likes my hair "that way".

Well, I hate his. He seems to have a bad-hair day every day.

I cancel all my appointments for the afternoon, even the important ones. Even the most, most important ones, so that I could have French fries and veggie-burgers with Matthiessen. We drive to Smithy's, he eats fast, talks about some fish in some holographic aquarium, which I do not get - obviously! Because I am too concentrated on not eating myself. Then he says he has to go to work. He works shifts in a hotel. I know that, of course, I just didn't pay much attention



before, when I was still in the hospital; then everything about Cataclysm Child seemed abstract. Now, however, it all becomes very, very real. Especially the image of him wiping somebody's shit from the bathtub in a hotel room.

He politely offers to leave money for his part of the bill, I say, no need, I'll take care of it. And then he leaves.

I have one hundred missed calls.

One of the calls is from the Arts and Humanities Department at the New York University. They left me a message. They want me there.

It's graded the ninth best university in the world to study philosophy.

### ***Twenty-second***

*Dad insists on me spending Christmas with the family in a cabin he hired in Hadeland. This means snow. And away from town for at least five days. The twins will stay here. They told me so. They said, "Fuck the holidays, man! Let's go break something or fuck a squirrel!" The twins are fun, although most of the time I don't see how much fun exactly it is to fuck a rodent. But since Aksel's stopped speaking to me, the twins are the only alternative I've been left with for having what they call "a social life". Which, on the other hand, is ridiculous, because the twins are anything but people you can call socially adequate. That's the beauty of solipsism. As Ira says, since mxe external world can hardly be known and hence, recognized as existing, so why bother! Why bother indeed if the twins are socially unacceptable? Besides, they are unacceptable only to a society which, according to my mind, does not really exist.*

*I told Dad that I had got a real job offer, and that's why I'd prefer to stay in town and work. "What job?" he asked and raised his left eyebrow in the*

*Dwayne-the-Rock style, you know, as if he seriously doubted my words. “And what ungodly Christian will make you work at Christmas!?”*

- *Um... it’s a theatre thing. They hired me to make the set scenes for a play.*
- *What play?*

*Man, he’s persistent! I don’t fucking remember the name of the play. It was something about gays, but I can’t possibly tell this Dad – he’d definitely think it’s not serious enough an excuse and would drag me to the cabin in the woods where the white bears will eat me for sure. But before that I’ll probably have to save Mom from freezing. Last time when we had a merry Christmas out in the nature, and that is seven years ago (when Nanne still believed Santa would come down the chimney and bring her a dress covered in pink diamonds and a lollipop that never finishes no matter how long you lick it), Mom got so bored from not having anything “interesting” to do beside watching the fire in the fireplace, that she got drunk extremely fast and threw her beautiful and very expensive Hermes overcoat in the fireplace. “At least now we have something else to watch burn beside the stupid logs, right? Right?” And then, before anybody could do a thing, she just ran out of the cabin, all barefoot and wearing only her nightgown and we searched for her for like 25 minutes. Father was more infuriated than concerned, I remember that clearly, for he said, “Shit, what would they write in the papers tomorrow if they eventually find the damn woman frozen to death in her underwear – drunk and with messy hair! They will certainly connect her with me and then my career will be compromised. I should’ve taken her to damn Paris instead!”*

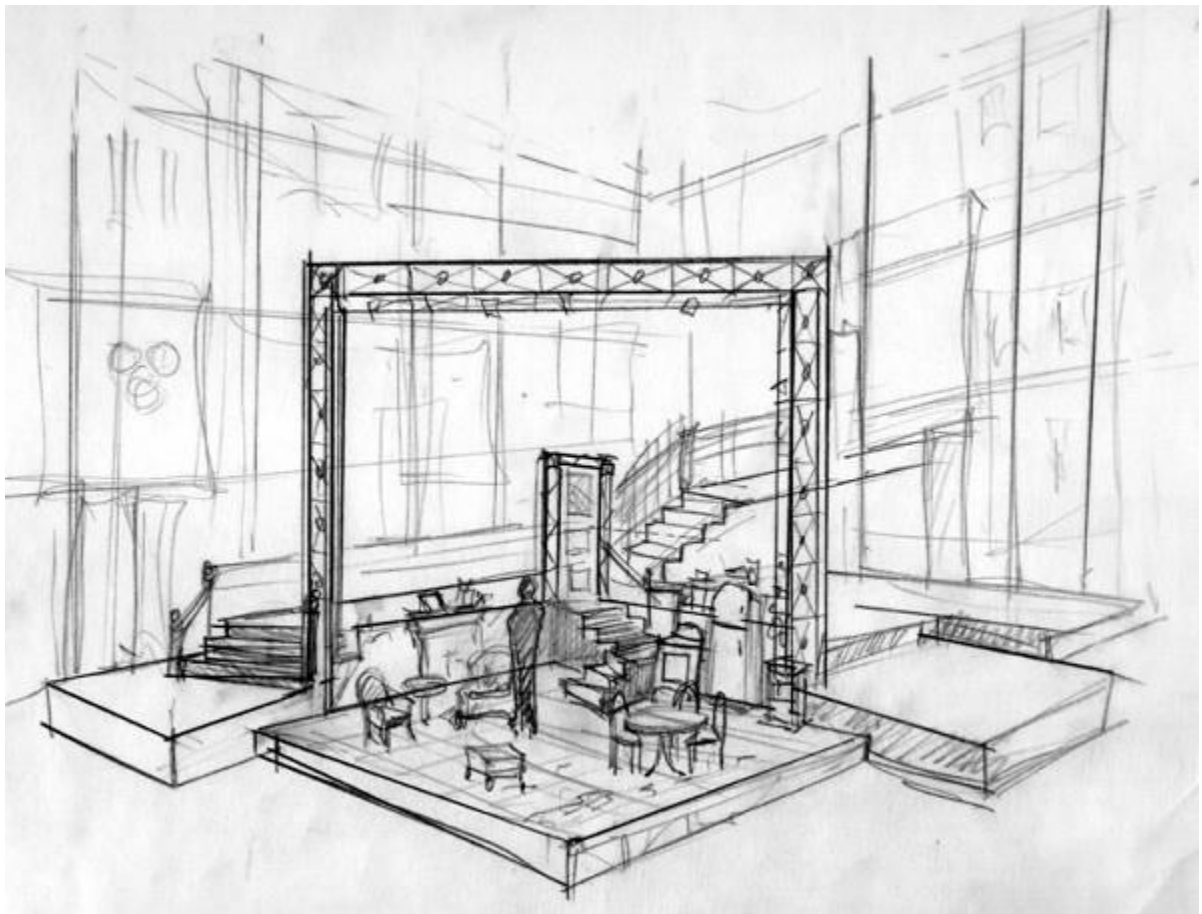
- *WHAT PLAY, Matti?*
- *Well... it’s an avant-garde piece, I guess.*
- *How much are they paying you?*
- *Twenty thousand. Already paid me one half in advance.*

*A suspiciously long silence follows. Dad avoids looking me into the eyes, for he knows he's lost this game. This time. He pretends he's busy looking for his gloves. Without saying a thing, I unostentatiously put them in front of the mirror, so he could find them and think they've always been there.*

*- Ah, my gloves! Finally. Well... I must say somebody at last has appreciated your talent then. But still this is not an excuse for skipping Christmas with your family.*

*I knew it wouldn't work. But at least I tried.*

*I go back to my drawings. Don't particularly like what I've done so far.*



*But of course it's still just a rough idea. I've never done set scenes before. But I doubt that they'll be having special requirements. I mean, it's a really small theater. Hardly a theater actually! And it's a shitty play about some homo eye doctor. And the actors are all amateurs. And Frau Linden is the producer, for*

*fuck's sake! I wonder how they can afford to pay me that much money! It's insane.*

*If we leave tomorrow for Hadeland, as planned, I'll skip the movie Ira said she would be taking me to. But it's OK. I don't think I'll like it anyway. It's about the 70's. I don't find anything appealing in this decade. Some people do. Makes them feel nostalgic or something, I guess.*

*Yesterday I went to see the new hobbit movie with my sister. Sure it was a lightweight story for kids, but I enjoyed it anyway. Afterwards we went for ginger beers and pretzels, and I even got to talk for like 40 seconds to one of my sister's girlfriends. But she was too beautiful and the other boys we met later at the diner were all over her (what else!) – bigheaded, arrogant, self-important little shits with boners, so I decided that to back off was the smartest and the most dignified thing to do in this particular situation. I paid for our food and drinks and took Nanne by the hand. But she wouldn't go home, she said she was having fun with her friends RIGHT NOW, and she was not 12 anymore, so I had to let go of her, or else... Or else what? Call Dad? Mentioning Dad chilled her temper a little, and she begged for ten more minutes. I could see she liked the dickhead with the pierced eyebrow, who, as a matter of fact, was the most obnoxious one. I may be clinically immature sometimes, but I'm not stupid and I see things. And what is more important, I see the consequences of those things. So I said, "No, Nanne, we're going now!"*

*She'll hate me for doing that in front of her friends for the rest of the year, for nine long days! That'll be one crappy Christmas, I can smell it from now.*

*But I'll have my laptop with me – it's some kind of a comfort.*

*Ira is online.*

*[14:46:29] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Where have you been?????*

*[14:46:36] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: I thought you might have been arrested. For murder.*

*[15:37:19] Cataclysm Child: well...*

*[15:37:22] Cataclysm Child: the things are going exactly that way*

*[15:37:27] Cataclysm Child: but seriously, I was home alone last night. my home, I mean, not the flat I rent.*

*[15:37:33] Cataclysm Child: I missed that... being in my old room*

*[15:38:43] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: what?*

*[15:38:51] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: what happened?*

*[15:39:02] Cataclysm Child: nothing happened. my parents and Nanne went to this Christmas party at my father's boss's place, but I had a very bad headache and stayed at home.*

*[15:39:11] Cataclysm Child: took a pill...although i didn't want to. i never take pills. not even when I got heart-burns or a headache.*

*[15:39:24] Cataclysm Child: and then I was left all alone and did what I love doing the most.*

*[15:39:40] Cataclysm Child: that's listen to some album I never really took notice of before, or play Heroes 3, or read something.*

*[15:39:35] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: When was that because I wrote to you at 1:30 and you didn't reply!*

*[15:40:04] Cataclysm Child: well, I told you, I was here*

*[15:40:07] Cataclysm Child: didn't go out*

*[15:40:15] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Oh please!*

*[15:40:52] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Why then you didn't even bother to answer! Anyway, I must have fallen asleep at some point and the laptop was on all night. And still nothing from you in the morning. What can I think!*

*[15:41:00] Cataclysm Child: think positive ☺*

*[15:41:33] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: And I had this very weird dream of you and this other kid from your group, Julius*

*[15:41:45] Cataclysm Child: Julius? the funny guy with the adam apple that's bigger than an orange? no shit! and what? were we getting dirty, me and Julius ;)*

*[15:41:52] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: No.*

*[15:41:58] Cataclysm Child: come on, tell me what we were doing and I'll tell you if you have this extra sense or not ☺ maybe you dreamt of sth we'd been doing for real ☺*

*[15:42:03] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: I doubt it.*

*[15:42:51] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: In my dream, I was asking him what he knows about Nietzscheism*

*[15:42:57] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: But he hadn't learned much*

*[15:43:17] Cataclysm Child: and what was I doing?*

*[15:44:41] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: I don't remember details, but I can say that was a rather enjoyable dream. We were hanging out in a town we had never been before and everything seemed interesting and new, but most of the time we'd just sit in parks and talk.*

*[15:45:01] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: And then your father appeared all of a sudden and the funny thing was that he looked like Einstein.*

*[15:45:10] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: and he said he had to take you home with him.*

*[15:45:53] Cataclysm Child: my father Ainshtain!*

*[15:46:00] Cataclysm Child: nice!*

*[15:46:11] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: He only looked like him, he wasn't him! And it's spelled Einstein! He behaved like an asshole though.*

*[15:48:35] Cataclysm Child: my father IS an asshole.*

*[15:48:37] Cataclysm Child: sometimes*

*[15:48:40] Cataclysm Child: he's got his periods. good and bad ones.*

*[15:48:42] Cataclysm Child: a typical Virgin he is*

*[15:49:37] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Cut this bullshit with the signs, will you! I can't believe you accept as true everything this absurd travesty of a serious science offers...*

*[15:50:31] Cataclysm Child: and you are in a way a typical Aquarius.*

*[15:54:44] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Stop it!*

*[15:54:48] Cataclysm Child: honest and loyal, original, independent and intellectual. and on the dark side – perverse, difficult and contrary, and also unpredictable, unemotional, detached. it's all you, professor.*

*[15:55:30] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Seriously!*

*[15:55:49] Cataclysm Child: I can go on for an hour but you have to tell me your ascendant sign – then I can give you the complete picture*

*[15:56:30] Eulogy\_of\_Wrath: Astrology can't tell you shit about my personality!*

*[15:56:39]: Cataclysm Child: I have to take a piss, brb*

*I go to the bathroom and stay there a bit longer, so to give Ira some time to cool off.*

*It's good to piss in a germfree bathroom, which I haven't cleaned myself for a change. My whole face is covered in a nasty rash. Must be some of the detergents I use at work. This morning I called sick and Pernille said, "Whatever, Mister President. Everybody's calling sick during the fucking holidays anyway!"*

## **Twentieth**

I am in a good mood. Why the fuck am I in a good mood? I have no reasons whatsoever to feel that way. First, I fed the fucking pigeons on my kitchen window sill. Again! Which means they will now start coming back in voracious flocks. Second, instead of scolding Siri for smoking in the kitchen, I borrowed a cigarette from her. And third, I talked to Astrid on the phone this morning and she kept on repeating "danke, danke, danke, danke" like a mad person. She was obviously thanking me for paying for the whole production of her play. "You are welcome, "I said, rather fed up with this emotional turn of events. I expected everything to go on smoothly and unemotionally, having in mind the fact Astrid is a tough German bitch. But no! I wasn't spared the danke-ish outburst. "But giving that much money to the kid who's drawing the sets... Ira, are you sure about that? He may be talented, but he's not Caravaggio..."

"Do you want me to pay also for the refreshments buffet, Astrid, or not?" This question finally sealed her lips. Of course, she wants me to pay for the refreshments buffet. And I bet she secretly hoped I'd offer that, so that she wouldn't have to pop the question herself.

I promised to call her after the holidays and have a drink. Together. Or separately. Doesn't really matter for me. Although I'd prefer the second.



To be honest, I am not exactly ecstatic about throwing so much money out of the window, so to say, because, seriously, throwing it literally out of the window would have been more rewarding than investing it in something that goes under the name of Viagra Falls! But what could I do? That seemed to be the only rational way for me to give Matthiessen twenty thousand without making him feel awkward. Otherwise I wouldn't have done it the "subtle" way but the... well, my way, which is hand the money in an envelope.

So, the question stays: Why am I in a good mood? I definitely shouldn't be feeling that way because Matthiessen told me (although indirectly) that I was difficult and detached ... I am not difficult! It's the other people who make it difficult for me to like them. And of course I'll appear to be difficult in their eyes. And probably in the eyes of the astrologists.

[16:09:59] Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath: Peeing took you a lot of time.

[16:10:17] Cataclysm Child: so what?

[16:10:25] Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath: So nothing. Are you sure you won't be able to come to the movies tomorrow?

[16:10:43] Cataclysm Child: no way, we are leaving to Hadeland. my father's idea! besides, I might have watched this film actually. The title sounds familiar. it's about some punks and misfits right?

[16:11:08] Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath: In a way, yes. The 70's were huge. I regret I missed the Sex Pistols' breakthrough in the 1974.

[16:11:41] Cataclysm Child: I don't regret anything in particular... the only thing I kinda feel depressed about is that our time is so... idle. inactive. rusted.

[16:12:01] Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath: Meaning?

[16:12:25] Cataclysm Child: profit's killing art, everybody likes the same shit

[16:12:31] Cataclysm Child: people think we evolve but in reality the opposite happens. we're stuck very much it gives me the creeps

[16:15:17] Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath: Matthiessen?

I can physically feel the dopamine taking control over my brain functions. And if I don't shut myself right now, it's going to get ugly.

[16:15:23] Cataclysm Child: what

I look through the window. One of the pigeons, my most enthusiastic devotee, and ugly one, with two toes missing on one of its legs, is perched outside, its ass is freezing, but it's relentless in its craving to be finally appreciated by the cold-hearted dweller of this kitchen. So, it stands still with its left side positioned eye transfixed on my half-eaten roll.

I'm not going to love this pigeon.

[16:15:44] Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath: I have to go

[16:16:21] Cataclysm Child: ok, bye

And he goes red – DND.

So quick.

So callous.

I bang open the window and scare the pigeon away by hissing at him like a cat.

Siri comes home, her bony ass freezing because she, like any other stupid teenager her age, goes out wearing only Converse sneakers and a jacket over the same old ragged grey t-shirt she goes to bed with. While blowing hot air into her cold palms, she asks if I am coming with her to the grandmother's for the holidays.

- What do you mean?
- Grandmother invited me to visit her, remember? I told you like... two days ago.
- Who?
- YOUR MOTHER, Ira!
- What are you talking about?
- Grandmother Francine invited me to spend Christmas with her and Andreas in Esbjerg.
- And you are going?
- I thought you may come, too.
- May I?
- I don't know, but I guess... She's your mother after all. You don't need a special permission.
- You think so.
- You do need a special permission?
- Pas de tous.
- Meaning?
- Learn some languages, cunt!
- Nice of you to say, auntie!
- I mean it!
- I know you mean it. It's just not nice to say this to a kid.
- You're not ... OK, forget it. I'll fucking come.
- Seriously?
- You asked me to.
- I did, but...
- But you thought I'd hate the idea.
- Yes, to be honest.

- Well, surprise then! I'm coming
- Great.
- Great.

So, it's decided. I'm going to Esbjerg for the stupid holidays. And I'm going to see mother for the first time in nine years.

I still have 15 hours to change my mind and buy myself a ticket to London, where I usually go for Christmas and hang out with ugly drunkards at pubs in Camden. But!

But... I guess my dopamine levels are still very high, so I'm in no condition to decide what's best for me. That's why I'm still going to Esbjerg.

## Causal Determinism

“The will has no overall purpose, aims at no highest good, and can never be satisfied. Although it is our essence, it strikes us as an alien agency within, striving for life and procreation blindly, mediated only secondarily by consciousness. Instinctive sexuality is at our core, interfering constantly with the life of the intellect. To be an individual expression of this will is to lead a life of continual desire, deficiency, and suffering. Pleasure or satisfaction exists only relative to a felt lack; it is negative, merely the cessation of an episode of striving or suffering, and has no value of itself. Nothing we can achieve by conscious act of will alters the will to life within us. There is no free will. Human actions, as part of the natural order, are determined [....]

As individual parts of the empirical world we are ineluctably pushed through life by a force inside us which is not of our choosing, which gives rise to needs and desires we can never fully satisfy, and is without ultimate purpose. Schopenhauer concludes that it would have been better not to exist—and that the world itself is something whose existence we should deplore rather than celebrate.”

— **Christopher Janaway**

## January

### Eleventh

I'm still in the process of recovering from this visit in Esbjerg, which started unexpectedly pleasant (the whole house smelled of home-made cupcakes and gløgg with herbs), and ended as another Sleepy Hollow screen version.

Mother welcomed us dressed all in white, and explained that since next year will be the year of the snake and the dominant color will be black and dark blue, now is her last chance to wear white. Clever! exclaimed Siri. Whatever, murmured I.

Her new, younger than her, husband happened to be a wet rag. Seriously, I detested him at hello. Sluggish, sullen, spiteful. And his hobby was ice hockey. He himself used to play once...before a random puck hit him with ferocious speed in the groin, literally cracking one of his testicles. Which, of course, put a disappointing end to his hockey career and also to his manhood, if you ask me. If I said mother never had a good taste in men, I would insult myself, since I'm the fruit of my father's loins and my father was the best man ever lived on the face of the Earth. So, I'd rather say it wasn't Mother who picked up Dad. It was him who picked her up. And I still cannot explain this unusual, one-time failure of his intelligent perception! I guess this is what they call love. For me, it's simply disobedience to one's true self's laws of conduct.

We took walks along the pier. They had set up a Christmas bazaar there – with wooden pavilions and merry-go-rounds, and all the season's clichés. Mother walked like a queen among the cheerful subjects of her new seaport kingdom on the Jutland peninsula – her face still beautiful although the shadows of middle-class trivia had deepened some of its lines. The former French junkie had become a worshipper of the hideous 4-piece Sven Wiig Hansen's monumental

sculpture called “Man meets the sea”. You can’t miss the huge, white identical bastards, especially if you arrive from the sea; they sit on their pedestals in the stiff position of someone wearing a spinal brace. They are supposed to portray The Man – innocent as from his mother’s womb, before rising up and beginning to act. What they actually represent, however, is ugliness in its pure form.

The atmosphere during the first 48 hours was so cheerful and festive, that I couldn’t help but think that a recidivist missing half his face would eventually show up in the middle of the night and kill us all. He might spare the life only of Fredrik, Mother’s hubby, because he’d recognize a fellow psychopath only by listening to him breath in his sleep.

In the evening of 25<sup>th</sup>, Mother finally unleashed the beast. We were having cocktails in their kitschy furnished “biblioteque”, on the bookshelves in which there were only 23 books (or these were just the covers, I haven’t checked, to be honest). Siri was sent out to socialize with her, how exactly am I supposed to call them – step-cousins? – that is, the kids from Fredrik’s previous marriage (who were conceived obviously either before the hockey puck hit him, or with the enormous effort of the one survived testicle). Siri didn’t quite embrace the idea of hanging out with two male teenagers, aged 13 and 15, with one of them, the younger and the more repulsive one, clearly hitting on her, but Mother insisted on her being friendly, so she reluctantly agreed to see a movie with them and share a pack of M&M’s.

– Just look at us! Aren’t we just happy, happy, happy! – Mother theatrically exclaimed and opened up her arms as if to embrace not only the ones technically closest to her at that moment – me and Fredrik, but also the citizens of the entire Esbjerg municipality together with their beloved pets.

- Come and hug me, Ira!
- Now?

- What better time?

I hesitantly left my place by the open fireplace, not loosening a bit the grip on my glass, and approach her – reclining like a feasting Roman nobility on her right side.

- Tu est tres, tres belle, tu sais, Ira? Trop maigre, mais belle!
- I know.
- Embrace me, will you?

It's not the easiest thing to embrace someone while trying not to spill one's drink.

– Harder! – commanded Mother.

And harder I pressed her detestable body towards my “maigre” chest. While still with her face shoved in my grey stud-embellished jersey, she said:

- We are adopting Siri. It's not negotiable. I'm filing the papers tomorrow.

Wow! That came out of nothing!

- Ha! (pause) Ha! (pause) Hahahahahahaha.

I pushed her. She almost fell off the couch she'd been patrician-like reclining on. Fredrik smelled my rage and thoughtfully left the room under the pretext he'd get us another round of cocktails.

- Don't you dare laugh at me, Ira! Don't you dare!

Her whole expression changed in a blink of an eye. Now she's ugly and as unfrench as it might get.

– I'm sorry, I can't help it! Hahahahahahaha. And you know ...hahahah...why? Hahahahaha... Because...hahahahah... you're funny! You can be in a comedy show, Mother! Seriously.



- Stop it!
- Hahahahahahaaaaa.
- Stop it, I said!
- Hahahahahhhhhahaha.

And in this moment she slapped me. I mean, it wasn't unforeseen. She had slapped me before. Many times. I spent one-third of my childhood with Mother slapping me. She'd slap me when I got myself dirty from playing in the sandbox, she'd slap me whenever she caught me biting my nails, she'd even slap me when I was sad. "You'll get all wrinkled, Ira! Stop frowning! Stop right NOW!"

This time, however, I slapped her back. She fell off the coach.

- How dare you?
- Look, Mother, I'm sorry, but you can't possibly adopt Siri.
- Says who?
- Says... well... says the Lord!
- What??
- Yes, Lord himself. Remember Jesus? Well, he says you're too stupid to be raising an adolescent.
- Fredrik!
- Don't yell, bitch! He's preparing cocktails!
- You! You...
- Me what?
- You ... I hate you.
- Look, Mother, I will be the first person to be relieved if Siri moves out, believe me, because I don't like her, and she doesn't like me either. But let's get real and talk about you for a moment. You, Mother, shouldn't be granted the right to take care even of a rat, a sickening little rat, and you

know why? Because you're sickening yourself. And the stupidity that you literally radiate can be harming to any young brain. Which, in this case, is Siri's obviously. And she is not stupid, I give her that.

There was a sweep-of-a-bird-wing long silence and then she crashed.

- She's my baby's baby! - She wept. – We can be a family.

I let her sob for a minute, while I rummaged inside my soul in search for even a crumb of compassion for her. But I couldn't find any.

- You shouldn't be raising children. You're stupid.
- And you are evil!

And she started hitting me with fists. At that moment Fredrik entered with the cocktails, stopped at the door and stared at us with his mouth open in dismay, as we were now in something which resembled a real fight. It all felt like a scene from a theatrical performance. A farce maybe. Or close to a farce. I have to ask Astrid how she'd describe it, since she's so much into theatre.

- What the hell is going on?

Yes, Fredrik speaks! I forgot to mention that but the fight between me and Mother served him well to exercise not only his vocal abilities, but also his affiliation to his present wife. He threw away those perfectly good cocktails in order to separate us, thus putting a stop to a primordial, a mother-offspring type of a mortal combat.

Before I went to bed, she came to my room and declared with an official tone in her voice that Siri is staying with them in Esbjerg for as long as it takes while she settles the paper work concerning her adoption.

- She plays in a band, you know, - I said in the darkness, the sheets pulled over my head.

- What band?
- A noisy one. And she loves it!
- Well, she'll find another band here, I believe.
- Whatever.
- Good night, Ira.

Father died when I was 19. The last two years of his life he didn't read books anymore. He gave up on written words. This broke my heart. I didn't want to go to England, but he made me to. He said, "You know, Irka, knowledge will forever govern ignorance. And I have no doubts that the best place to start your governing career is at Cambridge. Go there and learn how to rule over the weak-minded. If not for yourself, do it for your old father, will you, kido?"

And still I wasn't sure I wanted to leave him at home, where my mother constantly polished her nails in bright colors; this stomach-turning place where he'd return to after eight hours spent behind the tram's console panel... Operating a tram is relatively simple, you know. As it runs on rails, it doesn't require steering controls. Yet, most of the controls are electrical switches, which are operated by the driver's hands and feet. Some of the days were really tough for father to handle - I could literally **see how** his weight deadened on his shoulders and he stumbled when crossing the threshold of our old apartment – the ghost of lost had gotten into him...

When I came home for my Christmas holiday after four months, his first question was: "What did you learn, oh, captain, my captain?" I silently unbuttoned my grey wool-blended toggle coat, took his pale, prematurely aged face into my cold palms, kissed him on the lips, and said, "I learnt not only to love my enemies, but also to hate my friends."

Father broadly smiled.

“Good old bastard Nietzsche! “

I nodded.

“I’ll die in peace now, Irka, since you’ve learned the toughest of all lessons. Come, let’s eat and then I’ll take you to the movies at our theatre. Want to?”

I nodded again.

He didn’t die in peace. He died in pain. And I was left behind – all rage and fury.

## **Twelfth**

It’s today, after I broke a nail when trying to open a can of tuna that I started to have flashbacks of what exactly happened when I left mother’s house in the early morning of 26<sup>th</sup>.

Everybody was still innocently or not that innocently sleeping in their beds when I called for a cab to take me straight to the airport. The disappointing thing was that they had regular flights to only two destinations which sounded familiar – Aberdeen and Stavanger. I bought a ticket to Aberdeen, had two whiskies and a package of cashew nuts on board, then we landed, I said to myself, “I have no business to attend to in Scotland!”, and two hours later I was on a plane to London. That’s my all-time favorite New Year’s place to be! Not that I usually recall how I spend my time there, but I suppose it’s always different fun, and yet, it’s always the same shit. This time, however, everything went completely berserk. That was for sure because I dragged my bad moods along with me.

I hired an apartment on Camden High, vomited the cashew nuts, which by then had turned into a stinky squash, took a shower and had a proper meal at a restaurant nearby. While chewing my fish fillet, I was thinking that this time I’d spend a very quiet New Year’s eve – I would go out, soak up the magical atmosphere of this beautiful city, share the holiday spirit with some nice,

cheerful people, have a few drinks and go back to the apartment in good and working order, completely trouble-free. Yes, this was what I was going to do!

But then this guy, who was sitting together with some other guys, having pints of beers and fish and chips came over to my table and asked me for the salt.

A week of a drinking binge followed.

I woke up in the morning of the second of January. I was lying on the bathroom floor with crumpled papers and stinky clothes around me. The apartment was a mess. I had dried up blood on the side of my face and under my nails. Instinctively, I reached under my t-shirt and felt the nipples – they were intact. I drew a sigh of relief and for a brief moment, while struggling with the gravity of the floor in an attempt to get on my feet, I naively thought that this time I had miraculously avoided any damages whatsoever.

In the bedroom, I found pieces of clothing which didn't belong to me, a pair of plastic gloves turned inside out, and some greasy empty boxes with the logo of Yum Cha Silks & Spice Restaurant, at the sight of which I had an urge to empty the already empty content of my stomach.

Every movement I made while undressing was painful. I opened the bathtub taps, sat on its slippery edge and gloomily stared at the running water. Then I saw it - a fresh new tattoo on the inside of my left thigh.

The distorted, still inflamed letters read WHORE.

First, I spat on my thumb and tried to rub it off, but then it came to me in a flash that the guy who asked me to borrow the salt was a tattooist, his name was James or Jade, not quite sure, and we had sex, and then we met for real some nice people, and then we had some more sex, and I bought drinks for all his buddies in a pub somewhere in the South Bank, I remember eating a baked pigeon the inn-keeper claimed to have caught earlier that day in front of the

National Gallery (“Now, he said, that it’s become illegal to feed the flying rats, it’s much more enjoyable as the pigeon population dwindles, ya’ know?”); we spent that night in somebody’s dirty dwelling in the very same “borough”, I skipped having sex with James/Jade because he vomited on my belly and I understandably pushed him away; or he may have had sex with me after all that night, only that I don’t remember it, but it’s already irrelevant to the story; and on the following day we had pouched eggs and pints of beer for breakfast, then we bought some more beer and went sightseeing (when I say “we”, I mean me, James/Jade and some of his drinking buddies, who were also “marvelous and talented artists”, i.e. tattooists, who could draw a coiled snake on one’s arm without using a stencil or something), Marvin-with-the-goat-beard suggested that we see the London Dungeon, but James (now I’m almost sure that was his name) said, “Neee, queues are insane and it’s very touristy, and besides, if there are some Finns waiting to get in, they may drink all our beer. We all know how thirsty the Finns are all the time! I’d rather opt for the Tate Modern.” Somebody else suggested that we go and watch the skaters under the arches near the London Eye, but finally, we decided to go back to the pub where we ate breakfast and do whatever normal Londoners do.

This must have gone on for quite a while... Until the morning of the second of January actually.

And now...not only MAN IS DEAD, but it is a WHORE who claims it!

I squeezed my nose with two fingers and dipped into the hot water.

### ***Thirteenth***

*I told my father I wanted to quit university.*

- *That soon? – Another one of his Dwayne-the-Rock eyebrow arching.*

- *Actually, I'm not surprised at all, Matti. You've never accomplished anything important in your life so far. Not a single thing!*
- *Education is not important.*
- *Yes? Do explain, please.*
- *I mean, not that kind of education. They only smother us with information we don't really need. And turn us into ... you know...*
- *Let me guess - into another brick in the wall?*
- *No! Well, yes, in a way... Pink Floyd were junkies but they got it right.*
- *So you quit university because you don't want to become a brick in the wall of the Danish society?*
- *You make it sound ridiculous, Dad.*
- *Because it IS ridiculous, Matti!*

*This conversation is getting nowhere: father is always right, I'm always wrong.*

- *I gotta go to work. Say hello to mother from me.*
- *Say it yourself if you dare. She is lying in her room in a state of comma. These migraines of her... you know how it is.*
- *I know.*

*In my lunch break, I check my phone; there's a message from Ira. She rarely texts me. I hate typing; she knows that and doesn't take it personally when I never reply. That's why her messages never contain a question. Like the one now.*

*"Come over for dinner tonight. Magstræde 16, across from Vinens Hus, 3 floor."*

*I feel someone's breathing in my neck. I turn. It's Ngvanko and he's reading the message from behind my shoulder.*

- *Someone has a date!*

*He winks at me as if he knows what's going on and he's a part of the conspiracy.*

*- No, not a date.*

*- Yeah, right!*

*- She doesn't know how to cook.*

*Why did I say this??*

- She's my philosophy professor.*
- Oh, man, that's awesome! Like serious porn! I bet she's fucking with her glasses on.*
- Go fuck yourself, Ngvanko!*
- Yeah, man, probably I will because I don't have a sexy professor to feed me strawberries and cream-m-m-m!*

*He pulls out a long pink tongue and licks his fat black lips.*

- You're disgusting, man!*

*He laughs the laugh of a retarded circus monkey and I seriously consider punching him, but instead I politely ask him if he doesn't have a toilet to scrub. He says, "No, man, I'm done with the shit today."*

*I intended to go for a ride in the suburbs with the twins but, I guess, I can call it off. Look, now I talk like Sherlock Holms - "call it off".*

*I need to buy my own car. Probably I can use the money from the play. Which reminds me that the premiere is next Friday. I shouldn't forget to ask Ira if she's going, too. She will probably – they say Frau Linden is her friend. But on the other hand, Ira has this thing... I don't know how to put it in words... I don't even know if there exists a specific word at all for her condition, but she seems to hate her closest people the most. The rest she just doesn't notice. Which in a*



*way puts me in an unfavorable position. I'll explain. She is obviously not indifferent towards me. Which means she may (or already has) accepted me as a member of her inner circle. Which, however, is not good, because, if we follow the logics of her case history, she'll soon start to hate me. Or!*

*Or she invites me to dinner tonight to tell me she already hates me.*

### **Thirteenth**

- I'm leaving for New York in the beginning of February.

I don't believe myself! Is that the first thing a reticent woman such as myself tells to a guest to whom she hasn't even said good evening!

Matthiessen smiles and looks straight into my eyes with the soothing look of a mesmerizer. His nose is red from the cold outside; he must have been walking for at least 40 minutes to get here. His hair has turned into a wet clout. It's snowing in big flakes.

He hasn't got me anything - not chocolates, not flowers, not even a bottle of wine. He brings only himself and doesn't seem to be uncomfortable with that.

- Shall I come in?
- Oh! Sure...

He steps into the living room, leaving muddy footprints on my impeccably polished wooden floor. Usually people who come here for the first time are eager to note that I have a "nice place". So normally, as he sits down on the white sofa and casts a brisk look around, I expect the phrase to come out of his slightly open mouth.

- For one who ridicules people interested in the zodiac, you've got quite some books on astrology!

Shit! The books I bought from a bookstore at Gatwick! I should have removed them after I read them all (!), but instead I left them on the coffee table to be ON FULL DISPLAY.

- You got me! – I nervously pick the books and place them on Matthiessen's lap. – Bought them for you. From the airport. In London. The Gatwick. I was there for the holidays.
- Thanks.
- And I also got you this... Happy New Year!
- A Scar Symmetry Unseen Empire t-shirt? Wow! Thank you, thank you, thank you!!! You're the best, Ira, seriously!
- And this...
- What's that?
- It's... nothing really.

It is actually a stainless-steel L.U.C. MK II watch by Chopard for 4, 609 Euros.

- You don't want to be late for work, do you? – I say.
- Ira, it's... Thanks, but I don't really wear watches. Besides, this one seems expensive. My job... You see, I'm like Jennifer Lopez in Maid in Manhattan. I sure can't wear a watch while shoveling my arm up to the elbow in a toilet pan.

I am stupid, stupid, stupid.

- You want something to drink? I'll have wine.
- Water, thanks.

I am nervous. Why am I so nervous? My hand's shaking, while pouring water in a glass.

- I thought you were living with your niece; - his voice coming from the living room is smothered by the sound of the running water.
- I did.

I check my reflection in the mirror in the hallway. My face looks like a dramatically risen soufflé. I shouldn't have slept so much in the afternoon!

Back to the living room, I hand him the water and I take a sip of my wine.

- But she went to live with her grandmother in Esbjerg.

I make a disgusted face. I have heard neither from my mother, nor from Siri since my inglorious escape from Esbjerg. When I came home ten days ago, I found some of Siri's dirty panties in the laundry basket. I felt bad.

I'd better change the subject though.

- Hungry?
- Sure. You cooked?
- Not exactly. I ordered. Made only the lentils soup myself.

Over dinner table, Matthiessen talks a lot, as usual. He must have already forgotten what I told him about me moving to New York since he hasn't asked me, not even out of basic courtesy, about my reasons. I am surprised to find myself saddened by his lack of interest. I drink my wine and solemnly observe his moving lips.

- The holographic universe has to do with reincarnation in the sense that every human being visiting the frequency domain has access to every possible life and thought, you know? This means that a person on LSD or in a hypnotic state, whose consciousness opens up to the greater domain that holds all possible projections, would have access to the whole shebang, for time and space are non-existent. So then a person could take on any consciousness at all, and that prevents the need for reincarnation to explain anything. This so works for me, you know?
- How exactly does this work for you?

- Well...

He pours himself another glass of water to wash down the fairly hot vegetable madras.

- Because I am not afraid of death, Ira, as simple as that. As I was not afraid to die the previous time.
- What previous time?
- When I died.
- When was that?

He shrugs his shoulders.

- I don't know. And probably I'll never know. But I am certain I wasn't afraid when it happened. I guess death just seized upon me and I closed my eyes to take a rest, and that was it. I must have been thinking about the people I loved...

The boy is a weirdo.

But I have to face the truth – I thought that too in regard to his, as I considered unsound, interest in astrology before I bought and read all those books ten days ago.

- Are you afraid to die? – He asks.
- Me?

I didn't expect having to answer existential questions while having, as they used to call it in Victorian England, a gentlemen caller over to my house helping himself to the Sunday menu of the Indian Taj Restaurant. But life is unpredictable as it is...

- I can't say. I am a philosophy professor. I've read tons of books on other people's thoughts on death. And eventually I've come up to the conclusion that death and its concept are absolutely empty. The concept of

death has a use for the living, while death itself has no use for anything. Wittgenstein said it right, “Death is not an experience on life.” So, all I can say about death is that it is either real or it is not real. If it is real, then the end of one’s life is a simple termination. If it is not real, then the end of one’s embodied life is not true death, but a portal to another life. So, I guess this makes you right in a way.

We keep silent for a while, each of us contemplating on death, I guess. Or on the reality of the unstuck patch of wall paper in the corner above the bookshelf.

- Look, Matti, I’m thinking of going to New York. To teach.
- Aha, that explains why I haven’t seen you around since New Year.
- Yes. I took a leave of absence. The deal is: I go there for a month or two, look around, check the atmosphere at the Alma mater, and if I like it, I sign a two-year contract.
- I see.
- Aren’t you going to say something?
- I always wanted to live in New York. In Brooklyn. It’s the hottest place right now, you knew that? Artists and galleries - a lot is going on in Brooklyn. You should definitely rent an apartment there.

I feel as if I’m pouring cyanide down my throat and not Syrah. But I’ve put on my happiest poker face. And so I say with my best pokerfaced voice:

- That will be highly inconvenient. The university is in Lower Manhattan.
- That’s a bummer. But I’m gonna miss you. I intended to take some other courses with you if I... well, if I don’t quit school, which I seriously consider lately.
- I don’t know how I’m going to live without ...

Seeing him, obviously.

- ...without the food at Indian Taj!
- I'm sure they have great Indian places in Lower Manhattan! Want me to help you with the dishes?
- No.
- Please! I used to do it all the time at home before we got the washing machine. I love washing dishes. Seriously.
- If you insist...

I sit on a chair with my hands resting like dead birds on my lap. He talks with his back to me about two boys, twins, who stole the bicycle of some Chinese guy the other day, but they were too heavy and too clumsy to both ride it, so the owner very soon caught up with them and beat the shit out of them, because he happened to be a T'ai chi ch'uan instructor.

I feel this urge... I rise slowly, and stand right behind him, my eyes fixed on the back of his head, my hands caressing his shoulders without touching them. I don't hear anything anymore. The twins and the martial arts instructor are non-existing. There is only the thin strip of air between me and him.

He turns abruptly and is so startled to see my face that close to his that he instinctively draws back a little.

- What?

My hands remain ridiculously hanging in the air.

- Sorry, - I mutter, - just wanted to take...this.
- What, the tooth pins?
- Yes.
- Here you are.

He dries his hands on the towel by the stove and asks what time it is. He has forgotten about the hand watch I've given him. I tell him the time. He says he's going home.

- When are you leaving? – He says when he's already at the doorstep.
- By the end of next week.
- I'll fix you a compilation of my favorite tracks, so you can listen to them during the flight. I have listened to some new bands those days. Well, not exactly new, only that I have recently discovered them. Like Poets of the Fall, they are Finnish. Not bad at all, you'll see.
- Sure.
- Ira?
- Yes?
- I'll miss you. You're maybe the only person I feel close enough to miss, you know what I mean?
- I do.
- Good night. And thanks for the presents.

And when I am about to close the door, he calls out from the staircase one floor below:

- I forgot to tell you they paid me twenty thousand for making the sets for Frau Linden's play. Awesome, right?
- Good for you. Bye, Matthiessen. Take care!
- You too, Irka!

He called me Irka!

I go back to the living room and crash down on the white sofa, exactly on that sunken spot formed by Matthiessen's bottom.

A first-time mother will probably spend hours beside the cradle of her new-born watching it breathe in case it forgets how to do it. That how scared women are in

the beginning of their motherhood. I have the same fear and it is all directed towards my new-born love.

### ***Seventeenth***

*I was called this morning to go to the theater and check if I'm "satisfied" with the sets they'd made based on my drawings. They don't have stage-hands or anything, so I guess the artists have to do everything themselves. When I arrive, Frau Linden seems to be in amok – she runs about the stage like a mad cow and swears in German. It's funny, but at least nobody gets offended.*

*It's Thursday, tomorrow is the first performance day, hence the madhouse. Frau Linden comes to me, smears sweat and butter from her sandwich all over my jacket sleeve as she is having a tight grip of the wrist, dragging me in one direction and another, explaining things, yelling orders, and giving herself a heart attack. I ask her who's paying for the production. Is it the Arts Department? She suddenly stops and gets off me.*

- *No.*
- *Then who?*
- *It's none of your business, mister Matthiessen. You did your job, you got paid for it, that's it.*
- *What, now you are telling me that the Russian mafia has paid for this second-rate play to be staged?*
- *Why don't you go learn something, Matthiessen? Don't you have papers to write?*
- *I'm sorry for being rude.*
- *And you should be!*

*I apologize once again and leave.*



*I take the green line from Forum to Ørestad to meet the twins after classes. They are in their last year at high school. I find a vacant seat although it's rush hour, and try to do some sketching. I can't get Ira's sad eyes out of my head.*



*The portrait doesn't turn out to be very good, with all the swaying and rattling of the coach, but at least I captured the eyes.*

*The twins are waiting for me outside the school's railings, huddling in the fluffy hoods of their electric green bubble jackets. "Surprise!" they yell with one*

voice. *“We’ve been kicked out of the last class because this fucker here (they point accusingly at each other) tried to burn the hair of Fat Monika in the chemistry lab.”*

*I instantaneously get in a destructive mood and feel like burning down something that the society undeservedly treasures much.*

*We burn only our own lips when trying to put out a firelighter with mouths.*

*After an idle afternoon spent with the mentally deficient brothers, I go to my untidy den and crash on the sagging sofa. That was my day off work and I did absolutely nothing useful with it. Except for wolfing down veggie burgers with fries at Smithy’s, which simply must be mentioned since they have the best veggies in town.*

*I log on Skype and there’s already a message from Ira, which has been waiting for me to read since the early afternoon.*

*[14:37:28] Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath: Why don’t you move to live in my apartment while I’m gone? You won’t have to pay, just to keep the nasty birds away from my kitchen.*

*An excruciating pain in the forehead almost blinds me; it feels as if I’ve eaten a frozen yoghurt popsicle too fast. Ira must be joking. Nobody and I mean NOBODY in nowadays Denmark would offer their apartment in central Copenhagen to a strange youth with suspicious friends and uninvestigated background.*

*I gulp down two glasses of water before I answer.*

*[21:39:50] Cataclysm Child: i’m already here.*

*[21:40:18] Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath: Or if you're in an adventurous mood, you can join me in NY. I can even arrange a ticket for tomorrow.*

*She should stop drinking so much. She's drunk for sure now. What she proposes is easier said than done. Besides, I don't like where all this is heading!*

*[21:41:20] Cataclysm Child: Why? What I'd do there? Where will I live?*

*[21:41:54] Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath: We'll enroll you at the university. You'll live with me. You yourself said how much you'd like to be living in NY. Here's an opportunity! Don't ignore it.*

*[21:44:03] Cataclysm Child: ira, this is ... I can't*

*[21:44:22] Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath: Why not?*

*[21:44:48] Cataclysm Child: because this is not how I imagined it to be*

*[21:44:48] Cataclysm Child: simply don't want it to happen that way. And you make it difficult.*

*Damn, this is hard.*

*I pour myself another glass of water. Those fries were fucking salty.*

*[21:48:34] Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath: I'll leave the spare set of keys with Mrs. Kozinski, the house manager, on the first floor. In case you decide to move in.*

*[21:48:42] Eulogy\_ of\_ Wrath: Goodbye, Matthiessen.*

*And before I could wish her a pleasant flight or whatever, she went red.*

*Ok. Did I fuck it up, or did I fuck it up?*

*Well, I guess future will show.*

*But now it's time to get rid of that uncomfortable uneasiness in my balls. I lie back and apathetically masturbate for twelve minutes. Then I spend four hours playing Warcraft online with some people I know from before – The Airy Warrior, Master Lancelot and David-From-The-Grave.*

*That was an EPIC GAME!*

## **Relativism**

Whether a man is a criminal or a public servant is purely a matter of perspective.

— **Tom Robbins**, *Another Roadside Attraction*

## February

### Fourteenth

Heraclitus' 'All is in Flux' is an aphorism on the ever changing nature of all things in the world. Nothing is permanent, or definitive, that pre-Socratic philosopher taught us; which means that nothing, good or bad, stays the same for a long time, bad changing into good, and vice versa. That has two big consequences: it keeps humans hopeful, but also realistic. Thoreau famously remarked that 'The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation'. Is it because they lose hope easily? Or is it because they fear death? Nobody knows what happens after death.

The thing is I got so much obsessed with that death thing that I am planning to file a proposal with Dean Garrett to teach a course entitled "Death and Its Concept". I talked only once with him since I arrived in New York, and that was a brief, over a hot-dog lunch break conversation. He seemed nervous when we shook hands, and some of the mustard from his hot-dog got on my silk blouse. Told me to first settle in, get comfortable, go sightseeing, eat sushi, and then we'll meet again for a more thorough "conference".

- By the way, Professor Franic, how do you like the apartment we arranged for you?
- I don't. I rented another one.
- Oh!
- Don't worry. There was nothing wrong with it, I just like Brooklyn better.
- Oh!

I rent a studio on North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street in Williamsburg. For 2, 700 per month I get a comparatively quiet place two blocks from yoga to designer denim to fancy pickles.

And also organic delis, pop-up restaurants, vegetable brunch eateries, vintage clothing closets and flea markets on every block. Williamsburg has sprung up from the abandoned factories and shipyards to become the hottest spot in Brooklyn.

I know, I kind of fantasize about Matti attending those infamous “classes for dudes” at the Kula Yoga Studio twice a week, in the evening preferably, and after that, on his way back home, dropping by the Royal Canteen and gets me octopus tostada with tamarind drunken sauce.

I’m pathetic, but only in 40 percent. The other 60 is pure awesomeness. I left the sullen Copenhagen and I am moderately happy.

And yes, as a matter of fact, I do see Matti flourishing in here. I mean, there is this amazing street art culture – it provides a flamboyant backdrop for an area that has become a hub for creative types. And the girls look like Kirsten Dunst, in slim slacks and Wayfarer Ray-Bans, the guys like 1930’s hipsters, bearded or mustachioed and tattoos galore.

I hired this studio in the northern part, which has grown almost touristy for residents and they don’t feel that happy about that, but I like the southern part better – it has more original spirit, with elaborate Old New Orleans establishments.

On weekends, I go shopping for custom-tailored jackets with vintage fabrics at Ferries (bellissimi!!!) and Bowler shoes at Rickard Guy. Or buy jam (I learnt to bake waffles! And waffles go best with home-made jam.) And the Brewery

Brooklyn beer – come on! I am able to never put a drop of water in my mouth till the rest of my life since I’ve discovered that beer.

I went a couple of times to take pictures at the spot where the new Wythe Hotel’s being built. There’s something about this place and about this building, a block of bricks and glass, which drags me towards itself. It’s inexplicable.

It’s still cold, but my other favorite pastime is taking walks down the Coney Island Boardwalk. Not many people there, especially on week days when it’s raining or snowing, but especially on those days I feel like in a Technicolor movie and my thoughts hark back to Weegee’s classic photos of summer crowds in 1940.

And in the nights I go to sleep with Red Hook in mind. With its deserted portside warehouses and school bus and taxi depots. Fairway Market that’s been destroyed by Hurricane Sandy is about to be reopened soon. A few waterfront studio-galleries survived the storm. Last Saturday, when I went there by the Ikea bus from Manhattan, I bought two crabs the size of saucepans.

I know, this means I’m healing.

Damn, I’ve turned into a fucking Eat, Pray, Love cliché!

## **Fifteenth**

Next Tuesday will be my first day teaching. I was supposed to start in June, with a summer course of my choice, but they had an emergency situation - a professor had to take a maternity leave two months ahead of the scheduled, and they thought I might be willing to substitute her for the rest of the spring semester. If, of course, I have decided to stay.

So, I’ve been invited to the Dean’s office and now I’m sitting cross-legged on a massive Windsor chair, pretentiously made to look more antique than it actually is. The Dean himself seems a bit uptight; he acts as if the Queen of England is



paying him a visit and Her Majesty's personal valet is holding her coat-tails with utmost caution and respect.

- I am so delighted that you could make it on a Friday forenoon, professor Franic!
- Why? The only occupation I have so far on a Friday forenoon is taking pictures of the gulls' anuses while flying over me.

Awkward silence.

- I love taking walks along the Navy Yard, - I eventually find it necessary to explain where I happen to see gulls from such proximity.
- Yes, yes, of course, the Navy Yard! Tea? Or coffee?
- Sure. With some bourbon if at hand.

Dean Garrett is now on the alert – he's been unexpectedly stricken by the prospect of having offered a full-time contract to an alcoholic coming from the Old World. He now may only pray that she is not also a vampire. Or a North Korean intelligence agent.

- So, I presume, by your coming here on such a short notice, that you are willing to take Lydia's classes. That is professor Maudlin – she's our expert on Kant, Hegel and philosophy of mind. But you know, she got this... condition, there were unexpected complications with her pregnancy... I mean, it's not easy to become a first-time mother when you're in your late 40's, am I right?

I shrug my shoulders.

- No way for me to know.
- Oh yes, I'm sorry. So, my point is that her students were left high and dry and we feel responsible.
- I'll take her classes, no need to go further in your explanations, Dean Garrett.
- Please, call me Don.
- Nice bourbon. Strong, and yet kind of playful.
- Thank you but I'm not a connoisseur myself. We just keep the bottle in case we have visiting academicians from Russia.
- Yes, one should always be well stocked for those!
- Ha-ha-ha. Pardon me!
- Don, may I ask you something?
- Anything.

I get up, take a few steps, and stop in front of the impressive bookcase. I run my fingers along the covers and say:

- Have you read them all?
- Well... - He fixes his glasses and leans forward to take a better view from behind my shoulder as to read the titles of the books. – Not all of them, I guess. Some of them belonged to the former Dean of the faculty, so...
- I have read them all. I know them all.
- Of course you do.
- Tell me, Don, why did you decide to invite me, of all prominent philosophy researchers in Europe and the United States? I've just now realized that you've never really mentioned a reason while we've been exchanging mails and talking over the phone.

I turn and stare at him. Suddenly, the muscles on Don's faces relax and he assumes the expression of a child who has been released from the burden of keeping a secret.

- Have you heard of the Super Scholar Institute?

I frown.

- I don't think so. Why?
- I'll explain.

His mobile starts ringing with the Swan's Lake main theme but he ignores it.

- Back in 1998, while still a Master Degree student at Cambridge, you were subjected to an intelligence test conducted by this institute. I guessed that you might have forgotten about it because I couldn't see it mentioned in any of your CV's or biography notes I've come around.
- Why should I?
- Don't you know what the result of your test was, professor Franic?

I force my brain to restore some memories from 1998. It's not easy. My brain has been recently occupied only by processing waffles recipes. Finally, I get this vague picture of me sitting in the biology lab, scribbling something on a sheet of paper. It's a rarely bright British day outside and I'm pissed because I have to sit in this somber room and fill in a useless test, for which they said they wouldn't even pay me. The letter with the results must have arrived at some point later, but I never actually read its content; my then roommate nonchalantly mentioned one day that she had accidentally spilt her coffee on the envelope (she'd always use unopened letters or magazines still with their plastic wrapping on as table mats) and threw it away. I didn't get cross with her, I wasn't exactly eager to know how smart I was. I knew I was very smart, I didn't need anyone else to send me a letter claiming the same.

- I don't.
- It's inexplicable to me why they didn't insist on contacting you again for further tests.
- Why? What's the matter? Am I going to die of some rare genetic syndrome that gradually damages the brain? Is this what they discovered about me at the Institute?
- Do you mind if I call you Ira... since we are going to be working together... And no, fortunately, you're not dying!

I nod for yes, he can call me whatever he finds suitable. Do I have any other option anyway? I mean, I'm drinking the bourbon meant to bring the Russian colleagues in a mood to reveal scientific secrets.

- Ok, thank you. The thing is, Ira, that I happen to know in person the chair of the Super Scholar Institute. His name is Rajeshwer Khanna and he is one of our graduates – Class of 1987. Six months ago I met him at a conference in Stockholm and the opening speech was so boring that everybody was playing with their smartphones. Then Rajesh sneakily approached me and whispered in my ear: "I cannot understand how you can be sitting so imperturbably in this chair, my friend, when there are only 325 miles separating you from the best employee you can ever dream of." I gave him a confused look, because I had no idea what he was talking about. Later that day, over dinner, he told me that he had been rummaging through some old archives when he came upon the files containing the testing results of 250 Cambridge students from the time he hadn't still taken over the Institute. Your name stood out. He couldn't believe his eyes. He went back to his office and googled you. So, when he saw me at that conference in Sweden, he made the connection, knowing that I run a philosophy department, which had been experiencing some

difficulties. We had been through a couple of unpleasant scandals, which tarnished our impeccable reputation. And he knew I wanted to keep the department in the big first five league ... Only six months ago I was desperate, Ira. Do you understand that?

- And what's changed now?
- I've got you.

He throws his arms up in the air as if to show his gratitude to God for having sent him abundant harvest or that his wife got pregnant at the age of 90.

- How do you mean?
- Well, to start with, I intend to throw a huge advertising campaign with your name as a bait. And your picture should be on the front page of our faculty site. No! On the front page of the university site. I can tell you that at the Rector's office they are no less enthusiastic about us having you here. And then – interviews on primetime at CBS and NBC. It will be inevitable not to get a cover contract for the People magazine...
- Wait a second, what exactly are you telling me, Don???
- Oh, I forgot to mention. Your IQ result is among the highest top twenty in the world along with those of Stephen Hawking, Paul Allen and Garry Kasparov... This makes you a genius, professor Franic!
- Who's first on the list?
- Why?
- I just want to know. I may want to marry him.
- Some Korean guy, a physicist. But I let the people at the Science Department care about that.

He laughs at his own attempt to be funny, but when he notices the fossilized expression on my face, his laugh turns into a fit of coughing. I wonder for some

seconds if I have to tap him on the back or something, but eventually decide to remain motionless. I am not a paramedic after all.

- You know what, - he says with a voice still croaky from the coughing. – I'll have bourbon myself. What the heck – it's casual Friday after all and we're celebrating your arrival among us. Cheers and welcome!

What can I say? It turns out that I am what I've always subconsciously suspected to be – a stupid cow.

## **Nineteenth**

Am I lucky or what?

The poor pregnant bitch has left an inspiring course untaught.

- Good morning, people, I believe this is PHIL 1175 graduate course that goes under the name of *Death and Life*?
- *Life and Death*! – Someone from the far end of the seminar room corrects me. My heart flips; for a split of a second the voice reminded me of Matti's when he first...
- Sure, Life and Death. Much more close to the fixed routine, isn't that right? First we have life and then death follows. Or is it really so?

The classroom is silent. They still are scrutinizing my appearance, analyzing my gestures, studying my clothing, my facial expression, dissecting me.

- I'll repeat my question. Do you really think that this is the natural course of things – death succeeding life? Or is this what you've been made to believe all your conscious life? Is it possible that life begins with death?

Indistinct murmur, paper rustling, chairs squeaking.

- I went through the notes of your professor who started this course a month ago and... I find them of no use.

Indignation. Confusion.

- Her intention was to talk to you about memories. Personal identity, memory chains, and amnesias; errors of memory and perception; selective “embroidered” memory and narration; purposeful forgetting, buried or suppressed memories and self-deception; grief and living in the past; obituaries, memorials, and obligations “to never forget”; desires for how and how long one is remembered after death; remorse, forgiveness, and punishment; tradition, patriotism, and war.

I went slowly to the corner of the room. There’s a pot of fully blossomed Peace Lilly. I bow a little to smell one of the white flowers. It doesn’t really have any odor. The students in this room do not have the vaguest idea that I attempt to smell a flower for the first time in 19 years.

- This is a first-rate office plant! Prudent, and yet eye-catching. And speaking about life and death, it’ll look just lovely in a remembrance wreath! And what professor Maudlin wanted to talk you about is horseshit.
- Would you present yourself, please?

Ah, the eager voice of inquisitive youth!

- My name, together with my face will be on the next week cover of the People Magazine, so I heard.

The students exchange glances.

- But we’ve already bought the recommended readings for Professor Mauldin’s class. And for the other classes this semester.
- Which are? The readings?

The future doctor of philosophy – a fat guy with a dirty black-and-white keffiyeh scarf wound around his thick neck – checks something on his laptop and says:

- Jerry Fodor's "Minds Without Meanings", Christopher Peacocke – "Metaphysics and the Theory of Meaning", Mark Richard's "Concepts, Intuitions, and Analysis", Guy Longworth...
- OK, I got it! Well, these are all decent authors. Not brilliant, but enough uncomplicated to flatter the lazy American brain.
- Excuse me, are you going to teach us also other classes?
- Not unless someone of your other professors get pregnancy complications.

Constrained laugh.

Another raised arm.

- Yes?
- I've just checked the faculty site – it's been recently updated. Yesterday most probably. You are the notorious professor from Copenhagen!
- Am I?
- Well... you are among the smartest people on the planet.
- Other questions before we start? Yes? You, the girl with the fake pearl necklace.
- These are real pearls!
- Whatever. Your question?
- What is your requirement for an A?
- A simple one, I may say. If you die, get buried (or cremated, doesn't really matter to me), and return prior to the semester's end, you'll get an A, since you'll fully prove there is life after death.



## **Twenty-fourth**

To those who claim that NYU is a big school for lazy slackers who come from wealth and which lack humanity, I can tell this: Yes, you are completely right, my friends! And I am one of those who actively add to the dehumanizing process.

Now, that I happen to be more often downtown, I see why so many people hate New York. It is a lonely city. People always work, running with their heads down to get home, barely creating relations with one another and enjoying life. New York is littered with people who have money. It's a cutthroat city. But I don't really understand why, as they tell me, so many students leave school claiming they have a hard time making friends. Fuck the friends, I say, if you can buy an excellent education for 25 thousands per semester, why do you need friends in the first place? Get a puppy. Or feed pigeons; they'll eventually become your loyal friends.

Speaking of friends (or imaginary lovers), I haven't heard from Matti since I left Denmark. He's always offline on Skype. And I'm always invisible. Or he may be invisible, too, thinking I am always offline... It's a double-edged denial.

Fortunately, I am left with little time to think about the Matthiessen crisis because I've taken up also Mauldin's undergraduate course on Kant. And Kant is a tough nut to crack. By the way, I've been informed Mauldin's condition deteriorated. And yes, she actually had a miscarriage and lost the twins. I was the only one in the recreation room with the coffee machine on our faculty floor that didn't show any signs of grieving at the news. Everybody else was walking around, or rather tiptoeing around for one whole day with heartbroken expressions on their faces. OK, I said in a loud, windows-shaking voice during one of the breaks, when most of the staff had gathered to drink coffee with muffins (home-baked by Millie, whoever she is) in a deathlike, respectful

silence. Look, people, enough with the mourning game! Do you understand that those were only fetuses, not real people? And besides, this is what normally happens to women who are 50, when they try to bake a previously frozen bun in their cold, deaden ovens!”

The united, goggle-eyed look of accusation and disapproval they all gave me somehow warmed up my broken heart a little. For a brief second I felt at home. Only this time I almost immediately regretted what I’d said. And promised myself to go see poor Lydia one of these days. I could even bring her flowers...

It’s getting dark and it’s getting cold. This is my usual late-afternoon Sunday walk around the neighborhood. I blow in my palms to warm them; I feel my fingertips frozen and numb, although I’m wearing hand-knitted mittens. I cross Berry Street, and quicken my step. As I pass by the Mast Bro Chocolate, I notice I’ve already got used to the slight acrid smell coming from the inside. When I first sensed that smell, I was a bit alarmed, but then, when stepping into the tasting room, a fat woman in a sterilized white overall and a hairnet explained to me that the smell is part of the process, which involves cacao, cane sugar, and adds-in like Serrano peppers and sea salt. Yes, now it’s official: one more tour for 9, 99 like the one in the Mast Bro. and I’ll turn either into the female version of Willy Wonka, or into the author of a suicide-encouraging sequel of “Eat, Love, Pray”, entitled “Eat, Eat and Eat”.

I suddenly decide to drop by Cantina Royal for a quick glass of merzal before I get to my high-ceilinged loft studio. I sit at a table next to a Hasidic couple – a seemingly young woman, wearing a wig and a long, conservative dress with sleeves past the elbows, and a 50-something year old man in a navy jacket and trousers and white shirt. I take off my mittens and check out my phone. I have three missed calls from Siri. This is alarming. Even more alarming than a tart smell of dog piss in a chocolate factory! Yet, I don’t bother to call her back. Whatever the emergency, I’m sure it can wait until I finish my merzal, which

helps me equilibrate my body temperature with the one of the room. Then I'll probably cook myself a fish, standing naked by the generously lit curtainless windows of my kitchen. And then I'll forget that I even have a phone.

## **Twenty-fifth**

But the phone doesn't miss the chance to remind me of itself.

It's 3, 15 a.m. when it rings. The half-digested pan-fried perch raises its fins in terror and indignation inside my stomach.

-Siri, WHAT?

- If I could, I'd kill you, Ira!

- Well, come and get me! Do you know how to swim?

- Come online, I need to talk to you.

- Now?

- Right now!

- Do you know what time it is here?

- I don't care, Ira, just switch your goddam laptop on!

- FINE!

It's a broad daylight in my apartment on Magstræde 16. Siri's face is pale and frustrated; in fact, it looks like a mask she uses as a standard banner of her dissatisfaction of my actions. I don't expect to look much better on the camera either, since I was awoken during my REM sleep.

And then I suddenly connect the dots. My living room. Siri's face. Siri in my living room.

- What are you doing in Copenhagen???
- I escaped.
- Wh... You did? When? Why?
- I hated it there. Your mother is obsessed with white clothes, did you know that?
- No, but you can't... I mean, she had all the papers and judge's order and everything. You can't just leave! They'll accuse me of messing up with your brain! How can you be so stupid!!!
- How can YOU be so stupid?
- What do you mean?

I reach to adjust the screen at such an angle, so that I could watch it while making myself a cup of tea. I have the premonition I won't go to bed soon.

- Well, I come home yesterday, I unlock the door, step in and what do I see?

Siri makes a face that is supposed to correspond to the suspense of her story.

- I see a body in MY bed!
- A dead body?
- No. A living body, but that's not the point.
- So no one died in your bed, why worry then?
- Ira, there was a stranger sleeping in my bed!

I consider that the situation requires adding whisky to my tea.

- Someone broke into the apartment?
- Not exactly.

Now her tone has changed from dramatic to quarrelsome.

- When I woke him up with a kick in the kidneys, I could see he was a boy. Bushy hair, bloodshed eyes, girlish mouth... Sounds familiar to you?
- If it's some sort of test, it's too early for me to make any guessing and answering.

Although I say these words in the calm, indifferent voice of a self-controlled cold-blooded psychopath, my heart is pumping blood like a machine gone out of order. I have a heart, which is madly in love. And which is obviously a broken machine because I can feel a disturbing tightness in my chest...as if someone...or, better said someone's fat cat's sitting on my chest.

- This boy claims that you gave him the keys and the permission to move in. Is that true, Ira?

Matti.

- Well...
- Is that true, Ira?

Matti has laid his untidy nest of hair on my pillow!

- Before I answer affirmatively, let me remind you that it is my apartment. And besides, I had no idea you'd be coming home! Seriously. Otherwise, I wouldn't have offered him to move in.
- But you did, so this scumbag is currently living in our apartment. OUR apartment, Ira!

She makes a gesture as if she intends to tear her entire hair with both hands.

- Is he there now?
- What?
- Is he there now? I'd like to talk to him.
- No, he is not. I called the police. What did you expect?

- You called...

This heart...oh, this heart of mine... it's rapidly galloping inside my chest, giving me hard time breathing.

- Why would you call the police, Siri? I let him in; he doesn't have a place to stay. It's OK really, I know the boy, and he is my student. Just for a few weeks...
- Oh sure, that is what he said, too. He got evicted for getting into quarrel with the landlord or something, but I didn't bother to listen to his explanations because I was too busy throwing things at him. By the way, sorry for breaking the porcelain piece, the one of the Vietnamese girl with the bamboo pointed hat you keep on the coffee table.
- And what happened?
- It broke in pieces.
- No, I mean with the boy.
- The police were here. Just half an hour ago. Checked his ID, questioned him briefly in the kitchen, and then took him away with them. He didn't get a chance to gather his stuff – it's all over MY room. If he doesn't show up to collect it any soon (although I don't want to see this little shit anymore!), I'll throw it to the garbage.
- You're a ... you...

Let's be honest, I'm on the verge of bursting into tears. This is not normal. This is not happening! And yet, this is happening.

- You are a bitch, Siri! A heartless, conceited bitch. He is just a boy! He loves fish in aquariums and... and...the universe. What do YOU know!?
- Oh, please, don't be melodramatic and calm down! He's not arrested or anything. But he's a trespasser, so they had to take him away.
- No, no, no, you don't understand.

I shake my head violently. I remember mother used to say that shaking your head like this could cause brain damage. And she'd tell me that because whenever I was furious I'd tear my head off. Guess what, Mother, I did get a brain damage from that much shaking!

- I don't understand one thing though! – Siri cocks her head to one side and squints eyes to add a suspicious aspect of her already viciously distorted face. – Why would you offer a young boy to live in your apartment!?
- Look, Siri...

Suddenly, I am lost for words and feel tired. The burden of irrational sentiments and decisions presses down heavily on my shoulders.

- I don't know.

On the laptop screen, I follow the second hand of the cheap clock on the wall behind me ticking backwards.

- I miss you, Ira. I somehow hoped that I'd find you there, sitting by the kitchen window.
- I miss you, too, Siri.

She touches the screen as if she believes she can reach over to me and caress my cheek.

- I suppose I have to talk to my mother. She must have freaked out so far...
- Yes, you do. Tell her I don't want to go back there, and I'll never go back there.
- I'll do it first thing tomorrow. I'm going back to sleep now.

But the sleep is a bitch and doesn't come back to me.

And suddenly it's Monday morning.

## Absurdism

Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.

-- **Søren Kierkegaard, Journals (1843)**



### *March-April-May*

Alas, how easily things go wrong! They call the sequence of unfortunate events “cascading failures”.

There exists an obvious fact that seems utterly moral: namely, that a man is always a prey to his truths. Once he has admitted them, he cannot free himself from them. One has to pay something. A man who has become conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it.

I created this absurd and totally unnatural universe for myself. And I’ve lived in it for many years and now, being already conscious of it, I have ceased to belong to the future.

*I bought a car. I’ve been thinking for some time now to make a car tour all the way up to Vättern in South Central Sweden in the summer. I love lakes. Better than any other kind of water basins. And Vättern is the second largest lake in Sweden and the sixth in Europe. I got hooked on this particular lake when I watched Ingmar Bergman’s Wild Strawberries. There is a scene on a restaurant terrace overlooking Lake Vättern. Then I dreamt about the lake. That I myself was on this balcony, and when I looked down at my legs, they were in black and white.*

*Two weeks ago, I cycled to Tagensvej in Nørrebro where the Titan Auto Shop is. I asked the guy at the help desk if he could show me the cheapest cars on sell, and he laughed and said I could buy his old car instead. Is it on sale, I asked. “It is already, you can have a look at it if you come down to my place after work.” Is there something wrong with it, I asked. “No, man, it’s just ...I’m tired*

*with it. Anyway, I've been thinking to buy a new one anyway. The old one is not that attractive to the chicks, if you know what I mean. Besides, I won't take any commission, it's gonna be a private deal."* And he winks at me. And then adds with a bit of an arrogant sympathy written on his horse-like face, *"To be honest, man, the second I saw you, I was convinced you can't afford even the cheapest of our vehicles. No offence!"* He spreads his arms in a self-crucifying, excusing-himself manner. As if these were not his own words, but were written on my forehead and he just spelled them out loud.

*I have this thing – when people see me, I make them believe I am the least objectionable and harmless creature that can be. Even their pet guinea pigs seem carnivorous compared to me. This is because I never give expression to my anger. I never show being insulted. I never actually frown.*

*I said, Cool, give me the address, I'll drop by your place at about 6, if that's fine.*

*The car the horse-boy sold me is a piece of junk. To begin with, I had to buy a new battery, because it kept going dead the first few days. So, it was obvious the guy lied to me saying it was in a good condition. But even with the new battery, it would start with a boost. One of the twins came over to check the engine and wisely concluded that the alternator too must be replaced. So I did that too.*

*Then, last night I was driving home, up a hill, foot nearly all the way down on the gas. As I reached the crest of the hill, the accelerator pedal jammed down... pretty dangerous. Had to obviously declutch, roll the car to the side of the road and switch it all off. Hazards came on, I got out and managed to un-jam the pedal somewhat, and I limped the car home. I called the twin; he was in the middle of banging a classmate, but still was able to find a sparkle of inner strength to consider my situation and even managed to make a suggestion that*

*was almost drowned in the lord-praising moan of sperm discharge: “Ughhh, man, that must be the throttle cable, grrrrhaha, uuuuuuh, yeaaaaah, baby!”*

*I now rent a room in Søborg. For 3,400 per month, which is a pretty decent sum. I found it on BoligPortal.dk. The ad said: “Furnished room ONLY AVAILABLE FOR FEMALE RENTAL”, but I must have skipped that capital-letter part, so when I showed up at the address, the landlady first gave me an are-you-fucking-with-me look, but then I smiled nicely and asked for a glass of water because I had cycled all the way to Lyngby (still had no car then) and I was thirsty, and she...I swear to God... I could see her growing softer and warmer, like a handful of heavy bread dough being put in the oven. Finally, she agreed to give me the room on the only condition that I wouldn't be bringing lover boys in. I guess she has issues with gay men, on which I didn't care to comment. I only said, “OK, I'll keep that in mind.”*

*I hate this car!*

The Kant course is not going well. And the kids in my other class hate me.

This is not something new, but now I somehow don't feel indifferent to this fact.

My colleagues don't ask me anymore if I'd join them for a coffee break on the balcony, now with the spring in the air, and the weather getting warmer, and this inexplicably fresh scent of lilacs...or maybe it's just the detergent they're using to clean the corridors. Or maybe these are real lilacs anyway!

The other day I found a note, stuck under the wipers of my car. It said: “Suck my Pure Reason Dick, Professor!” Obviously one of my male students was not quite satisfied with his midterm paper grade. I got into the car, put my hands on the wheel and cried for about two minutes before I set off.

I'm not well.

And I definitely have to put an end to this crazy waffle-making!

*I got a girlfriend.*

*Who would ever believe that could happen in the next 70 years! Not me.*

*She waits tables in the café next to the bike shop I work in, on Sølvgade. All in all, she has everything I look for in a woman - two tits, two legs, the basics... and she's vegetarian like me, and she's real nice, and good-hearted. And has beautiful cheek bones and her hair smells nice. And is somewhat clever. And she likes my music! Especially the industrial stuff. We started timidly, because in the beginning I was just a regular customer at the café (they have those delicious cinnamon rolls to which I got addicted), but then I asked her out, like on a regular date, and she asked "Where?" How do you mean? "Where are you taking me?" I don't know yet. We'll see. "I need to know in advance, otherwise I'm not coming." So I had to shoot out the name of the first pub that came to me. She said, "OK then, I'll see you there at 7. And don't bring me flowers or anything." I didn't have the intention to, I said. "Well, just a warning."*

*This girl is considerate. And never smiles. And is allergic to flowers. She brought cinnamon rolls to our first date. And to the next seven dates. She was perfectly honest, saying these were leftovers from the bakery delivery for the day. Anyway, I still love them.*

*She is not from here, actually she's half Norwegian, and lives alone with her father somewhere in the province; she moved to K-town to study, but things didn't work out for her and she quit after the second semester. She speaks funny, and is a bit lop-eared and if you look at her face from a particular angle, she looks like a telletubby creature, but I find her cute.*

*The other day I draw her portrait. I used this technique of old-fashioned naiveté on purpose. She said she'd hang it over her bed. Where else! And her eyes sparkled with joy and admiration. Maybe this was the moment for her when she realized that she mattered.*



*It was right after our third date when I realized we had a problem.*

I am now officially the smartest academic worker in the humanitarian sphere on the territory of the United States. People in my neighborhood recognize me and poke each other in the ribs whenever our paths cross. The other day some guy in the subway asked me for an autograph, but I think he took me for Lara Flynn Boyle or something. I am a fucking t-shirt!

So far, I've had seven TV live talk-variety shows appearances, eleven magazine interviews, four participations in TV discussion studios, and 23 feature stories

published in newspapers nationwide. I can't deny it – the Americans know how to advertise a product and make the advertisement work for them. What they don't know, or rather pretend not to know, is that the product advertised is most likely not of the high quality that has been declared.

The most ridiculous thing, however, was that my surly face did appear on the cover of the People magazine's May issue. Then I received an invitation to participate in the Ellen DeGeneres Show. I said yes, and I happened to be on the same show with Collin Farrell and a big, fat guy wearing a cat costume, who was supposed to scare the shit out of Farrell, while he was sitting peacefully and totally oblivious to what had been cooked for him on the red sofa.

Ellen was nicely surprised to see me dressed like her – I wore a green Lacoste polo shirt, a man-cut blazer, Rock and Republic skinny jeans, and a pair of classic PF Flyers. No surprise that, after the introductory lines, Ellen welcomed me in the studio, exclaiming in the most genuinely enthusiastic way there is, “Well, well, well... what do we have here? A freshly frozen piece of Danish pastry. Will you marry me, so that we could have kids as beautiful as myself, and as smart as they claim you are?” I laughed at that joke but not because somebody held up a laugh sign for me, but because I had a couple of quick drinks in the dressing room before that, which inevitably brought me into extremely high spirits.

And Dean Garrett... He just can't be happier than he seems to be right now. Because of my geniusness, he too has been interviewed and his picture has been taken for a couple of magazines, mostly of academic character. Although he jokingly suggested he could appear on the Ellen show as my life partner.

- I thought you were married!
- We're separated.
- Is this a movie line you've picked up, Don?

- It's the truth.
- Is it?
- Ira... please! - He snatches my arms in his sweaty palms. - I can't get you out of my thoughts. It's been like this for some time now...
- Yeah?
- Yeah.
- So you want to have sex with me?

He looks at me with sheer alarm in his feverish, squirrel-like eyes, and instantly lets go of my hands with a spasmodic twitch, as if there's been an excess of electric charge trapped on them.

He is not cute, I don't feel sorry for him, nor do I feel whatsoever. Nevertheless, I fucked him on his art cushy padded office chair. It wasn't anything to do with Dean Garrett and his erect blood filled penis, it was all about keeping myself in touch with reality.

And then, when it was over, I said,

- Don, it was not about your erect blood filled penis, I just want you to realize that. I'm going home now.

*My girlfriend is a virgin, and she doesn't seem to be willing to change this status of hers to "non-virgin".*

*I am in a cock-block situation here, and it's not easy to handle it.*

*Last Saturday, we were in bed at night watching TV and we started making out and she said she wanted to do it. So we fooled around and then, when it came time for me to put it in, she said I was going to have to talk her through it. I only got half way in because she was really quiet and then I realized she was crying,*

*so I pulled out, and went to the bathroom to get the condom away. When I came back to the bed she was turned away from me, so I put my arms around her and she was just really quiet like that for a few minutes and still crying, so then I asked her if she was okay and she wouldn't talk to me, and I couldn't get her to turn to face me. So then, like 10 minutes later, I finally got her to talk to me and she said she was sorry she cried, and I told her not to be sorry, and she just kept blaming herself and she was really frustrated about the whole thing. So I finally got her to calm down, but she made me promise her that we could try again another time. So next time, I'm wondering, how can I possibly make it less painful for her? She is all relaxed, but then, when I'm about to go in, she tightens up, and, I mean, I'm no girl but I think being tight is probably going to make it hurt more? And when she cries during it what can I say to her? How can I help make it less scary to her? I told her she could be on top next time but she said she'd rather not. If she bleeds should I tell her or no, because she really hates blood? I just don't know how to help her through this. She says she really wants to do this but she is nervous. How long should we do foreplay before I go in? I just want her to know it's okay to cry, and when I'm going in her she wouldn't look at me in the face - why is this? But mainly I wanna know what to do when she cries when I'm going in? And when she does cry should I keep going or pull out? After I get in all the way, how can I keep going when I know she is in pain?*

Tonight, I'm watching this really stupid show because I have nothing else to do. A lady with a high sleek bun and knees chastely drawn together is fervently arguing with a 50-year old guy with a mustard-colored face on a topic I am not aware of because the sound is muted. With a lazy gesture of my left arm, I turn the sound on, and I finally hear what they are arguing about.



The guy: But what makes you think that this is fundamental, core piece of who you are, regardless of how it got there, can be put away and sort of just ignored or not acted on? It's not like you're deciding not to eat Big Macs because you know that they're bad for you. This is something much more central to whom we are. This is sex.

The lady: And I believe that American culture and the gay community have overly glorified sex to the point that it's expected to be the most important piece of our lives. And historically that never happened before the last couple hundred years. And I don't accept that it's natural for us or that it is what God wants for us. I think it is Western culture that is out of whack, not me.

I turn the sound off again.

Why the hell am I happy, since everybody else claims life is overbearing!

I look around the room. I am the helmsman of this fluorescently illuminated ship. My vessel, however, sails nowhere – it has an anchor as big as a mountain, deeply penetrated through the weed and solidly dug into the seabed of my wasted life.

- This is our last class, and, understandably, you all are impatient to get over with this as soon as possible. But before we're done here, allow me to share some final thoughts with you, which are quite in the context of what we've been reading so far during the semester.

I lick my lips. The faces in front of me stare back at me with indifferent and arrogant glassy eyes.

- I know you are eager to graduate and start profiting from that tiny sheet of paper your diploma will be. Some of you will get married till the end of this year and will forget altogether they've even been here. Some of you will be offered indecently high-paid jobs. And some will drink their way

through life. I, personally, would like to have a drink only with the kids from the third group. And I'll tell you why. Because they won't be willing to have more than they actually desire, and that's another shot of tequila or whatever they keep ordering at the bar.

- Here are Christ and Buddha, Marx and Freud, Spinoza and Nietzsche, Joyce and Proust, we read them all. And the conclusion we made was that they all think alike when it comes to human frailty – notably the way our base desires delude our higher-reasoning selves and drive us mad with one unmet expectation after the other. Modern life has made things worse, deepening our cravings and at the same time heightening our delusions of importance as individuals. Not only are we fanatical in our unsustainable demands for gourmet living, eternal youth, fame and a hundred varieties of sex, but we have been encouraged into believing that to want something is to deserve it.
- Look at this! – I fish out of my purse a Lancôme Rouge Resille lipstick and hold it up for the audience to see. – This lipstick, no matter how expensive it was when I bought it, is already devaluated in my mind by the idea of the lipstick I want to have next. The only way out of this trap is detachment, an idea as compelling to the Greek and Roman stoics as to Sartre and Camus: if you can't change the world, don't let it change you. The problem is that detachment is opposed to modern life, which is characterised by "communities", the herd instinct, team-building... But I know a person...

I now can feel tears chocking me.

- I know this person, who, despite his young age, has succeeded to outplay us. Us, that is the society with all our trivial concerns and strivings. And he did it...he does it by maintaining a magnificent state of detachment –

that is a state of solitude and of quietly taking responsibilities of one's own actions. He doesn't avoid difficulties as we all do. But since he is the only one I know who can do this, he is also the only one capable of changing. Look at us - we drink orange juice from the bottle because we no longer trouble to peel an orange and eat it.

It's quiet in the room. Untypically quiet. And as I don't know what else to say, I take out a pocket mirror from my purse and start applying the Rouge Resille lipstick on my dehydrated lips.

*At the bike shop today I recollected a long forgotten simple pleasure – peeling dried glue off your hands.*

## Metaphysics

And it is all one to me.

Where I am to begin; for I shall return there again.

**--Parmenides (515 - 540 BCE)**

## September

### Third

After spending two months in Copenhagen, leading epic battles in court and beating mother badly for the guardianship rights over Siri, I am now back in New York for the beginning of the new academic year. Back in May, I signed the preliminary two-year contract with the Humanities Division and Dean Garrett was beaming with joy and other feelings, which, of course, could not be disclosed either to his wife, or to my fellow co-workers. But I suspect the janitor knows everything. This old black bastard, who never lets go of the mop, has ears itching for the latest gossip, and a filthy mouth, hungry to burp demeaning stories of human failure and degradation.

I sit in my new office and idly stare out of the window. I am thinking of Siri. It's her last year at school. And she is officially my daughter. At the thought of it, I feel like breaking into angry tears, but instead, I laugh hysterically.

On my way home, I shop groceries and a black dildo to remind me of the janitor.

I am still climbing the stairs, when my mobile rings, but I am out of available hands, so I let it ring until I enter the studio and drop the paper bags on the floor.

- Am I speaking to professor Franic? Ira Franic?

I remove the phone from my ear and take a brisk look at the display. It's a Danish number. I switch to Danish.

- Who's asking?

- You don't know me...

A female voice. Solid, sleepy, solemn.

- I am Doctor Susane Bekker. I work at the Neuroscience center of Rigshospitalet. I have your number from your friend, Astrid. She told me you are in the States...working there. I hope I don't bother you...
- No, you don't. I've... I'm just getting home.

I guess everybody, when they get a call from a hospital, gets this feeling of numbness and of a distant, but tangible alert – like an avalanche on a muted TV screen.

- Look, Miss Franic, to be frank with you, I wouldn't call the situation awkward; it is beyond the imaginary. And I've been thinking for quite some time before I finally decided to contact you.
- What situation? How...Excuse me? Why would Astrid give you my number? Is there something wrong with my niece?
- No, it's not about a closely related person, but the situation calls for your assistance, believe me. And as for Astrid's role in it, she is my partner. We live together.

That's new. The old, fat, cunning fox has a girlfriend! A doctor at that! And she kept quiet about it even when we met briefly over a beer in late July.

- We have a patient in the ward. He was accepted five weeks ago with a serious head injury and a broken leg after a car accident. The other passenger, a young girl, didn't make it. But the boy is a fighter. We needed to immediately operate to remove a huge hematoma from his brain. He was in a deep coma the first week, then he woke up – no memories whatsoever from the time before the accident. He doesn't even recognize his own parents. They are devastated, although the doctors who treat him, say there's a big chance for his memory to recover at some point.

- Excuse me, Susanne? Why exactly are you telling me this?

She clears her throat, and I could feel with every hair on my head she is about to reveal something, which will devastate me, too.

- Recently the boy has been talking in his sleep. First, we thought these were just ravings of a delirious brain, but then a nurse, during her night shifts, started recording him, and then we listened to the recordings. The patient spoke in a foreign language. His parents had no idea what language this was and neither did they know how their son might have picked it up. So, we sent the recordings to the linguistic department at the university, and a certain professor got so interested in the case, that a couple of days ago he came over to the hospital and wanted to see the patient. What is needed to be said at this point is that the head trauma also caused a drastic personality change. And the parents confirmed that. He's boorish and sometimes even aggressive, always in a bad mood, always frowning, sometimes he'll break into incontrollable cry, and smash things. So, as expected, the professor didn't get to talk to him much that day because the boy took out his penis and urinated on the professor's knee. So understandably enough, the professor left filled with indignation, and said we should find another person to investigate how's that the boy speaks Croatian
- Croatian?
- Yes, Croatian. The boy speaks Croatian in his sleep. And as I told this to Astrid, she instantly thought of you and said we had to call you. And here I am, calling you as I promised to Astrid. Although I don't quite understand why she insists so much on that, I mean with you being so far away and ...yes, it's an amazing medical story really, but how can it

possibly relate to you! Except that you are half Croatian yourself, I mean...

- Is your patient's name Matti Matthiessen?
- Oh?
- Is it?
- You know him?
- I do.

I sigh a long sigh. It feels like an awakening from an endless disturbing dream, in which I play, and parody, and destroy, and recreate, and turn upside-down, and hate, and get bitten by rats, and wear Tom Ford, and wear sadness, and step on shit, and smear shit, and feed pigeons, and wrangle, and keep still.

- I know your patient. And I'm coming to get him.

## **Fifth**

I walk down hospital corridors, led by the slender figure of doctor Bekker, and with every further step, my trench coat feels heavier and heavier on my shoulders. And it's not because it's drenched with rain. The burden of my unbearable living is riding me like a mad jockey. In order not to fall apart and stay attentive, I try to focus on the doctor's calves wrapped in black jacquard fish net tights totally contradicting with the hospital's asexual environment. I am a little infuriated by the thought that she seems too young and too unprofessional with those tights and the playful, kitschy hairpins adorning her beautiful head to have the legal right to delve into people's brains. I don't say this aloud though, because this is my loved one's brain I would be referring to, and I don't want one of his doctors to get a negative impression of me...

I'm so concentrated following the thin net threads on her legs that I don't realize that she has stopped walking and almost knock her down.



- His room, - announces she with the same solemn phone voice from the other day, as if she was about to introduce me to the chambers of the crown prince.

I suddenly panic. I step back, turn on my heels and start walking toward the entrance. I can sense Susanne Bekker's perplexed look on my back. And then she calls out after me.

- Wait! Miss Franic, it's going to be OK, he might even recognize you, who knows.

She tries to catch up with me, but now I am ahead and she has to trip in order to keep up with me.

- Miss Franic, what is wrong?

I stop. The sharp smell of detergent clears my nostrils.

- Is he going to be awake? – I ask.
- Probably.
- I can't meet him while he's awake, I'm sorry. May I come tonight instead?
- How do you mean? - She cocks her lovely, hairpinned head on one side, like a curious little bird.
- I come in the evening and spend the night in his room, waiting for him to speak in Croatian.
- I'm not sure it's appropriate. After all, you are not a close relative. As far as I know, you are...you were his university professor, although...

She bites her lower lip. Poor Susanne! She's been naughty – almost revealed the “secret” she's been told.

I wonder if Astrid had ever suspected about my infatuation. Before! Although before I didn't even realize it myself, so how could she! But probably yes, judging by the guilty look into Susanne's eyes, she must have told her lover about me having a relationship with a student. They must have talked about me...in bed. Or over breakfast, doesn't really matter. And Astrid persuaded her into believing I NEEDED to be informed about Matti's condition. The old twat! I cannot decide whether she did it out of pure malignancy, or out of pure romanticism – reuniting me with my secret love under the most ridiculous of circumstances that can ever be!

- Please? Susanne?

The guilt of being involuntarily exposed to my secret makes her soften.

- I'll see what I can do.
- Thank you.
- But I have to take also his parents' permission.
- Susanne, - I put my hand on her shoulder, - You know these nice people are not to be bothered about such a minor thing. Besides, the odds will be undoubtedly against me in such a situation. So, you must realize how unfortunate I will be if you let me become an easy prey of the ill-fated circumstances.

What will lower the scales of her still fragile consciousness of a doctor? The quixotic belief in the professional ethical standards implemented in the Hippocratic Oath, or the intrinsic feminine belief in the woman's right to fight for her true love? I bet on the second. I hope for the second. Susanne looks like a girl who'll let a lover finger her while lying on the cool green grass on a serene July night, observing the curvature of some fucking constellation.

– Susanne?

A rebellious flickering in her left eye hints at her readiness to succumb to my improper request.

I shall dine in heaven tonight.

## **Sixth**

It's seven minutes after midnight. The nurse on duty opens the door after I knock four times, as previously agreed, and ushers me in silence, her eyes gravely lowered as of one initiated into an Indiana-Jones-kind-of-sacred secret.

- I'll leave you alone now, - she whispers in an annoying tribal accent, for I now see her face carries the typical features of an Eastern African. Her slender fingers slightly touch the blanket, covering the immobile figure in the bed, as if to make sure the body beneath is protected against the evils of the night.
- He's fast asleep. We give him his prescribed medicine every evening at 11. He takes it and he doesn't wake up till dawn.
- Thank you.
- If you need me, I'll be in the nurses' room. Just press that button.

I nod. The instructions are simple. No matter how nervous I am right now, I guess I can follow them properly.

Before coming back to the hospital, I had some hours to go home, take a shower, change clothes, and watch Siri having supper. She seemed grown up. We shared a bottle of white wine. She told me her band had warmed up for Queens of the Stone Age at the Roskilde Festival earlier this summer. You didn't mention it last time when I was here, I said. You were too busy acting like my mother in court, she answered with a sneaky smile. That's true, I agreed. I guess I didn't have much time to listen to your bullshit stories.

Siri didn't bother to ask me where I was going that late in the evening. She just wanted to know whether I was in a stand to drive, given that I had drunk two glasses of wine. And a couple of tequila shots before that. I'll be fine, I said. And I might be long, so just go to bed. See you tomorrow.

The milky light from the corridor oozes through the opaque door window of the hospital room. I could hear him breath smoothly. A step nearer and I now see his shaven head resting sideways on the blue pillow. My limbs go numb, my heart slows down its pace, I feel serene.

I unbutton my trench coat, slip off my shoes and cautiously lie down beside him. I dare not move a hair, as I am on the guff of the bed, half of my bottom is practically out of the bed. But I hold on tight to his waist, my left arm envelops him like a hungry snake on the alert of passing-by chickens; and when I synchronize my breathing with his, I hold on to him even tighter – like a forlorn sailor who is afraid not to be left ashore.

Thus, we have fallen asleep. And I see nothing in my skin-deep sleep, but a face I've always loved.

Always loved indeed!

I am suddenly awakened by an elbow stuck into my rib cage. I swiftly jump on my feet and stare at Matti. His face now is twisted into a painful grimace. His eyes are closed, but his lips are moving, and his whole body is feverish and spasmodic.

I am about to press the emergency button, because I am all scared and I don't want to be here anymore, and I don't even know what I was thinking, when

suddenly a word, coming out of his mouth, makes sense to me. So I stop and listen for more discernible words to catch. My patience is recompensed by the word “Plešivica”.

Now the feverish one is me.

- Irka, srce moje!

My bare feet are icy cold.

- Irka! – Matti’s torso strains like a bow string, and his left hand tries to grasp something up in the air. – Srce, ti si došla! Dođi i poljubi me!

I make a step back, then an ant-like one forward, then again a step back, just a precautionary measure – because I am terrified of what is happening in this grimly lighted hospital room. And my heart is beating against its will.

- Dođi, Irka!

His hand is reaching out for me. As if he really sees me. I put mine on his forehead, and for some seconds he seems to have calmed down. But then, all of a sudden, he grasps me by the wrist and the grip feels like shackles. As I bend over the bed in a fruitless attempt to free myself, I can now see his eyes wide open, staring straight into mine.

- Došao sam za vas, srce! A bio to dug put... Jako dug!

His grip loosens. But I’m not sure I want to disengage my hand from his anymore. A long forgotten tear rolls down my cheek. And I hear myself whisper in a long forgotten language:

- Tata.

## The Unexpected Uselessness of Philosophy

## December

### Seventeenth

- Philosophy, as a pursuit of truth, is futile without revelation and inspiration. And I am not speaking out of nothing. My own ideas of what is wrong and what is right, of what is true, and what is untrue have been invariably handicapped in the absence of revelation during the years. But I've witnessed some events recently that made my faith in philosophy and in its power to give answers, or, better say, suggest answers to what we perceive as commonplace phenomena, feeble. I am talking about love and its many, many, many ways of manifestation. I have come to realize that even the authors who were prone to understand love as an emotion proper, failed big, for you cannot, you should not, and you must not call a feeling that comes from the most intricate labyrinths of unconsciousness, and I quote, "abnormal bodily change caused by agent's evaluation of appraisal of some object or situation that the agent believes to be of concern to him or her". End quote. That was Brown, by the way, for those of you who are eager enough to take notes. Although, to my opinion, it is not worth it.

Hamlyn goes on to suggest that love and hate might be primordial emotions, presupposed by all other emotions of ours. In both cases, the problem seems to be the rather simple account of... of what an emotion the authors use as their starting point: if love is an emotion, then the understanding of what an emotion is must be enriched considerably to accommodate love. Yet it is not at all clear whether the idea of an "emotion proper" can be adequately enriched so as to do so.

But here comes Rorty, who claims that love is to be "identified by a characteristic narrative history" and further argues that this historicity of love involves the lover's being permanently transformed by loving who he does.

Badhwar understands love to be a matter of, and I quote, “one's overall emotional orientation towards a person—the complex of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.” Unquote. There is surely something very right about the idea that love, as an attitude central to deeply personal relationships, should not be understood as a state that can simply come and go. Rather, as the emotion complex view insists, the complexity of love is to be found in the historical patterns of one's emotional responsiveness to one's beloved—a pattern that also projects into the future.

Helm presents an account of love as intimate identification. To love another, Helm claims, is to care about him as the particular person he is and so, other things being equal, to value the things he values. That is, if he likes building boat models, you learn to love it, too. Although I personally find this an absurdly boring occupation. But, again, it may seem so to me because my beloved does not like making model boats. He likes other things instead, which I don't care about and try not to encourage, but nevertheless, I do. And I hate myself for it.

But the question stands: Why do we love? Can't we just flow through life without being bothered by the complications and turbulations caused by love? This would have been so nice, so liberating, don't you think? One way to understand the question of why we love is by asking for what the value of love is: what do we get out of it? One kind of answer, which has its roots in Aristotle, is that having loving relationships promotes self-knowledge insofar as your beloved acts as a kind of mirror, reflecting your character back to you.

LaFollette offers several other reasons why it is good to love: love increases our sense of well-being, it elevates our sense of self-worth, and it serves to develop our character. It also lowers stress and blood pressure and increases longevity. I know, I know, it's a claiming worth your laugh, but I can assure you that you



cannot buy a longer life only by truly loving someone. You have to also cut down on smoking!

But seriously, there is only one reason to love and it is because we bring out the best in each other. But what counts as “the best,” of course, is subject to much individual variation.

### ***Nineteenth***

*My hair grows fast.*

*I sometimes look at my reflection in the mirror and try really hard to recognize myself. The previous me. It doesn't work.*

*I am pale. Whenever I cycle by the bunch of small girls playing ball in the alley, they shout at me a flirtatious counting-out song they've made up especially for me:*

*Hana, mana, mona, mike*

*Is it boy or is it dyke,*

*No, it's just pretty Matti on his bike*

*I'm not sure whether I have to smile to them, or not. So I just don't. I rarely smile anyway.*

*My wife Ira tells me I need to eat more vegetables and smoke less. She says I never smoked before the accident. She tries to convince me that she's not lying to me. That I used to love her. Always. That she'd been the best thing that ever happened to me.*

*I sit crossed-legged on the floor in the broadly lighted, poshly furnished living room in our Brooklyn apartment, chain smoking Pal Mals, and strain my brain to remember her face from before. Sometimes I am almost convinced I can evoke*

*an evasive recollection of her laughter... And her eating an ice-cream cone, which looks enormous in her tiny children's hand. But I chase away this memory, for it cannot be, but fake. There is no way that I knew her when she was a child. Simply because she is almost twenty years older than me.*

*Ira's lesbian daughter comes in, throws her bag on the sofa, kisses me on the forehead and asks me for a cigarette. I give her the whole package. She says she'll fix herself a sandwich and disappears in the kitchen.*

*I slowly rise myself and go to the aquarium to feed the fish.*

March, 2013

