

THE MYSTERY OF JUNE 16

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1. PROLOGUE

I hesitate and feel a vague wave of melancholy when I finally click on the Send button of the e-mail. There is no way back now.

The rest of the night I am reading my stories, most of them only half finished. I cry all the time: I haven't changed a bit. At daybreak I go to the backyard, dig a little hole and burn the lot of them.

Then I pack my suitcase: some clothes, a couple of towels and the powder-case and bracelet from London.

With my hands in my pocket I throw a last glance on the room where I have lived for fourteen years. My fingers touch the memory stick in my pocket. Just to be sure.

This was my life: the white wooden chairs with their grey clothing turned pale; the old TV-set without remote control that still works because it was seldom turned on; the plaster on the walls, yellowed by nicotine from heavy smoking.

This is the point I knew it was going to come one time. Often, I had tried to imagine how I would feel. Now when that moment has arrived, it feels unreal. As if I am not there myself. And still, this is the last time I look around my chamber.

Then my eyes fall on the calendar.

With a shock I realize it is June 16. Today was my father's birthday. But he died in solitude years ago, in a puddle of blood, from gastric hemorrhage.

June 16, I know: my life is about to change forever.

With an automatic gesture I pull the tablecloth straight. Then the utter absurdity of this gesture dawns on me and quickly I step outside. I turn the key on the front door and walk with my suitcase in hand to my car.

I leave my village in the river foreland without saying goodbye to anyone.

2. GENESIS

I

When I was a child, my father's garden was a real paradise. There were trees, shrubs, crops. In between the plants there were exciting paths that still felt safe. Evil still hadn't found its way to the garden. In summer the green coolness of the leaves protected me from the scorching sun. There were also animals in the garden, especially birds, insects and sometimes a frog. However, I didn't call them by their name. Nothing had a name yet: the plants nor the animals nor the green coolness nor the scorching sun. To me it was as if all was one. And not only didn't I distinguish between the phenomena around me, also I didn't experience a separation between those phenomena and myself. All was one and for eternity, at least it seemed so to me then. I only have just a vague memory of that time, so there's no other way to describe it.

But one day, I remember it well, I was riding my tricycle in my father's garden: back and forth. Just a few inches, back and forth, back and forth.

The day before it had rained a lot and with my head bent downwards, I watched the wheels dig into the mud. Back and forth, still deeper into a morass of anger.

I was four years old and for the first time in my life I realized that I wasn't part of the wholeness anymore, that I was alone. That I had become an 'I' and that 'I' was separated from the things around me. From that moment on I didn't belong to the wholeness anymore.

Maybe I shouldn't have given names to the animals. Maybe that had started it all: that I had called every animal by its own name. And by giving them names I had also given words to my preferences. Maybe that had started the feeling of separation and anger.

But as far as I know, nobody had told me that I shouldn't make a distinction between the phenomena. Nobody had warned me that all things become isolated and finite as soon as you distinguish between phenomena that suit you and those that don't.

But once started, my head burst with judgements about what was good and what was evil. I was angry at the whole world and I hid myself behind the trees.

In the coolness of the evening's wind my father walked through the garden.

'Adam, where art thou?' he called.

'I heard you entering the garden, father,' I answered. 'But I was afraid of you because I was angry. That's why I hid myself.'

My father drove me out of the garden. And after he had driven me out, he placed east of the garden a cherub with a flaming sword which turned every way. The cherub should keep the entrance to the garden, so that I never could enter it again.

But looking back now, I don't think that the guardian ever stood at the entrance of the garden but that he only existed in my head all the time.

II

I was born in a land of green fields. The village lay in the river foreland between meadows and water pools. Poplars whispered softly in the breeze.

In spring, as the snow from the mountains in the south melted, the river's water flowed over the foreland. It was good country. Beautiful cattle were grazing the meadows. Little insects were skimming over the pools. Standing on the bank I could hear them buzzing. It was as if I could touch heaven with my own hands.

But on the horizon dark clouds billowed. The village, the whispering poplars, the buzzing insects and I, all were waiting for the thunderstorm that would certainly burst as evening fell.

A friendly ferryman bent over me and looked with his understanding eyes deep into my child's soul. The ferryman confused me. I didn't say a word.

The ferryman noticed my desperation and said: 'Don't look back. The past is an illusion and the future a fata morgana. There is only now and here, and even the now and here is fluid.'

The ferryman loosened the tows and started rowing. There was nothing to grab for a hold on anymore.

3. EXODUS

On the other side of the river the ferryman noticed my distress and said: 'You are a human being now. And being human means being free: you may walk a mile to the east or you may walk a mile to the west. Or you may not walk at all, but that would be a pity. You may make choices: good choices and bad choices. Because freedom means above all: accepting your shortcomings. You are destined to become a human being, and not some sort of God. If you use your talents God is always merciful. But most important of all is to be patient. You have all the time in the world. How later you reach your destination, the better. You can deal with success much more easily. Or with failure for that matter. But above all: you may make errors. So, go out in search of to the place on this earth where you, and only you, can become what you are meant to be.'

I decided to walk to the east, further away from my father's garden. First, I travelled through a desert. Forty long, long years.

It was a strange desert. As in every desert nothing grew there, but it was filled with buildings: schools, churches, police stations, gymnasiums, dental institutions and slaughterhouses.

I felt excluded by the people around me. They looked at me and said: 'You are fat. That's why you don't belong in our story.'

At the same time all those teachers, classmates, priests, policemen, sport trainers, dentists and butchers kept on saying: 'You should this, you should do that.'

If I just do what they say, so I thought, then one day I may belong after all. I did what they asked for. Even when I was alone, and no one saw me.

I forgot about the ferryman's words and every night I promised myself: 'Tomorrow I am going to live a completely different life, a perfect life.' But whatever I did, I made errors all the same and didn't belong.

But the truth is, no one excluded me. I excluded myself.

A priest roared from the altar: 'Thou shall not covet...'

I was alone and I just burnt from craving. But I swallowed my resistance and my belly started aching.

The desert teaches, because it takes away. In the desert we become human. Yes, I was prey, but I soon learned that I was predator as well.

In this way I travelled through the desert. Forty long, long years.

And never a mere glimpse of the Promised Land was to be seen.

4. THE WAY OF NATURE AND OF GRACE

I

I walked on to the east. The desert became more and more desolate. Far away I saw a mountain range.

II

I remember the first time my father and mother took me to the cinema. I must have been five or six years old then. I had never seen a movie before.

That afternoon a Laurel and Hardy film was shown. Laurel and Hardy drove in a car through California to sell Christmas trees. At one house things got completely out of hand. After ringing a couple of times, the owner of the house ended up cutting the Christmas tree in pieces. That starts off a whole cycle of mutual destruction: Laurel and Hardy destroying the house and the owner completely degrading their car.

With each new destruction I laughed out louder and louder until I finally got up from my chair and stood bent over from laughing in front of the silver screen.

At that moment I didn't judge yet whether revenge was good or evil. I didn't take sides with one or the other. Nothing stood between me and laughter. I had become laughter itself.

When someone is so free from his judgements and preferences, it is said by some, that, for a short time, he is a place of God. For a short time only...

Most people speak of the child within, though.

In that moment you are once again as you were in the garden on the other side of the river. You have finally become the person you were always meant to be. A person not known by anybody in later life, except by the one you are always looking for and who loves you unconditionally.

III

At the edge of the desert, just before high, unwelcoming mountains arose, was a city. It was as if in this dark corner life should be lived to the extreme.

There were liquor stores, opium dens, brothels, places where animals fought with people, gambling palaces, shops with shrill-colored advertisements for tax-free products nobody needs and chapels where you can marry one day and get a divorce the next day. And everywhere was water: fountains reached to the skies where the drops evaporated in the heat before they could drop down again. Boats drifted on canals that went nowhere. The most beautiful trees and plants – some even more beautiful and exuberant than the ones in my father's garden – were sprinkled 24 hours a day. I had no idea where that water came from in this barren desert. It was as if mankind stuck up its middle finger against the world and its laws to say to that world: look, we just do this!

In other circumstances I might have been attracted to all these seductions. It certainly suits me, and I would have undergone it with passion. But now I had the feeling that I was on a mission and that this city tried to distract me. I decided just to stay there for the night and not enjoy the nightlife. When I

wanted to put my suitcase on top of a chest, I almost grabbed into a needle that was lying there in the dust. It was during a time that I washed my hands forty or fifty times a day.

I washed my hands four times in a row and watched myself in the mirror above the sink.

'Bye, Fat One. Bye, Father' I said, and I spat at the image in the mirror as if it were not my face but that of someone Else. In the mirror the drop of spit slowly dripped out of my eye.

It looked like a tear, a tear of sadness and liberty.

In this way I chased God out of my life. But the angel in my head, the one with sword that turned every way, who guarded the way to the tree of life, he didn't go away.

He became even more frantic from that point on.

IV

In the night that follows, I dream that I am back at primary school again. We have a drama master class. One by one we all have our turn. I am the last one to perform.

We act someone being disturbed by a salesman who sells vacuum cleaners. The other pupils are good. But I want to stand out.

When it's my turn, I walk to the front of the classroom and feel the pressure. Sitting on a chair, I wait until the bell rings. It seems like ages. As the bell finally rings, I stand up and stagger drunken towards the door. With a double tongue I say:

'At the... hiccup at the door... hiccup no deal at the door...'

I wait for recognition, for liberation, for applause, but it is dead silent.

It is too early yet.

V

Next day I headed for the mountains. These mountains were no heaven on earth. I didn't meet people there. With every step I took, I also walked further down the way within and I found scattered pieces of the person I once was.

Clouds that come from the west sometimes bring scattered rain showers to the mountain slopes. The grass there is almost as green as in the river foreland of my youth. Far away I saw little dots spread all over the slope. I peeked through my eyelashes and saw that it was a flock of sheep. There was also a shepherd with a dog.

'Where are you from?' the shepherd asked when I had climbed the hill.

'From the river foreland,' I said.

'Ah, that is good country,' the shepherd exclaimed. 'Why did you leave it?'

'I am banished by my father because I made a difference between good and evil and because I was angry at the world all the time,' I replied.

'Yeah, that happens to all of us,' the shepherd sighed. 'That we are sent in exile, I mean. But why did you come to here?'

'I don't know. It was mere intuition, I guess. Only that desert was a mistake. I thought the people mocked me. And I did really everything to belong to them. I'm not saying that I am a holy man myself. Before my mind's eye I can still see how the living frog fell from my child's hands into the burning fire. Now I know the people didn't mock me, at all. But what kind of a world have we people created?'

'The world where the Way of Nature is the rule,' the shepherd said, and he looked miserable.

'The Way of Nature?' I asked, 'What is that?'

'I'll tell you,' the shepherd answered. 'Just sit down and I'll explain it to you.'

The shepherd pointed to a spot on the ground. We both sat down in the grass. The shepherd silently rolled a cigarette from my shag tobacco, took a first draught and started to tell.

'You know, every pack of wolves has an order of ranking from high to way down low. Up on top you'll find the leader of the pack. We call it the alpha animal. Further down there is a meticulously preserved hierarchy among the other wolves. The leader must be obeyed unconditionally. Of course, there is a lot of fighting going on in the pack to reach a higher place in the hierarchy. It already starts when the wolves are still just pups. You think it's only playing, but in their games the strongest, smartest and most self-confident wolf emerges. He will later become the leader of the pack. When the time is right, he will defy the old leader, beat him in a fight and from that moment on he is the boss.'

'All right, all right,' I interrupted the shepherd. 'I can see your point. But what are you aiming at?'

'I'll tell, you,' the shepherd said, while he sniffed impatiently. I guessed he was a man who was often alone and not used to contradiction. 'When you take a close look, it is not that much different from what happens among human beings. If you observe a group of people, you will find that there is always one who prevails psychologically and physically and who is looked upon with awe by the others. We all are always busy defending our place in the hierarchy and if we see the slightest chance to climb one or two steps in the ranking, we won't let slip that chance. Sometimes by literally fighting, but more often by bluffing and intimidating the other person, mocking him, shutting him off. Because let's be clear about it: wherever there is a ranking order from high to low, there necessarily must be one who is last in line. And there's hardly anyone who volunteers and says: okay, let me be the last one then. Because being the last in line means danger and sometimes even extinction among human beings. That eternal struggle among people for a proper place in the hierarchy is what I call the Way of Nature.'

The shepherd looked at the sky. He was silent for a while. With his eyes he tracked a buzzard that was circling high over the mountain tops.

Suddenly the buzzard made a sharp dive and the shepherd continued:

'There are people who live in fancy houses and others who spend their lives in misery. It already starts at school, you know. You think the kids are just playing and teasing a bit, but it doesn't take long before it ends up in right out pestering and those who haven't learned to defend themselves, will become the scapegoats of their class. They will carry the burden for the rest of their lives.'

I asked with a voice hoarser than I wanted it to be: 'Is it the desert, you are speaking of?'

The shepherd nodded. Then suddenly he smiled. It was the first time his face softened up.

'O yeah, my son. You arrived as a stranger in their country. An innocent bird that came flying from the garden of your father. The first thing they want to do is cut your wings. But don't judge others too soon. You as well are bird and snake at the same time.'

I felt the need to weep, but I contained myself. That was what I had been taught.

'There is one thing I want to tell you and then you must go. People think that fascism is about brown uniforms and death camps. But that is not the case. Fascism is about efficiency. Next time the fascists are back, they will wear three-piece costumes and a tie, and they will convince the poor people in this world that it is efficient to get a bit even poorer. Just hang on guys, times will get better afterwards. Because listen carefully: it is the religion of absolute priority to efficiency, combined with the liturgy of a veiled use of language, and not those brown uniforms, that are the inner core of fascism. But they will not go unpunished: an army of 600 men and a bunch of allies will suffice to make them go the same way as every other civilization before them. Down the drain of history. Only the ruins will remain. I wonder whether a new leap of consciousness is necessary to avoid the end of our species. But why I'm making a fuss about that? Evolution will solve that problem in due time. No doubt about that!'

With a muffled voice I asked: 'Is there nothing people can do to resist to the Way of Nature? I mean, we are human beings and not beasts, isn't it?'

The shepherd's eyes were gleaming as he said:

'O sure, there is something else, my son. That's what is called the Way of Grace. One fine day you will experience that the Way of Grace prevails over the Way of Nature. That strong bonds of friendship for a group are far more important than dominance and subordination. That it is not dangerous to say: Okay, I will volunteer to be the last in line. But there is no one who can teach you about that here. Do you see that path over there?'

He pointed at a path that seemed to lead straight up the mountain slope.

'That's the Narrow Road to the Deep North. If you walk that road, you will learn all about the Way of Grace. And you must walk that road, my son. That is why your father has sent you from the garden. Not as punishment for making a distinction between good and evil or being angry, but to let you have a taste of the sweetness of the Way of Grace. To release you from the compulsive need of criticizing yourself and other people. To learn to stand upright instead of bowing to fear. To become a free human being instead of a self-obsessed god. Because remember, son: you may make errors and you may not make errors.'

I didn't understand all that the shepherd had said but I felt curious and was ready to walk the Narrow Road to the Deep North.

At the bottom of the steep climb I turned back to the shepherd one more time. He was a small figure in the distance. I could see how he raised his arm and waved back at me.

He is the shepherd in me who, in the desert, leads me to the water and brings me healing.

5. THE NARROW ROAD TO THE DEEP NORTH

I

I was halfway up the mountain, as darkness fell. Lights from the towns and villages in the desert were twinkling in the night. The lights reminded me of the candles that used to burn before the Madonna in my church in the river foreland. On Sundays my parents took me to Holy Mass. I was mesmerized by the gestures of the priest, but I didn't care much for the words he uttered from the pulpit. My gaze used to wander off to the Madonna who was looking at me with love. She held a child that was floundering in her arms. In his left hand the child had a bird. Sometimes during sermons, I stared at the candles and wished I was that bird. With this soothing image in mind I laid down in the grass beside the Narrow Road to the Deep North and fell into a deep sleep.

II

That night I had a strange dream. I dreamt that there was a wedding party to which the whole family was invited except me. Even in my dream I felt the sharp pain of rejection, although I don't like weddings and parties at all. At the same time a war had broken out and, in my anger, I had volunteered to go to the frontline. With my draft for military service in my hand I sat at my mother's kitchen table. In my dream that kitchen was painted apple green. I remember that detail sharply because my mother's kitchen was not painted apple green, but rather a dull sort of grey. Anyway, I was sitting at the table and read the draft. I would be sent out to a faraway land. I rejoiced in the prospect of going to other countries and be welcomed as a liberator, a hero.

The next moment I found myself in a landing craft at sea. We headed directly for the coast. 'OK, don't be afraid, boys,' the sergeant hollered above the sound of the waves. 'Our air force has bombed the coast for weeks. There is no stone and no man standing upright anymore. The few enemies that are still alive are as scared as hell. It will be a piece of cake to get on the beach and move land inward.'

But when we were about 200 metres from the shoreline those presumably few enemies started to shoot with all the gun power in the world. There were loud explosions all around us. Grenades burst next to the vessel and bullets hit the bow.

'Lower the bow door,' the sergeant ordered. 'The last 100 metres we will wade through the water.'

Until that moment the bow door had provided some cover against the bullets, but once lowered we received terrible bursts of machine gun fire. Some of my comrades died in the landing craft.

'Forward! Out!' the sergeant shouted fiercely. 'Forward, get on the beach!'

I found it difficult to keep on my feet in the ice-cold water that reached up to my breast. Seasickness made me feel vaguely nauseated. Then the guy who had stood next to me in the vessel caught a bullet right into his throat. He fell backwards and his head was under water. I tried to get him on his feet again, but the sergeant barked: 'Leave him. There is no rescue for him anyway. Get on to the beach now! This is an order!'

I wrestled through the waves. Soldiers were dying all around me and the water turned from grey to red. By some sort of miracle, I managed to reach the shore. Once I walked on the beach, a queer quietness fell over the scene. I saw little puffs of smoke from behind the sea wall from where the enemy kept firing at us, but I didn't hear a sound. It was as if I walked with my head stuck in a bowl of glass.

Right before me a little black ball landed in the sand. Curiously I stuck out my left hand. Then all turned dark.

A few moments later I soared high above the beach. I saw soldiers dying everywhere. And on the spot where I had walked a few moments before, only my left hand stuck out from under the sand into the smoky air.

Then, all at once, the sun shone, and birds sang their morning songs. War was over. I floated over the fields behind the coastline and I saw a graveyard beneath me. It was laid out beautifully with trees and flowers all around. I flew among the headstones and read the words and names that were written on them. Then I came upon a stone with my own name. I gasped for breath. Right under my name stood the words:

*I have seen and saluted France
On my first and last morning.*

I woke up with a start in the grass alongside the Narrow Road to the Deep North. It was broad daylight but the valley of the shepherd, the towns and villages in the desert, all the places where I had been, were covered under a thick blanket of clouds that was stretched out below me.

III

Where I was standing, the sun stood high above the blanket of clouds and the road to the top of the mountain was clearly illuminated.

Last night's dream kept haunting me. As far as I knew, I hadn't had that dream before. Still, in a way, it felt very familiar to me.

In a bend of the road was a small inn. I was hungry and thirsty by now and I decided to go inside. There weren't many other guests there, but those who sat at the tables looked very different from the people I had known so far. Their skin looked like tanned leather and they had slanted eyes. Nobody paid any attention when I sat down at one of the tables.

The landlord was a stern looking woman. She put a pot of steaming coffee on the table and a plate with deliciously smelling bread. Because the other guests didn't ask much of her attention, she kept standing next to my table. We got into a conversation and at a certain moment we came to talk about last night's dream.

'Well, that it felt all so familiar to you isn't that strange. I guess that in a former life you were that soldier,' she explained.

'Oh, please, stop, woman' I exclaimed. 'I don't believe in former lives at all.'

'And why not, if I may ask you?' The landlord was in a belligerent mood. 'Because you can't remember former lives?'

'Yeah, that's right,' I said.

'But have a look outside if you want to,' she carried on. 'The only thing you see down there is a blanket of grey clouds. Does that mean that the valley of the shepherd and the desert don't exist? No, but we can't see it now. But sometimes, we see the valley and the desert and very rarely, on short clear moments, we are even able to see a glimpse of the river foreland. But not now. Maybe your dream was such a rare, clear moment of insight into your former life.'

I didn't want to debate with the landlord. She seemed rather ill-tempered and so I said:

'Madam, your coffee is delightful, and you have baked a terrific bread, but now I have to go on.'

'On the Narrow Road to the Deep North, I suppose?' she asked.

'Yes,' I said while I stood up from my chair. 'The shepherd told me that I could learn about the Way of Grace there.'

'Well, I think you should try to listen more carefully first, otherwise you will learn nothing at all,' the bitch shrieked.

'Listen to you in particular, uh?' I snapped at her.

'O yeah, maybe,' she said. 'Wherever you are, wisdom always starts right there and then. You can see the Way of Heaven without leaving your home and without looking out of your window. The farther you go, the less you know. And the greatest words of wisdom tell you the things you've always known deep down inside. But if you feel the need to travel, go and take some of the bread with you. The road is long.'

She didn't want any money. That was very friendly of her. Maybe I had been too quick in my judgement about her. I apologized that I had been too rude.

'Oh, don't bother,' the landlord said. 'It wasn't that bad. You know, the thing is that in as much you judge another, you also judge yourself. And as far as you can forgive another, you can forgive yourself. That is the heart of the Way of Grace. But now you must leave, my friend, I have got more to do than keeping you entertained.'

The landlord's remarks kept crossing my mind. Suppose it was true, the former life as a soldier and so on. Then I had to investigate that soldier's fate, dig into historic archives. Maybe the clue for the problems that I had today, was hidden in that former life.

Suddenly, I wasn't so sure anymore if I wanted to go further up the Narrow Road to the Deep North. I sat down beside the path to think it over.

IV

I had no idea which direction I wanted to go. In fact, doubts were already raised about that first word: 'I'. Did I really know who that 'I' was? Of course, when I talked to the landlord, I maintained some consistent convictions and opinions belonging to a more or less clear cut 'I'. But sitting here on my own, alongside the road to the Deep North, those consistent convictions and opinions tend to disappear like snow in summer. As soon as another light falls on them, they evaporate. Inside me there is nothing that is consistent or clear cut.

If you learn to accept that identity is merely a means to communicate with others rather than an end in itself, you will create room to breathe, to be human. Realizing your own *condition humaine*, you can accept the absence of cohesion and consistency in others more easily. We are not gods, not perfect, not all-powerful, but just stumble towards the end.

That being said, I must add that I despise the preacher in me. Tomorrow he preaches something else.

A man came walking down the path. He wasn't tall, but he looked distinguished in an old-fashioned way and from the way he walked, looked around and kept his walking stick, you could tell he quite fancied himself. Like most men in this region he wore his hair in a long, thin braid on his back. He spoke in a very civilized manner:

'Good morning, young man. What are you thinking about, if I may take the liberty to ask? Not regretting your sins too much, I might hope?'

I told him about my thoughts and that I didn't know whether to go further up the mountain or to return to valley below.

'The Narrow Road to the Deep North is about arising above your ego. So, if I hear you speaking of your doubts about who you are, I think you're well on your way. I don't believe that you will learn something up there that you couldn't find below. Remember, on mountains and in valleys, yes, everywhere is the Way of Grace. Maybe you'll find it even easier in the valley, because once arrived at the mountain top you may be inclined to think that grace is a reward for the effort of climbing. And that is a great mistake which - on the contrary - shows that you haven't understood grace and arising above your ego at all.'

'That's just the advice I needed,' I argued. 'Saying that it doesn't matter where I go. Now I am a lot wiser than before you came. But someone told me that you can find heaven at home.'

'Huh, the landlord of the inn, I suppose?' the man laughed. 'She hasn't understood that one can read the old texts in 70 different ways. Don't bother. Just choose the road where you will be bored the least!'

'Then I go back down,' I answered promptly. 'I want to know more about the soldier I dreamt of.'

'You are right, and I wish you the best of all pleasures and wisdom on your journey. But think of this and then leave:

*He who tries to bend the world to his will
Will tear it down with his bare hands.*

*He who tries to describe the unspeakable with eloquent words
Will be slain with holy silence.*

*He who has lost all his pretensions
Will live from trust and trust only.*

*He who understands the illusion of falling leaves in autumn
And the slow budding in spring, will live eternally.'*

6. NORMANDY

I took off for France. The beaches of Normandy where the allied Invasion took place on June 6, 1944, seemed the most likely place to find the headstone that I'd seen in my dream. I didn't expect it to be a very complicated assignment. Just a nice walk in mild sunshine on green graveyards. But Lord, what a task I had taken upon me! There are numerous war cemeteries in Normandy and an exponential number of tombstones. I have seen them all: American cemeteries, British, Polish, you name them, and I've been there. The American war cemetery at Colleville took three days of searching in pouring rain. Endless diagonal rows of white crosses made it hard to make out which rows I'd already searched, and which needed still to be done. But in the end my efforts were of no avail.

I had already given up, but somehow, I felt obliged to myself and to the great assignment to make one last visit to the Canadian Cemetery near Courseulles-sur-Mer. Fortunately, it wasn't half as extensive as the American Cemetery, but with about 1500 graves still quite a chore in its own right.

The cemetery was divided up in two halves. I decided to walk down the rows from the front of the cemetery to the back, the right-hand section first. The weather was fine, and I was touched by the words on the headstones. When I had finished searching this section, I felt I'd seen enough for that day and went back to the hotel.

The next day I started working down the left-hand section all the way from the entrance to the back of the graveyard. By the time I reached the last row, I had lost virtually all confidence that I would ever find the stone that I'd seen in my dream. But when I made a halt before the 21st headstone counting from the middle path, it seemed as if the world stood still for one brief moment. There, under the date of death - June 6, 1944 - and the name of a Canadian soldier, the same words that I'd seen in my dream were carved out in stone, be it in French now:

*J'ai vu et salué la France
Mon premier et dernier matin.*

How for heaven's sake could it be possible? Was it true after all, that I had been this soldier in a former life? I fell to my knees and tears dripped into the grass in front of the soldier's headstone. My shoulders shook.

Knowing that he had died on the day of the Invasion, probably even in the morning already, the text was so utterly moving: I have seen and saluted France on my first and last morning.

Suddenly I heard someone shouting: 'Monsieur! Monsieur!' I was still on my knees and turned my head to see who called me on what I had thought to be a deserted cemetery. Between the headstones a tall man of about 70 years old, white hair combed backwards, was walking fast towards me.

I got up and although he was still far away, he called: 'Vous connaissez le soldat Canadien?'

Out of breath from running he stood next to me now and repeated his question if I knew about this soldier.

'Yes...erm, no, not really,' I stammered. 'And you, did you know him?'

The old man started to tell a story in rapid French and though I couldn't understand all of it, in broad outline it boiled down to this: as a 17-year-old boy he had gone through the horrors of D-Day. That is to say that he had spent the night before the invasion with his father and mother in the cellar of their

house in a village on the coast. His father had bought the house just before the war and was reluctant to leave it behind. Most of the villagers had left but the evacuation wasn't mandatory because the Germans didn't expect the Invasion to take place in Normandy but rather near Calais where the distance to England was only 30 miles. In their vision the bombings of the coast of Normandy were meant to mislead them and distract their attention from the real site of the Invasion. But the night of the 6th of June it seemed as if the whole Allied arsenal of bombs was dropped on the coast. Their house had been hit but, in the cellar, they had been relatively safe. His father had been calm throughout the night. He'd been on the frontline at the river Somme during the First World War and had been through much worse shelling. Around eight o'clock next morning they had heard the firing of machine guns on the beach and about an hour later the sound of tanks rattling down the narrow streets of the village. Around ten o'clock it had become much quieter.

His father had gone up the stairs first to see what was happening and how much damage the bomb had caused to the house. When he came back into the cellar five minutes later, tears filled his eyes.

'We are free,' he had said solemnly. 'The Canadians are driving down the streets in jeeps and armored cars. And they speak French, too! Boy, go outside now, this is a historic moment and maybe you can help them in one way or another.'

'Be careful,' his mother had warned when he was halfway up the stairs.

He had walked in the direction of the beach. Tanks were everywhere in the tiny village. The streets were far too narrow and now they couldn't head on. Near the beach he had met some friends.

Curiously they had watched what was going on there. Continuously vessels with new soldiers had landed on the shore and were led by MP's on their way land inward. On the beach were still dead bodies and behind the sea wall there were some dead Germans.

One of the Canadian officers had beckoned them.

'Over here. Please, lend us a helping hand, will you?'

'What can we do?' they had asked.

'We have many casualties. Because of the high sea it took much longer as planned to get our tanks on the beach. Therefore, the first wave of soldiers had nowhere to find cover when they got ashore. In a couple of minutes, the bloody Germans killed more than 100 of our boys. You will help to get the bodies from the beach and bury them on a provisional cemetery near the rail tracks over there.'

They had been busy all day and, in the process, they had also buried my soldier.

'But if you have recovered and buried more than a hundred dead soldiers that day, how come that you remember this one so well?' I asked the French gentleman.

'There are five graves here that I visit every week. Mostly, as today, on Mondays. Each of those five soldiers carry a special memory to me. This soldier I remember so well because he was the last one, we found on the beach. It was at the end of the day; it was almost dark, and we thought we were ready. We hadn't noticed him before, for only his left hand stuck upright from the sand.'

I reached for the old man's shoulder.

'Are you OK?' he asked anxiously. 'Wait, I'll take you to my home. I will get you coffee and something to eat. You are way too upset. Here, let us go to my home.'

Together we staggered towards the exit of the cemetery and drove to the village on the coast. The old man still lived in the house his father had bought before the war. He showed me a big crack in the wall that was caused by the direct hit in the night before D-Day. As he showed me around his wife made coffee and prepared a delicious meal with fried chicken. At dinner I told the old people about the dream I had had along the Narrow Road to the Deep North. I expected them to mock me about it, but they didn't. On the contrary:

'You must go to Canada and try to find out all you can about this soldier,' the Frenchman said. 'But you must keep me informed when you've got news.'

As dusk was falling, I saw the sun sank into the sea, setting the sky alight with a red and purple color. A light fog was shimmering over the waves. I realized that the pain in my belly had vanished in the haze.

7. AMONG NATIVE AMERICANS

I

My soldier was born and raised in a remote area of Canada. Again, I was bound for the deep north, but this time the road was a four-lane highway. After having covered almost half of the distance I pulled up at a motel for the night. The flight from Europe and a whole day driving a car had tired me, so I decided to spend two nights at the motel and sleep off my jetlag. I felt asleep immediately and had a strange dream.

In that dream I walked out into the woods. The proprietor of the motel had warned me not to go too far. 'These forests are much more extensive than you are used to in Europe. You are lost before you even realize it.'

'Don't worry about me, sir,' I replied briskly. 'I'll just go for a short walk and I have learned to find my way around.'

I started to walk and felt relaxed. However, it was not the most exciting forest that I had seen in my life. The man from the motel was right: with all just pine trees it soon became a bit boring. Fortunately, there were some hills to climb and they offered nice views from the tops. Well, I reassured myself, if I just keep an eye on the position of the sun occasionally, I am not going to lose my sense of direction around here.

At one point I came upon a broad path that was winding through the pines. Suddenly a bird flew up from the branch of a tree. I realized it was an owl. You don't see owls during the day that often, but I must have woken it up. It was a beautiful bird and it landed on the path some fifty meters away from me. Cautiously I walked towards the owl in order to have a good look at it.

When I was about ten meters away from the owl, it flew up again and set itself on the branch of a tree further down the path. Once again, I stalked the owl and once again, he flew up, making a screeching sound this time. I had never seen an owl that close and I was completely under its spell. I remember thinking to myself: boy, watch out that you don't get lost because of this owl but I reassured myself that I would find my way back.

The owl must have enchanted me. Before I realized it, dusk was setting in. I got my cell phone from my pocket: it was 4.50 p.m. and my phone couldn't find a network.

In half an hour it would be pitch dark and though it was spring, the nights this far up north could still be very cold. I didn't have any food or something to drink with me. I feared there might be wolves or bears roaming around during the night.

Just before I really panicked, a Native American jumped from behind a tree. On top of everything we get this, I said to myself. I had read that Native Americans wear jeans nowadays, but this character still was in traditional clothing. By the way, he didn't have a feather on his head.

The Native American said something in his own language. I didn't understand a word of it. Then he made a gesture that in all cultures all over the world means: come with me. Should I follow him, could I trust him? But on the other hand, so I reasoned, I was totally lost and in a very precarious situation. And maybe this Native American meant well and was going to bring me back to the motel. So, I followed him.

After some fifteen minutes we arrived at an open space in the wood. There were wigwams, just as I had seen them in comic strips when I had been a child. The Native American stopped at the biggest of the wigwams and raised his hand to let me know I should wait there. He slipped inside the wigwam and I heard him talking with another Native American, an elder man judging from the crackling voice. After a while my Native American stuck his head outside of the wigwam and signaled that I should come in. There was the older man I had heard, sitting on a heap of animal skins. He was wearing a feather headdress. I knew he was the chief.

I had to sit down and as the chief was talking to me in his own undecipherable language the other Native American went outside again. After a few minutes he came back with a third Native American who introduced himself to me:

'My name is Cha'luwa. I speak English and I will translate what the chief has to say to you. But don't worry. We are a people of peace. In our own language our people are called Peace. You will be done no harm. And tomorrow we'll bring you back.'

'Tomorrow?' I asked startled.

'Yes, tomorrow. It is too dark now,' Cha'luwa said. 'Besides the chief wants you here tonight.'

The chief spoke to Cha'luwa and after he had finished, Cha'luwa turned around to me and said:

'Listen, white man. Tonight, is a very special night for us. It is spring and a new cycle of life will begin. We will ask the Great Spirit for his protection. The chief wants you to be with this ritual tonight. Mind you, this is very unusual. You are the first white man that has ever been allowed to assist at the ritual. After it has finished, the chief wants to talk to you with me as interpreter.'

I didn't think I had my say in the chief's plans, so I accepted my part in it. At that moment three beautiful women brought bowls with food into the wigwam. Dried meat and fresh fish. Very tasty, I must say.

'Just take a rest,' Cha'luwa said after the meal. 'You'll need it. It's going to be a long night for you.'

I laid my head down on some hairy animal skins but couldn't sleep. I was too excited about what was going to happen.

II

By the time we got out the chief's wigwam, a huge fire was burning amid the open space. Around the fire many Native Americans were sitting in a circle: women, children, men. The chief, Cha'luwa and I took place in the ring, in the front row so we had a good view of the fire. As the only white man I was at the center of everyone's attention. I didn't feel at ease, but as the looks were curious but friendly, I tried not to bother that much. Later at home I described the ceremony. I was not impressed by my description. I have never finished it:

'...as through the branches of the trees the full moon paints freak patterns on the ground, the men from the village dance their ecstatic dance. They jump around wildly and stamp their feet that are wrapped in the skin of deer on the softly springy soil. Their bodies, sweat accentuating strong muscles, stirred up by the rhythmic beating of wood on wood, their minds brought into a trance by a secret potion of henbane, belladonna and dried fly agaric.

The men dance in circles around the shaman, the initiate who is at the center of the open space dancing his own erratic dance. He is totally immersed in his own pre-worldly universe and is dancing

wilder and more ecstatic than the other men. His head is hidden behind a mask with huge horns on top of it, the horns sweeping through the air as he dances around the fire. Still faster, still wilder the shaman dances, until he is finally only running in circles around the fire, slips and falls, his mask is rolling over the trodden grass. His body is shaking while he turns his face to the flames.

The women and the children sitting at the edge of the open space are the first witnesses to the miracle.

Their cries wake the other dancing men from their trance. They stop dancing and look at the initiate and they see it, too. The fire in the eyes of the shaman and the fire of the flames are as one. No, his eyes are not alight but for a short moment in time it looks as if the flames and the eyes of the shaman are of one origin.

Fire, that is not as any of the other phenomena in this world as it doesn't stand on its own but can only exist as long as it flames consume other things and in doing so create the beginning of something new, that fire is the representation of divinity on earth. And the eyes of the initiate, who may have been passed on secret knowledge from his forefathers, but for the rest is, just as the other men in the village, a hunter in the forest, those eyes represent humankind, taken from the soil.

And so, on this first night of spring the great miracle occurs in which divinity and humanity become one again for a short while.

In that short, holy moment the people of the village bow their heads and ask humbly from the divine spirit if the hunting may bear fruit again this year: twentyfold, fortyfold, sixtyfold...

...and as through the branches of the trees the full moon paints freak patterns on the ground and the stars make the rounds of the Eternal Mill through the endless universe, deep into the forest the wolf, feared and revered, makes his invocatory howl travel through the night. For the time being the wolf still drowns out the sound of drums of an unknown people that has come from far away to, as rumor has it, to subject all other races in the world and put an end to the old way of living that was taught by the Great Spirit.

Without making a sound an owl hovers over the open space. With fearful premonition the people around the fire raise their heads and pray that this year everything still may be well. For this one year at least...

This is the world into which I was born, time and time and time again...'

A soft sigh rose up from the circle. It was as if the people were relieved, as if they had received a good message. On that moment the ceremony was over. The dancers left the open space as first. They dragged the man with the mask under his arms with them. He was completely exhausted, and his eyes were dull. Nobody in the circle spoke a word. When the dancers had left, the rest of the people stood up and one by one walked off in the direction of the tents under the trees along the open space. Only the chief, Cha'luwa and I stayed near the fire.

I looked up to a sky full of stars. In the last light of the smoldering embers I saw the owl flying over the open place. It didn't make a sound.

III

The three of us sat side by side on the wide empty field. Nobody said a word. The chief and Cha'luwa attentively watched the smoke from the dying fire go up into the big Canadian night. I wondered which secret message they might read from it. I felt uncomfortable with the situation and to break the silence I asked a bit clumsily: 'Well, did you like the way the ceremony went?'

None of them answered my question and they kept staring into the dark night sky. After what seemed to last an eternity the chief started to talk. Or maybe I should say he started to sing softly. At times his song rose to a noisy, wailing climax and then fell back to something that could be best described as a resigned way of humming. It was a very, very long song and when the chief had finally finished, he nodded to Cha'luwa. He started to translate all the things the chief had sung. It was a complicated story, far too long and intricate to write it down here. Besides, I do not remember all of it. But this is the broad outline:

The Great Spirit said to the bunch of yokels that was a leftover from His Creation: 'You are my chosen people. I will lead you to a land of milk and honey... No, wait a minute.'

The Great Spirit wetted His fingers with His tongue and thumbed through the pages of His Holy Book.

'Yeah, here We are. I already have a story with a land of milk and honey. So many stories, I can hardly tell one from the other. Anyway, now it's time for something completely different. So, listen, I will lead you to a forest, where there is not much else to do than hunting and picking berries and nuts. You will not become rich as other people in this world, and you will not build big beautiful cities.'

'Well, you are some kind of spirit, Great Spirit,' someone had yelled. 'Can't you pick another people as your chosen people instead of us?'

'No, listen,' Great Spirit had said, and He had raised His hand as a sign that they'd be quiet. 'The fact that you will be poor has an advantage, too. Other peoples will not try to steal your land. There's nothing to gain here for them. They will be at war with each other all the time for the riches of the earth, but they will neglect you, because your land is poor, and your life is simple. You will live in peace. Your name will be Peace.'

'Well, that sounds a bit better,' some had muttered under their breath.

'But, that's not all,' Great Spirit had continued. 'Because you do not have the resources to become very rich, you will not be entangled in greed so soon. I live a simple life and I have not many wishes. I want you to live in the same way, for then you will be able to keep my Law until the end of times.'

'And what is your Law, if I may ask you?' someone had asked. 'And, pardon me, but you are already talking about the end of times while you have just started them!'

'Everything that has a beginning, has also an end, that is my first Law,' Great Spirit had declared solemnly. 'And for the rest I want you to treat my creation: the rocks, the trees, the animals and your fellow humans, in a decent way. Like you had wanted to be treated if, by some whim of fate, you had been a rock, a tree, an animal or your fellow human yourselves. That's what my Law is about.'

'Oh, that shouldn't be difficult,' the people had said.

'Don't be too self-confident,' Great Spirit had hollered through the night. 'At the end of times a wave of greed will come over the earth. It will leave no one untouched. Men will envy each other's smallest possession and will have no regard for my creation whatsoever. They will destroy everything: forests, oceans, mountains, rivers, just to possess more. But you will live in peace for a very long time. Only at the very end of times another people will discover that there are great resources hidden in the ground on which you live. They have a white skin and will come from over the sea to ruin my forest. They will destroy and pollute it all. Nature will get mixed up. Where there used to be rains the soil will turn to dust and where drought was common, floods will drown the crops.'

‘Don’t you have any other messages?’ someone protested. ‘It’s not a very funny story you are telling, uh?’

‘By that time, you must tell the other peoples about my Law,’ Great Spirit went on undisturbed. ‘The other peoples learned about my Law, too, but forgot because of their burning greed. Maybe you can open their blind eyes and bring harmony back to this world. But the other peoples will come with treasures to corrupt you. Then you will notice how strong the seductive power of greed is. If you fail and stop keeping to my Law, then there is no hope anymore and the world will return to barrenness.’

The ancestors of the chief and Cha’luwa had lived according to Great Spirit’s Law for thousands of years in the forest. They had passed on the story from father to son. They also had invented some rituals and ceremonies, so they would not forget the great task given by Great Spirit.

Around the 1900’s the first white men had arrived. They had found copper and other precious metals in the ground and the story went as predicted by Great Spirit: the forest was destroyed and there wasn’t a single fish living in the rivers anymore because the white man had spilled poison in them. Many Native Americans had bent for the appeal of comfort and money, too. They had sold their land and had assisted the white man in the destruction.

When he had arrived at this point of his story, Cha’luwa looked sternly at me. The time was near that it would be too late for the world. Many prophesies that passed on from father to son had already been fulfilled. Great Spirit had said that just before the end there would be two warnings, two wars that involved all the peoples in this world. The elders had also spoken of a burning nut that would fall upon the earth and that would bring to ruin two big cities. For years life would be impossible there. And because the oceans were polluted Palúlukon, the feathered water snake, had swung his tail out of anger. Tremendous earthquakes took place at the bottom of the sea and huge waves flooded coastal lands. And more and more people would discern that something extraordinary was going on: the ones that were considered to be leaders got confused and let themselves be contaminated by greed. It was impossible for the people to decide which of the leaders they could follow and which not. All of them seemed to be corrupted and speaking with a forked tongue. ‘These times,’ Cha’luwa ended the long story, ‘are known in our language as Koyaanisqatsi: life that is out of balance.’

‘That’s a very impressive story, Cha’luwa,’ I answered. ‘But what have I got to do with it?’

Cha’luwa coughed a couple of times and went on, speaking very softly. ‘In ancient times the elders have read in the stars that this night a white man would come from over the great sea and that he would help us. Our prophesies speak of a True White Brother from Overseas or Pahaná in our own language. And because you have come this night from over the sea, we think that you are the white brother that is going to help us.’

‘What?’ I exclaimed. ‘Me? And what am I supposed to do?’

‘Tell the other peoples about the Law of Great Spirit,’ Cha’luwa said soft spoken but decisively.

‘Me? Am I not mocked enough during my life? And what do you expect, that the other peoples are waiting for your religion? They have just abolished their own and that seems to suit them very well.’

‘Oh, but this is not about religion,’ Cha’luwa said while his eyes glowed. ‘Religion is only a man-made means to catch a glimpse of the Great Spirit, God, and the Buddha-nature or by whatever name you want to call the unspeakable. However, religion is more often than not misused to reign over other’s people’s thoughts. Then it is a very effective means to darken a man’s outlook on God forever. Therefore, this is certainly not about religion. It is about the way of life: to treat the whole of creation as

you want to be treated yourself. You don't have to dance around fires or blow pollen into the four directions of the winds. Leave that to us. We are very good at it.'

'And do you realize,' I resumed as a last line of defense. 'Do you realize that the other peoples will say that your pessimism is not uncommon among tribes that see their way of life threatened?'

'Of course, we realize that,' Cha'luwa answered. 'In their arrogance they will probably say that to you. But you in turn may ask them if there is any so-called civilization that has endured the centuries? All of them have gone under as a result of their own greed. All of them, with not a single exception. Only the ruins remain. The only cultures that have withstand the centuries are those who have lived according to the Way of Grace. But they have all been wiped away by greed and we are the last one standing in line.'

'OK, you may be right. But then again, for God's sake, how am I going to do this? I am literally nothing in this world,' I exclaimed.

'So much the better. You won't get fancy ideas in your head then,' Cha'luwa laughed. 'Leave it to the Great Spirit. He will find ways you could never think of yourself. You are living in this world and you may just take your time. But now you must go with the chief into the forest. There's something out there that he wants to show you.'

'Are you not coming with us?' I asked Cha'luwa. 'You know that I don't understand a word he is saying.'

'That doesn't matter. The chief wants to show you something only. He will give no explanation of what you will see. Maybe you don't understand it now, but later, at the right time and place, its meaning will become clear to you. Just go now.'

The chief struggled to get on his feet and walked stiffly into the forest. I followed and so we walked for quite a while. The light of the moon was apparently enough for the chief to guide him through the trees. He hummed continuously. It all had a rather spooky effect.

Suddenly the chief stopped. He was silent and with his right hand he pushed the branches of a shrub aside. A big round rock was underneath it. An image that had been carved out in the stone was vaguely discernible in the moonlight. There were two lines. On the upper lines some figures could be seen. Perhaps they were meant to represent people. That upper line however ended in a zigzag just as a seismograph that registers a huge earthquake. There were two half circles on the lower line, but this line continued all around the stone and made an unbroken circle.

'Dangave,' the chief said, and he kept repeating: 'Dangave, Dangave, Dangave.'

The drawing reminded me of what the ferryman had said:

'You may walk a mile to the east or you may walk a mile to the west. Or you may not walk at all, but that would be a pity.'

Then the chief let loose on the branch of the shrub and the stone was out of sight again.

We returned to the open space.

There I asked Cha'luwa: What does Dangave mean?'

'Plan of life,' he answered. 'And now you must sleep. Tomorrow you return to your own world.'

IV

Then I had a dream inside the dream. I dreamt that I said goodbye to the Native Americans. They gave me a roll of parchment. An address had been scribbled on the outside. It was my assignment, the Native Americans said. I should deliver the roll at the address written on the roll and then I would get further instructions.

Next, I walked in a street with many shops. I looked at the roll of parchment and saw that address referred to a jeweler's store. A bit of an odd place to get assignments from Native Americans, but as things go in dreams I went into the store as if it was the most normal thing in the world and handed over the roll to the lady behind the counter. She opened the roll and read the instructions that the Native Americans had written inside. It looked like hieroglyphs to me. I couldn't read a word.

'You have to take with you a powder case and a bracelet for your girlfriend,' the lady said.

'But that's impossible,' I exclaimed. 'I don't have a girlfriend.'

That was true for the dream as well as for reality. My years in the desert had undermined my self-assurance to such a degree that whenever a relationship threatened to turn into something serious it unavoidably ended up in utter clumsiness.

'Still you have to take them with you. It is an assignment from the Native Americans. There is no doubt about it.'

She went to the back of the store and when she returned, she held a silver powder compact and a beautiful bracelet in her hand. When she was putting them into a gift box a gentleman with a derby hat entered the store.

'Well, well, mister has a good taste, I see,' he said.

'He didn't choose it himself,' the serpent behind the counter hissed to humiliate me. 'It's an assignment from the Native Americans.'

'Oh, is that so?' the derby hat said, and my dream was finished.

Next morning, I walked out with the Native American that had picked me up in the forest. We didn't speak as we walked. When we were close to the motel, the Native American slapped my back and said in fluent English:

'Go with God, son. So much depends on you.'

Immediately he turned around and walked into the forest. Bewildered I watched him leave. For a moment I believed I saw the owl sitting on his shoulder.

That was the moment I awoke...

8. IN THE ARCHIVES

I

Next morning, I packed my suitcase, thanked the proprietor of the motel for his caring and got in my car. The landscape was monotonous and the road empty, so I had ample opportunity to think about last night's dream. Fortunately, I was pretty down-to-earth about it. I didn't suspect that anyone expects of me to bring the good news to the world. With my head on tv. Don't make me laugh.

In the car the radio played old classics while the vast Canadian woods stretched out for miles and miles. I thought of the time in the river foreland when the same songs had been on the radio. I felt a vague wave of homesickness and beat with the rhythm on the steering wheel.

The town where my soldier had lived was not far away anymore. It was time to concentrate on the job that lay ahead.

II

The archivist of the town hall was a quiet nice man. Of course, we had had contact before over the mail. He had done some research already.

'Sit down,' he said. 'I'll get you a cup of coffee and then we take a look at the facts that I have found so far.'

I laid my coat over a chair, got a scribbling pad and a pen out of my pocket and waited impatiently for the archivist to come back with the coffee.

'Your soldier's family stems, as appears from the name, from Brittany, France,' the archivist started. His parents immigrated into Canada soon after the First World War. His father worked as a cook with the mine company.'

I told the archivist that I had met Native Americans in the forest who complained about the destruction caused by mining and that it was very peculiar that my soldier happened to come from a mineworker's family.

'That's not peculiar at all,' the archivist interrupted. 'Except for mining there were no jobs here in the 1920's and 1930's. And people came from far away: France, Italy, and Poland to work in the mines.'

He lighted a fine cigar. He had his own office in the town hall, and it was in the good old days that one could still smoke at work. A delicious smell filled the room. Sometimes I still craved for a cigarette. But it was better that I wouldn't start again: I can't restrain myself in things like that and would certainly fall back into non-stop smoking.

'Your soldier had three brothers,' the archivist went on. 'They are all dead now. Other relatives are too young to have memories of him. A sister in law is the only close relative who is still alive. She has known him well and I have already spoken with her.'

I jumped up from my chair. This was the moment. Now everything would be revealed.

'And...,' I asked standing breathlessly in front of the archivist. 'And what did she say?'

‘Nothing,’ the archivist replied. ‘Well, almost nothing. It is an uphill struggle, let’s put it that way. At first, she was very helpful. Then I told her that you’d come all the way from Europe in order to learn more about her brother-in-law. And that’s the one thing that I shouldn’t have done, because after that she was convinced that you were going to write a book about him. I said that I didn’t know if you were going to write a book, but I couldn’t get the idea out of her head.’

‘And what if,’ I argued, restlessly walking up and down the archivist’s room. ‘What if I would write a book, what I don’t plan to do in the first place, but what would make writing a book such a grave act so that she doesn’t even want to speak to you?’

‘I’ll try to explain that,’ the archivist said reassuringly and laid his cigar in the ashtray. ‘In the Second World War the people in Québec, the French speaking part of Canada, didn’t feel they were attacked or occupied by the Germans. The British and the British Army, however, were considered as an occupying power. Although the Canadian Army, Her Majesty’s Army, the army of the English queen, was said to consist of volunteers only, many young men were arrested and sent to the barracks because they wouldn’t go there of their own free will. The sister-in-law worries that if this episode is brought up again in your book it will be easily misunderstood and that others will conclude that the French speaking population of Québec were pro-German. That wasn’t certainly the case. All his brothers fought against the Germans and without exception they were praised for their bravery and courage. On D-Day the French speaking regiment, La Chaudière, were among the very first allied soldiers to set foot on occupied European territory.’

‘Let me talk to this sister-in-law,’ I suggested. ‘I bet I can convince her that I am not going to write a book, but that I am interested out of sheer personal reasons.’

‘Oh, don’t even think about going there,’ the archivist exclaimed and raised both his arms. ‘You must absolutely stay away from her. I got her talking again because I promised her that I wouldn’t tell you anything. If she knows that you’re around, she will keep silent to me for the rest of her living days. Keep a low profile here. I promise, I’ll find out everything that is to know about your soldier and mail it in a couple of weeks.’

That seemed to be the end of my mission here. I stayed for a couple of days but as I felt bored, I flew home earlier than planned.

During the flight, our captain told that Amsterdam airport was closed because of severe fog conditions and that we would land in London instead. In such a case one can decide to wait at the airport for the next flight, but I had never been in London before and made use of the occasion to visit the city and then take the train through the Channel-tunnel.

What will you do when you have never been to London and you have one day to explore the town? I wandered around, had a look at the famous buildings: Parliament, Buckingham Palace, Saint Paul’s Cathedral, Tower Bridge and so on. In a crowd filled restaurant I ate fish and chips and found that I’d seen enough. At the end of the afternoon, on my way to the train station, I walked down a street with luxury shops on both sides. Suddenly I stopped short in my tracks. There, right in front of me, was the jeweler’s store that I had seen in my dream when I was with the Native Americans. I was absolutely sure, it was the same front, the same shop window. In awe I shuffled towards the store and the same powder compact and bracelet that I had bought in my dream on display in the shop window.

As I said earlier, normally I am pretty down-to-earth, but now I couldn’t help going into that store. It was not the lady in my dreams that stood behind the counter, but an impeccably dressed English gentleman. I pointed at the powder compact and the bracelet in the shop window and told him that I would buy them for my girlfriend.

'Mister certainly has a good taste,' the gentleman said while he was packing the compact and the bracelet in a gift box.

'No,' I answered. 'It's an assignment from the Native Americans.'

I have never seen a man so stricken as if by a lightning bolt as this gentleman.

But I walked out of the store quietly. I had fulfilled my duty.

9. LAMENTATIONS

I

On my return from Canada I settled in the river foreland again. I knew quite well I wasn't going to find back the paradise of my childhood. The guardian in my head with his flaming sword that turns every way would take care of that. But I felt at home between the green meadows and the white and red dotted cows that grazed along the riverside. And, most of all, I felt familiar with the Saxon dialect that is spoken there: the language of my heart.

I didn't get any message from the archivist in Canada. After three months I sent him an email. He replied that he was still working on it and that I should have a little bit more patience. But when I mailed him again after nine months and didn't get any answer at all, I gave up hope that I would ever learn more about my dead soldier. The pain in my belly returned with a vengeance.

I wondered what sense my journey had made, if any. When I was on the Narrow Road to the Deep North and had spoken to the man with the braid, I had been convinced that the search for my soldier would give purpose to my life. But the fire had slowly died and this little fairy-tale threatened to turn into disaster. Little by little I got more depressed.

Then I remembered the Native Americans. Maybe the soldier hadn't been the real purpose of my journey. Maybe he had just been a guide, like the owl had been, showing me the way to the Native Americans and their Law of the Great Spirit. Maybe I should take their assignment more seriously and write about it. I sat down at my computer and wrote a description of the ceremony at the fire. I was not impressed by my writing. Honestly, I found it rather pretentious and I have never bothered to finish it.

And above all, I didn't see myself as a preacher of repentance for a messed-up world. The thought alone would have brought tears of laughter to those who know me.

No, I should forget about the whole episode and turn my view forward.

But still there was no promised land in sight, either.

II

As you may have noticed, there are very few women that play a part in my story. And of the only two women who do, one is called a bitch and the other a serpent.

I was far too insecure as it came to be dealing with women. And with men, too. But if you doubt who you are, what must anybody else make of you? This attitude doesn't in general invoke the very best of characteristics in other people, be it either men or women.

But maybe there have been women who saw me as I am and maybe, in turn, I have overlooked them. I remember a woman from New Zealand. She and a Chinese girlfriend travelled a few days with me in Portugal. When we parted in Lisbon, she cried. I don't know why I didn't change plans instantly. Well, I understand very well...

That the river foreland was not the Garden of Eden of my childhood anymore, became apparent a couple of years later when cattle were hit by Foot and Mouth Disease. It's very contagious for animals, though not for humans, and all cows, pigs, sheep and goats had to be culled in order to prevent the disease from spreading. There was a vaccine but that was not used by the authorities because it was

feared that other countries would close their borders for our meat in that case. It would be a severe blow to our meat industry. Healthy animals were thus sacrificed for sheer economic interests. My God was I angry! It was not in my nature to become politically active. But this time I wrote letters to newspapers, talked on local radio stations and on July 7, 2001, I even helped organizing a demonstration in protest of the mass culling, where only 200 people gathered. In the river foreland alone some 250.000 thousand animals were murdered and destroyed, more than 99,9 % of them were completely healthy and could have been saved by vaccination.

It would almost turn me into an alcoholic and I tried to pin down my emotions by writing. I saw myself as a colonel that was put out of action after a lost battle. In fact, the colonel originated from the novel *Hundred Years of Solitude*. For years he was my second most favorite novel figure:

'What we need is a decent war!' the colonel hollered through the pub. He was drunk again. That was what he had been every evening since his failed campaign against the cattle disease.

'What these people need is a lengthy occupation and not one of the friendly kinds. That will serve them right. The stuffed scum is just sitting every evening in front of their television sets instead of fighting for the good cause. Get them into the trenches that will do them the good.'

Nobody paid any attention to what the colonel was saying. Everybody knew that he had a hard time. His campaign against the cattle disease, that he had prepared so meticulously, had resulted into disaster. Even to such a degree that the local population was about to turn itself against him. For a moment he had considered giving up his status as colonel. But that was impossible. One was born to be a colonel, or one wasn't born to be a colonel. And the colonel was indeed born to be a colonel.

But a colonel that has conjured up the animosity of his people, the cradle from which he derives his authority, such a colonel doesn't have much of a future anymore. By now he hardly went anywhere in the village. The only place where he still showed up was the messy pub where a man of his rank and reputation would only come because of his function and with the only aim to restore order with force. But here among the drunken trash and fools of the village was the only place he felt secure.

'A free drink for everyone. For all my friends here!' thundered the colonel in the direction of the landlord. He stood on his feet and raised his glass half full of vodka high into the smoky, sour smelling air of the pub. He felt his veins pulsating in his throat and he thought by himself: I should stop this. And that's what he promised himself, to stop drinking while a hundred images passed through his mind in a split second: images of his childhood, images of days of wine and roses, of the absence of love and the bittersweet craving for it, images of worlds undreamt of, far away from the smell of dead animals, far away from the hand with the glass high above his head and far away from the mouth that drank the burning booze, far away into another world of quietness and harmony, a world in which, he knew, he eventually belonged. That's how he felt at that moment and once again he promised himself that he would quit drinking tomorrow and a glow passed through his entire body when the vodka went down his throat and he held on to the bar and again commanded:

'A free drink for all of my friends. I am going to get broke, anyway. Better in grand style then. Don't you think so, captain?'

But the farmer who sat with his bent back at the bar kept staring motionless straight ahead of him.

'Hey, can't you say anything? I am talking to you. To you, yeah. I fought for you, too. Can I do something about it that it didn't work out? Am I to blame that those scumbags in their petty homes find money more important than the lives of 250.000 animals? What did I say: more important? Was it only true? It would mean that they had thought about it and come to a decision, be it not mine. But it isn't

that way. They haven't thought about it for a second. They don't care at all as long as they can just keep on watching TV night after night. I tell you: a decent war would do them good!

The farmer turned his back towards the colonel.

'And for that war you have again a superb strategy, I suppose?' the landlord asked from behind the bar. 'Listen, nobody heard you talking about free drinks. Friendship, my dear colonel, is not a thing you can buy. Friendship should be conquered.'

'But I have never learned that. How to do that, I mean. People are to me like continents where I never travel. You know, I have once known a woman. She came from India. I was in love with her, because I didn't understand a word she said.'

Above the noise of the pub the colonel heard booze clattering from a bottle into his glass on the counter.

'Drink this,' the landlord said. 'Drink this and get to sleep. Act like a man, colonel.'

'My dear landlord, from now on I will drink only from roaring rivers: clean, crystal clear water, golden drops of the water of life. I will climb to the highest highs to quell my thirst at the purest dew: pearly drops of Gods own breath. I will be alone. I will be one and everything. This is my last one. Salud!'

The colonel emptied his glass at one draught and walked, to his own amazement, without hesitation to the door.

'Hasta la vista, amigos,' he said turning around one last time. The he stepped into the deep darkness outside.

On his way home he met a remarkably handsome young man. One with an angel's face.

'Can I help you?' the remarkably handsome young man asked.

'No, you can't help me,' the cornel replied bluntly. 'Who the hell are you, anyway?'

'I am your guardian angel,' the remarkably handsome young man said.

'Yeah, that's what they always say,' the colonel hollered, and, in the darkness, he grabbed a stick from the ground and started beating. He wounded the angel badly. When the colonel was done, he threw away the stick and walked on without bothering about the young man lying on the ground.

'Hey,' the colonel exclaimed in surprise. 'Why are all those crows flying around here?'

The colonel had left the service, dishonorably he found. That night he wrote an interpretation of a poem by Arthur Rimbaud. In the Saxon dialect, the language of his heart.

TEAR

*Far from the birds, the herds and the women of the village
What did I drink there, on my knees in the grass?
Around me fresh wood of poplar trees
In the warm greenish haze of the afternoon?*

*What could I drink from that age-old river IJssel?
Poplars without voice, meadows without cows, heaven without conscience,
Drink from the yellow skulls of animals, far away from my beloved garden?
Some sort of liquor made of gold that makes you sweat.*

*My presence scares away other clients of the pub.
A thunderstorm is raging against the sky. At night
Drops from the trees lose themselves in untrodden soil,
The breath of God makes ice crystals on the pools.*

While I cried, I saw gold - but I couldn't drink.

III

I was definitely on a down bound train. I started smoking again, really quite a lot. Out of boredom I sometimes searched the Internet for more information on my soldier. But it yielded no results. One afternoon I typed his name in a search engine. I was directed to a website that explained the background of French surnames. On my soldier's family name, it stated:

'This name means in the language of Brittany owl. In the old Celtic culture owls were seen as bearers of knowledge and insight as well as announcers of an approaching death.'

I was shocked. I tried to write the fiery pain out of my belly as if it were the last chance to save my life. But the trick didn't work anymore. To someone else the story here under may seem a pseudo legend or a funny parody on the conversion of the Roman emperor Constant to the Christian faith. As for me, I had written it as a justification for the self-chosen death that, so I thought, I would certainly seek one of these days.

'The Legend of the Vaunage

The emperor went to Nimes, his beautiful Colonia Augusta Nemausensis, with the arena and the tower from which one had a magnificent view of the surrounding rolling landscape. But the emperor hadn't come for holidays. He had something to really worry about. In the hills around Nimes a bloke had gone in hiding and was telling all kind of dirty stories about the emperor. He had a small army of supporters and everywhere in the vast empire his stories began to find an attentive audience. The bloke became arrogant and he challenged the emperor. The emperor had to teach the guy a lesson, otherwise the fool might endanger the emperor's authority.

So, the emperor went to the temple, prayed to the gods for victory and sent his best garrison into hills. It shouldn't be a difficult chore for them. A day later a courier from the garrison returned: the whole of the emperor's army had been defeated and only a few had managed to escape, among them the courier. On top of that the rebel in the hills was even more defiant now and had said to his followers that he would be the new emperor within a week's time.

The emperor was worried. What had he done wrong? He had prayed the correct prayers, the formulation of them had been well chosen and was considered by the priests as more than excellent. He had sent a very experienced officer and given him strict and clear orders. What could an emperor do more?

In great hurry the emperor sent for garrisons from nearby towns, went to the temple, prayed to the gods even more arduously than last time and brought his troops under the command of a still more experienced officer with the strictest orders. He waved at them from the city walls as the army headed for the hills.

The next day not even a courier came, for the complete army had been eradicated until the very last man. Gangs from the rebel had been seen near Nimes. The emperor fled to another town and wondered what for heaven's sake he could have done wrong?

When he had finished wondering, he remembered that except for the gods of the temple, there was another god that was worshipped by some people in his empire, be it mostly by yokels though. Former emperors hadn't cared much for this god and from time to time they had fed the faithful to the lions. But that hadn't prevented the followers of this god to become more numerous and everywhere in the empire you could find little churches where this god was worshipped.

'Well,' the emperor said to himself. 'I haven't paid much attention to that cult, but suppose I'd pray to that new god? My own gods let me down, no matter how much I pray to them. Maybe that other god likes me better. Let's give it a chance. It doesn't hurt to try.'

That night the emperor went outside of the town on his own, sat down on a hilltop and started to pray:

'O strange god, that I do not know, if I be victorious in the morrow, I will always pray to you and neglect my own gods. Amen.'

At that very moment a fiery cross appeared against the night sky. A thundering voice broke through the silence:

'In this sign you will gain victory tomorrow!'

The emperor got on his feet, swept the dust from his knees and said to himself: 'Well, here we are. That sounds already much better to start with.'

The next day the emperor rode in front of a disorganized bunch of men that he had barely managed to gather from the city's streets. Some of the men were half lame, others could hardly see and again others couldn't speak or hear. Images of the cross he had seen in the sky last night were painted on the shields of the army. You already may have guessed it: the army of the rebel was defeated in a glorious way and the emperor sank to his knees:

'Strange god, you have kept your word, now I will keep mine, which is not that obvious in my case, though. I will always pray to you and praise your name!'

But the emperor wasn't back at his feet yet or another courier arrived.

'Emperor, emperor,' the man stammered out of breath. 'The army of the bloke is defeated, but he himself has escaped.'

'Bloody hell,' the emperor swore. 'How could they have been so damn stupid to let the scoundrel get away!'

He scratched his beard and walked upon and down the room nervously. Plunged in his thought he automatically pulled out his sword and decapitated the courier out of sheer habit.

'Stupid bastards. Stupid, stupid bastards that are good for nothing. They let the bloke escape. Now he roams around freely, and I am not better off than I was yesterday.'

At that very moment his thoughts went to the night before and to the unknown god.

'Wait a minute,' he murmured and sank to his knees piously.

'O, unknown god, you helped me in defeating the army of the enemy, but he himself has managed to escape. Help me to find him and I will take care that also my whole family will pray to you and will neglect the old gods.'

The next day the rebel was found in the woods by a cavalry unit and brought to the emperor's palace.

The emperor thanked the new god on his knees and didn't linger much longer. He got out his sword and ripped up the rebel's belly. With his left hand he tore out the guts and then kicked the rebel in his ass.

'That will do. Now you are all set to conspire against me in the hills. Get out,' the emperor shouted and pricked with the tip of his sword in the bloke's back to hurry him up.

Screaming from pain the rebel ran out of the palace, his guts in a long trail behind him.

Once back in the hill, crows started eating from his guts. He could hear dogs barking in the far distance and knew that the emperor had sent out a cavalry unit to make sure that the rebel was really dead now.

The rebel panicked. This was the end of his life. He remembered being a kid when he played emperor and empress with the girl next door. He could never have guessed that it would lead to this miserable fate. But suddenly he thought of how the emperor had thanked a new god for his victory.

'What that new god could do for the emperor, can he do for me as well,' he told himself. He sank on his knees, prayed to the new god and promised him to praise and worship this new god forever if he would heal him in a miraculous way.

There upon a mighty, invisible hand took six stars from the firmament and formed six angels out the stars. The six angels hurried down to earth, chased away the crows, neatly rolled the guts of the rebel and put them back in his belly.

'You are healed now. Go before the unit finds you,' the angels said to the bloke and tipped him encouragingly on his shoulder.

Back in the palace the emperor heard that the rebel was healed and had escaped. He knelt down again and prayed:

'O, unknown god let me catch that criminal one more time. Then will not only I and my family pray to you, but I will make sure that all my civil servants and all my officers from the rank of sergeant and upwards will do the same and neglect the old gods forever.'

The new god, meanwhile, didn't understand anymore.

'What are they up to? First, I should help the emperor, next time his adversary. And the only thing they do is beating each other's brains out and praying for victory. That was not what I meant!'

Out of disappointment the unknown god turned his back on the world.

The rebel however was healed but he had lost so much blood and was so exhausted that he couldn't keep out of the hands of the cavalry unit for long. He was caught again and brought to the palace. The emperor ripped up his belly again and kicked him in the ass.

'Get lost, you, miserable heap of meat. You won't repeat that trick for a second time, I suppose.'

The unfortunate rebel ran into the woods, with the crows and bloodhounds behind him.

'O, unknown god help me, please,' he prayed but the unknown god didn't listen anymore.

The six angels, however, who were still soaring over the trees, were not informed about the unknown's god decision not to bother with the world anymore. When they saw the rebel running around praying, they thought it wise to heal him already ahead of the orders they expected to get from the new god.

In this way the rebel escaped again and the emperor in his palace prayed:

'O, new god, deliver him to me and I will take care that not only my family and all my citizens, but also the dogs, cats and ants in my empire will pray to you and neglect the old gods forever.'

But the new god was relentless. He had turned his back on the world, and he would keep on doing so for a very long time.

The rebel meanwhile had lost still more blood after the second goring. The emperor's unit found him sleeping under a tree.

'Quo Vadis?' the head of the unit asked.

But the rebel was at the end of his tether and didn't understand a word of what the head of the unit said to him. In the palace the emperor slit the rebel's belly for a third time and drove him off into the woods. The rebel had lost confidence. He staggered on and hoped that he would die soon.

The crows started eating from his guts and he didn't bother to chase them away. When the six angels turned up, he reproached:

'That's not helping what you do. You heal me, just as I have asked from the new god in my prayer, but you don't give me new blood and a fair head start on the cavalry unit. I don't stand a ghost of chance this way against them. In this manner I only have to undergo the same ordeal four times!'

'Yes, we can see your point,' the angels stated. 'But we cannot act any other way. We must work strictly according to our orders. In your prayer you only asked to be healed. You didn't ask for new blood and a fair head start. The only orders we got was to heal you. We cannot and will not depart from these orders. By the way, for new blood and a fair head start there are other angels.'

The bloke did a quick prayer, but the new god put his fingers in his ears, shook his head back and forth and started singing aloud: 'La-la'-lalaaaa.' He didn't want to be involved anymore.

The rebel noticed that his prayer remained unanswered and that the two angels needed for new blood and a fair head start wouldn't come down from the sky. From the corner of his eye he saw the angels chasing off the crows.

'No, not again,' the rebel roared and in the darkness of the night he grabbed a stick from the ground and started beating the angels. He wounded the angels badly.

Upon smelling the angels' blood, the crows got in a state of great excitement. Crows regard angels' blood as a culinary tour de force. In one massive mad flight the crows attacked the angels. They were helped by the rebel who was still yielding his stick at the angels. The crows ate the angels with great

relish, though a bit too voracious to be able to really enjoy it. They ate the bloke as dessert, to feel fully stuffed.

When the emperor heard about his rival's death, he burst out into exclams of joy and decided spontaneously that the whole world should pray to the new god from now on. The emperor, as he would be the first to acknowledge, wasn't used to keep his word, but this time it was different.

'This god is not so bad. Who knows, if he can me serve me again.'

And so, the whole wide world, willingly or unwillingly, was put under the authority of the god of the emperor: the god of self-interest.

The unknown God Himself in his Heaven looked upon the pathetic theatre that was going on below. He found, as He confided to some of His staff, it 'kind of worrying' what was happening down there.

But He had decided to turn His back on it and as long as no one cared for nothing else but their own profit, He would let them. He wanted to stick to that decision for now: 'My time will come anyway, that's for sure.'

The woods of the Vaunage, the region with the rolling hills west of Nimes, have turned into beautiful vineyards now. But sometimes, on moonless nights, a sudden wind rises from the place in the sky where the six stars are lacking. The wind seeks its way between the vines and softly whispers the names of the six angels: Agnoth, Thaz, Lasjtravit, Sanechsid, Vador and Rochtesjam.

Then all the crows fly up from their resting places and fill the nightly air with their screeching.

That is, so say the people who live there, the reminder of the legend of the Vaunage.'

10. IN THERAPY

Often, I wondered, if I should not have followed the Narrow Road to the Deep North. Maybe I would have found the Way of Grace there. The view from the mountain, the conversations with the landlord and the man with the long, thin braid on his back, it all appeared in a golden glow of melancholy to me now. But alas, you can't repeat the golden moments of your life. And besides I hadn't the money to travel again.

I received a benefit because of 'psychological inability to engage in regular employment.' I had to come back for a check-up each year.

'What are you doing in order to speed up your recovery?' the civil servant asked.

'I smoke fifty cigarettes a day, sir,' I answered neatly.

'That's not enough,' the servant said and looked at me with a grim face.

'Not enough? What do you expect me to do then? Smoke hundred cigarettes a day?'

But the civil servant couldn't laugh about it. He said:

'You know very well what I mean. You must undergo treatment or have medication so you can get back to work soon. I cut your benefit because you are not making any efforts that would promote your recovery.'

He added that I wouldn't get any benefit at all next year if still I hadn't gone into treatment. There was no escaping from it: I had to go in therapy.

'Tell me,' the therapist said. He laid together the tops of his fingers of both hands in front of his thin lips and watched me probingly over his glasses. 'Tell me, is there a point in your life of which you could say: that's where things started to go wrong, that's where I should have acted differently?'

'Oh yeah,' I replied. 'When I came out of the womb. I should have stayed where I was and should have said: "You can leave dinner around the corner. I am perfectly OK here."'

But we talked very seriously, too. One day the therapist said:

'You are a person that is very perfectionistic. Very demanding on yourself. That is not unusual for persons that have felt excluded for a long time in their childhood.'

'I suppose, you mean the guardian with the flaming sword in my head. The superego?'

The therapist laughed: 'Yes, in Freud's time we called that the superego. It is very uncompromising in your case and filled with reproaches and accusations that you have taken far too literal and internalized afterwards. It takes a very long time to heal from such an obsessive-compulsive neurosis.'

Once he said: 'You have a narcissistic personality. Also, that is common among people who felt themselves left out for over a long period of time. Unlike an obsessive-compulsive neurosis, there is no healing from this disorder. Only by being aware of it, you may constrain the excrescences. That is not an easy thing. Also, you must be merciful with yourself and other people that have the same disorder as you. You may find them horrible, but that's because they show you, as if in a mirror, how horrible

you yourself can be. Count to ten and take a deep breath. Always look deep under the surface. You will find love and understanding there. Trust people, trust life!

Still I stopped making visits to the therapist after a while. He was a friendly man, but I had already spent so much thought on my situation, and I didn't see that the therapy added new insights. Well, at least that's what I believed at the time. But if I quitted therapy, I wouldn't get any more benefits. I decided to find a job. I wouldn't need a benefit then and I was free from the civil servant's pressure.

I had been a hypochondriac all my life. Whenever I felt the smallest pain somewhere in my body, I was immediately convinced that I had cancer and I already prepared for approaching death. That was common to my psychological condition the therapist had said. And now I had gotten a job in a medical archive. I had to read the files of patients of 50 years ago and index them on medical entries. Scientific knowledge was not necessary. It was just a matter a typing the entries and their locations into a computer. In the beginning I found myself suffering from all the diseases I came upon to. But after a while I got immune and maybe for the first time in my life, I realized that, except for the botheration in my head, I was in excellent health.

When I write 'botheration in my head' it may seem innocent. But it wasn't innocent at all, it was a terrible torture. Everything I did, had to be done perfectly. To put in Biblical words: I wanted to be like God, allowing myself no failures. That was the original sin: that I didn't accept being just human with all the imperfections that go with it and that I kept judging myself for any failures. Of course, this perfectionism was rooted in the desert and was a quite natural consequence of that experience, but still, it agonized me none the less. The smallest, most irrelevant acts had, according to some vague unwritten code, to be done in the most perfect way. If I didn't live up to that code, I kept blaming myself and sometimes would lay awake for several nights on a row. It has ruined my life for a long time, but I won't go into further detail. I feel deeply ashamed and those who have never experienced it, can't imagine into what a destructive torment life turns then.

'It takes a very long time to heal,' the therapist had said. Drinking brought no relief. On the contrary, I think the obsessive-compulsive neurosis grew only worse by it. Sometimes I thought it was better to have a physical disease. At least you were aware of what you were fighting against.

But maybe, I thought in more optimistic moods, maybe I was just too much on my own. Maybe things would be better if had a girlfriend. Despite being insecure and despite I knew very well what I was up against, I gathered courage and made a profile on a dating-site at the Internet with the unnerving heading:

'Who wants to go down the river of life with this not so very young man?'

I described myself as a stay-at-home who is inclined towards philosophy and as someone who despairs of civilization and who likes cycling but only with tail wind.

Every ten minutes I checked my mailbox. But there came no reaction to my profile. Not that afternoon, not that evening and not the following night either.

The next day, it was a Sunday, I made a ride on my bicycle in the forest. Young couples were walking with their kids on the paths. It had rained all week and the front wheel of my bike dug itself into the muddy sand. At one point I had to jump from the bike quickly in order not to fall into the morass.

'Damn it,' I swore. 'On top of everything. And never, never something will happen that changes my life completely in the wink of an eye.'

When I was home again, I switched on the computer.

'You have one new message in your mailbox,' it said on the screen.

I opened the mail. There was just one line of text.

'Let's cast off, Eve.' I read and reread the line ten times and thought to myself: is it going to happen after all?

11. SONG OF SONGS

I

'I've got a real dream job,' Eve wrote in one of the next mails. We had agreed to write over the mail before meeting each other. 'I look after people who come to our meditation center just outside of town. I am their hostess to whom they can turn to with all their questions and problems. Usually I don't need to be there at night. There's a couple who runs the center and they are there in case of emergency. Only if they are out for the weekend occasionally, I sleep there. But mostly I am at home for the night. It is not a convent or something. It's not about religion but about silence and stillness from which all kinds of miracles can emerge. Really, I have had such amazing, in-depth or just nice conversations with the people who stay there for a couple of days or weeks! It's a real blessing to me. My former job was as secretary to the board of an important and real famous museum. That was certainly interesting. Some of my friends thought that the meditation center would be a step backwards. But on the contrary. I am perfectly fine here.'

And now I had to tell her about my dull job in the medical archives. When I was bored at work, I sometimes searched the Internet for what had become of my classmates. Without exception they appeared to have been very successful in life. They worked in the world of arts and theatre, held important positions in educational institutes or had made a living of their hobby. And I was an absolutely void of nothingness.

I decided to protect myself against my own shame in the correspondence with Eve and refurbished reality a little. I wrote (and because I lied, I couldn't write it in the language of my heart, the Saxon dialect of the rive foreland):

'Oh, cute, you worked in a museum! I work as a researcher in an historic archive and go through the files covering the period 1795-1813. Nobody has researched these files before. I am the first one to open them after 200 years and I often feel as an explorer in unknown territory. Every single page unveils new secrets. In time I will write a book about it. A publishing house is already very interested. As you will know, the period that is covered by these files is very important, because during it great changes took place that shaped our country to what it is now: the drafting of a first democratic constitution, the declaration of human rights and so on. I don't need to tell you about it, I suppose, as you worked in a museum? If not, I will tell you all about it soon, because out the abundance of the heart...'

'I am glad to see you have such a passion for your work. I recognize that,' Eve wrote back. 'By the way, the museum where I used to work was not a historical museum but a museum for modern art. So, you owe me the stories about your research.'

I had lied without caring for the consequences. And now I was in a mess, for in fact I knew practically nothing about the historical developments in this period. I was almost compelled to start reading about it. And then, writing a book! What a fool I had been, but instead of stopping I even added more lies.

'My friends are so important to me,' the poor woman wrote. 'I can't make real contact with my mother anymore. She has been growing demented for a couple of years now. Friends mean a lot to me then. Sometimes I take care of their children. That makes up a bit for the lack of children of my own. Do you want to have children, or do you think it too early to talk about that already?'

Since my journey through the desert I had hardly had what you could call friends. I was attracted to people that resembled the cherub with the flaming sword in my head: hard, condemnatory, so called

critical persons. Everything was rejected and slammed to pieces: nothing or no-one in the world gained our praise. No, we weren't a very agreeable company. But the condemnation of the persons I socialized with, eventually came down on me, I thought. I know they were not like that, but at the time I felt their rejection. I know I was wrong. They were very kind and caring to me. For instance, they urged me to stop smoking, when I got a bad cough. But nevertheless, I started to avoid them. By the time I met Eve on the Internet, I was virtually on my own.

'I don't have any close relatives anymore,' I answered her mail. 'I was the only child and my father and mother died a long time ago. But friends, as for you, are very important to me, too. I see them often and on Saturday nights we make music at my house. I play sax and keyboards. It's always very amusing and there's always something emerging that's very funny and let us have a good time. We laugh a lot. Saturday night is kind of holy to me. All week I look forward to it.'

What was wrong with me? Indeed, I had a sax and keyboards, but I could hardly produce a sound from it. And yes, in the past I had sometimes jammed with my friends, but the laughter was from drinking, not from the music. The music was rather cause for weeping.

And now I had to say something about children? I thought it wiser to keep that for a next time. Before I knew, I would have written that I had already three children walking on the surface of the earth. And that, according to all laws of reproduction, was utterly impossible.

II

And so, I messed up the correspondence. Frankly, I must tell that gradually the pain in my belly grew worse. Since I had worked at the medical archives the outbursts of pain had been relatively rare. But these mornings I woke up often with a sharp pain in the left side of my belly. I told myself that it came from the tension that the correspondence with Eve caused, but at the same time I was a little worried, too. Ten years ago, I visited with an artist from my village the opening of an exposition of pictures in the capital of my country. A lot of weird people had been roaming around. At one time a guy had stood next to me and started talking. He had made a confused impression and spoke about the royal family, the history of the Netherlands and about the people that attended the opening of the exhibition. He hadn't a high regard for them, which was clear. I thought that he was drunk. But when he left to get a new glass of beer the artist from my village whispered in my ear: 'He is a medium, a psychic. He is often consulted by famous people.'

A few moments later the medium was back. He had brought me a glass of beer, too. That was very kind. We talked all night, drank a couple of beers too much, I suppose, and by the end of the evening he said: 'Let me have a look at you. See if you have any physical problems. Just open your mouth, please.' And before I realized what happened, he was fretting with his fingers at my teeth. It was true that I had had some trouble with my molars on the upper right side and that I hadn't cared for seeing the dentist about it. I hadn't told him about it.

He pulled and pushed with his fingers at the painful teeth and said: 'OK, now you are set for a while again. Dentists just can't think of anything else than extracting teeth, while that is not necessary most of the time.' These teeth have never bothered me again.

He went with his hand over my breast and felt my belly, too. When he reached the left side, he frowned and said: 'Something is not right there.'

'Oh, that's nothing,' I answered. 'It's just tension. Nothing more.'

He shook his head, but he didn't elaborate. We said goodbye and probably I would never have given the incidence a second thought again. I am neither a believer nor am I superstitious, as I always said.

Besides, by the end of the evening the medium had had, just as I, a few beers too many, so maybe he was wrong anyway. I had felt pain at that spot for so long now, if it really had been something serious, I should have been dead by now. But a few weeks later the artist came to visit me. He had been to the capital and spoken with medium. 'He asked how your belly was doing.'

Ever since that day I worried from time to time when I felt that pain in my left side. As for those teeth, he had been right, too, wasn't he?

But as said, since I worked at the medical archives, that pain became rarer. Just now, when I was writing with Eve, it returned in full force. I wondered if I were doing the right thing. Maybe I should stop the correspondence or maybe I should just be honest to her. But I felt so ashamed of what I made of my life.

Before I could have decided one way or the other, I got a mail from Eve that made it impossible to just stop the correspondence, anyway.

III

'Dear Adam, something happened in my childhood that I have to tell you about, otherwise it might stand in between us. But this I can assure you of my love for you is real. You don't have to be afraid that I am a femme fatale and that your love will die, only a couple of yards on the beach, at the shore of my insensibility, as you wrote in your last mail. On the contrary, my feelings for you are growing and growing, but something has happened to me when I was young, and you need to know about it.

The tears must have their way. Nothing's going wrong. Your warm love and your passion for life will eventually thaw the last frozen place in my heart.

There was a time when my heart was ice all over and so all the treasures that I kept there were frozen, too. I couldn't gather new treasures, either.

After a very, very long time my heart has become almost free from ice because people came into my life who defrosted it patiently, piece by piece.

The place in my heart that was meant for a man, for a lover, was frozen most deeply. Even the path leading to that place was skiddy so that every man who tried to tread it slipped before he could come even near.

And now you came and there's nobody that has ever come so close.

From here on everything is new to me.

All the remaining ice must melt, and the frost has got to leave.

Please, stay. I have always dreamt of a man like you.'

I stared at the paper of the printed e-mail. Nobody had said this to me before. For a moment I forgot all that had happened in my life and the angel with the flaming sword disappeared from my head for a while. And from this freedom and emptiness, four words emerged. My fingers softly touched the keyboard. There they were on my computer screen. It was the shortest e-mail I had ever written, but the words came straight from the heart:

'I love you, Eve.'

The next day Eve mailed:

'Adam, thank you for these four divine words that you wrote despite my hint that our relationship would not be without problems. I always thought that love was never unconditional. Now I must tell you about my broken dreams.

Like you I was the only child in our family. I think my mother would have liked more children. But it was already a miracle that after two miscarriages I was born sound and healthy. The delivery had wreaked 'some havoc in there', the doctor had said, and my mother was never pregnant again. We lived on a small island off the West coast. Most of the men on the island were fishermen, but my father had a piece of land on which he tended sheep and grew potatoes and turnips. For grown-ups there wasn't much of a future on the island and many young men and women moved to the mainland in search of a better life. But for us children the island was like paradise. I can still see the tadpoles in the ditches swimming among the green duckweed. With a stick at the end of which a nylon stocking was wrapped around a ring of iron wire we used to catch the fast-black little balls. Every spring there was a row of jam jars on a shelf in our barn filled with tadpoles.

There was no kindergarten on the island. We learned more in nature than we ever could have learned from cutting and gluing pieces of paper. But at six I had to go to primary school. I missed the freedom and little by little the paradise began to crack down. When I was seven a disaster took place on the island.

On the northern tip of the island were two big silos in which artificial fertilizer was stored. Ships brought the fertilizer from overseas and it was kept in the silos before it was taken by smaller vessels to the mainland. People had sometimes said that the silos were built on the island because the storage of fertilizer in such quantities was far too dangerous on the mainland. But in all those years nothing had happened, and we children used to play on the beach near the silos very often. On a beautiful summer morning in June, we were just in our classroom, the island's only constable came running to our school: 'Haven't you heard yet?' He panted. 'In one of the silos the compartments have disintegrated.'

We didn't know what compartments were and what the collapse of them really meant, but we understood that it must be something extraordinary. When the constable had caught his breath again, he went on: 'Some smoke is already emerging from the silo and the temperature is expected to rise further. Probably there is going to be an explosion. You all must go to the mainland.

In the small harbor of our island chaos ruled. Boats almost bumped into each other and on the quay side children that just came from school were frantically looking for their parents. And although the constable, the mayor and the company's manager kept reassuring the crowd that there was no reason for panic as it would take at least one or two days before an explosion would take place, we were all very frightened.

Two days later the collapsed silo exploded followed by the other silo two hours later. It was not a big bang but rather a dampened plop which from the mainland sounded as 'puh-hooof'. There was not much damage. Only a couple of windows of the houses nearest to the silos were broken. Everybody wanted to get back to the island as soon as possible. But the explosion had spread a white blanket of fertilizer and other chemicals over the island. The first days we were not allowed to return. Men in yellow safety suits were taking samples. The result was not conclusive. One expert said that the white powder was harmless and would disappear after a few showers of rain. Others estimated that some of the chemicals were carcinogenic and that it was better to leave the island deserted.

The authorities let the choice to the people. Most of them didn't want to take any risks, if it wasn't for themselves then certainly not for their children. The fishermen could sell their boats and with the proceeds start a new life on the mainland. But my father didn't have a boat and the piece of land he

owned was virtually worthless after the explosion. We didn't have the means to leave. And so, I stayed behind as the only child on the island. I wandered on my own through the fields where I had always played with other children and walked along the ditches where all the tadpoles had gone.

Oddly on the island one school was still functioning. The former headmaster, an old man with a hunchback, remained as the only teacher together with the janitor, who was even older and more bent than the headmaster and who had plucks of hair growing from his nostrils. And I was their only pupil. The authorities decided to which school a pupil went. It was always the school most nearby. If one chose for another school, further away, the parents had to pay for the travelling expenses. In my case it meant that I would have to take a boat to the mainland every day. My father just hadn't the money for that. So, I was in the bizarre situation that I had a private education, not because my parents were rich, but because they were poor.

Of course, I missed the other children and was very scared of the janitor. But the headmaster was kind and full of understanding. He tried not only to be the teacher but also a fellow pupil to me. In the year that followed I considered him more and more as a second father or maybe even as a first father. My own father became depressed after the harvests failed one after the other. He was gloomy and listless. In the next winter he had all kinds of physical ailments which made him even less enjoyable. My mother gradually retreated in a world of her own and didn't pay much attention to me. I preferred to be at school rather than at home.

After the summer holidays the headmaster returned to school with a mournful face. His wife was very ill, he said. He laid his clenched fist on his desk and started to weep gently. I laid an arm around his neck and spoke to him encouragingly: 'It's going to be all right, I'm sure it's going to be all right.'

The headmaster shook his head wildly and shouted out: 'No, little girl, it is not going to be all right. She is going to die.' He cried and I put my arms around his neck and gave him a kiss on his cheek.

Ten days later the headmaster's wife was dead. There were not many people at the funeral: my parents and me, the janitor, the mayor of the town on the mainland under which the island came now and the constable who had come back for the occasion. The vicar held a short sermon and said that the headmaster's wife was much better off now. But the headmaster was only weeping his bent back shaking all over. Later we drank coffee at the headmaster's house. There was talk about the white powder. I watched my father and only now I noticed how pale he looked in comparison with the other men.

After the funeral there is big dark whole in my memory, a period of about eight, nine years of which I remember almost nothing. All wiped away, devoured by a black monster.

Imagine Adam, you are a child and you love somebody with an innocent, childish love. And if just that very person betrays you with the most terrible betrayal you can think of and you suspect that the cause for that betrayal was your wish to care for him and to ease his pain, then you want to throw that desire in the deepest pit, isn't it? If a knife has cut into your soul and you are almost bleeding to death, then you will do everything to prevent such an experience in the future. Maybe you wouldn't survive a second time... That's why there is that lock door in my heart that wants to keep my swirling love for you.

...OK, here we go, I've got to tell you... I don't want to, but I must, because otherwise you will never understand me.

After the headmaster's wife had died, he was very sad. I tried to comfort him, not as if he was my headmaster but as if he were a fellow pupil. I don't know what happened in that period, once again there's black pit in which all memories have disappeared. But when I had to undergo therapy later,

something terrible rose from that black hole, something utterly unspeakable. I still can hardly talk about it and I still can't believe it was the headmaster...

Somewhere in that vast, dark ocean the funeral of my father peaks out as an island, merciless and inhospitable, above the black water that surround it. I am ten years old. It is summer and while family members from the mainland are waiting in the sitting room for the vicar, I am sitting in a corner on the stairs. I hear them talk about the white powder again. But my mother has locked herself in in her bedroom. An uncle goes up the stairs and knocks gently on the door:

'Come Anne Marie, please come. We understand your grief. We will be there for you when the going gets tough. But today you have to be there for your child.'

There is no answer. My uncle goes down the stairs shaking his head in disbelief.

Time passes by and it feels like eternity. My mother doesn't leave the room. My uncle climbs the stairs again, takes me by the hand and says: 'Come, the vicar is there. We are going to bury your father.' I exclaim: 'And mommy? Doesn't mommy come with us?' My uncle shakes his head and says: 'No, your mommy can't be with us. She will stay here.' He lifts me up and takes me outside where my father's body is already on the wagon. The horse whinnies as my uncle puts me on the ground.

As the little child that I was, I understood why my mother couldn't come with us, that she couldn't help me. It was my fault that my father had died, wasn't it? In the reasoning of a child it was perfectly clear: My father had gone to heaven, so I was told, and on the obituary notice it said that the Lord had taken him home.

Why would God take a father home who was so badly needed by his family? He must have had His reasons for it that was sure. The answer I found, was that unlike the headmaster I hadn't comforted my father when the harvests failed and when his body started to ache. God had taken away father away from me, because I was a bad child. I had kissed the headmaster, but not my father. I was punished by God, for my father was in heaven while I stayed behind in hell.

My mother spent several years in mental institutions. She never went back to the island. After she lived on her own again, she had many relationships with men. I was sent to a boarding school on the mainland. I hardly remember anything from that period either. They said I was unmanageable. When I was sixteen, I was sent to an educational institution and it was only there that I gradually awoke. A huge lump of ice came surfacing from the bottom of the dark hole and it has always prevented me to love and be loved.

Do you understand Adam, that there's a frightened little girl in me that has become suspicious of love? But it's going to be all right. I just need a little time to soothe the frightened little girl in me. And already crazy, swirling love is trickling through the lock doors in my heart. Those four divine words of yours have caused a tidal wave in me. The last of the remaining ice has started to melt.

In the end no lock doors will keep my love from flowing. I have always prayed for a man that would stir up a passionate love in me so that I wouldn't have a choice but opening the locked doors.

Oh, Adam, if you only knew how it is raging in me...

But despite the confusion of all those different feelings, I feel great now.

Yes, I love you, my dear Adam!

Let the tide roll in!

Eve.'

I wished the ground would open and swallow me. After all the ordeals she had been going through this woman gave herself to someone who wasn't the person he pretended to be. I had been lying all the time. In fact, the person she was mailing to existed only in the virtual reality of the World Wide Web. But if told her the truth about me, she would probably lose all confidence in mankind for the rest of her life. Again, before I had been able to decide about what to do next, another mail from Eve arrived in my mailbox:

'My lovely little Adam from the river foreland. You are a real gift from God. My heart overflows with love for you. I want to tell you one more story and then we must meet. No sad story, this time. On the contrary!

I want to tell you about a dream that I had a couple of weeks ago. I was with some girlfriends in a pub. The pub was very crowded with young men in blue and green blazers. They were students or maybe soldiers. Because it was so crowded most of them had no seat and were standing around the tables. One of them started a conversation with me. At one point I told the guy about a movie that I had seen in London. It was such a short movie trying to keep the morale high. But this one was different. It was shot in London. It was about a man who found his house bombarded by the Germans. With his eyes shut down and a wrinkled face full of misery he told his story.

'This morning I kissed my wife and three children. They were so happy, because it was almost Christmas. Despite all suffering and bombardments, we had managed to make some sort of tree. Of old sticks and with balls, but no lights. And now all is gone. My boss allowed me to go and see if everything was all right. But it wasn't. I don't understand people anymore. What's all this killing about? Power? Money or honor or what must pass for such a thing? Why are we so lost? What happened to us?

While he is telling this story, his eyes stare down to the ground. Our stiff upper lip. But then suddenly he looks right into the camera and says: 'When did we get so lost in this world?'

Not a word of revenge or hatred, but just the question why we are so lost. It is because of this man that I began to understand another man. It is not his death of this man, that has set me free, but his life! His message! We are all brothers and sisters, children of God!

If we just could only believe this, that we are children of God and Love... Then we would see the Light in each other's eyes and stop murdering. We would care for the Creation. We would celebrate life. Then the Kingdom of God would descent on earth! I carry this man from London in my heart. He has touched my soul.

The guy looked at me with understanding eyes. Just now I saw that he was very handsome. There were tears in his eyes. Then he reached under his green blazer and took a small packet. At that very moment his mates pulled him from my table and left the pub in a hurry.

I went back home, too. That was a medieval castle with a high tower. My father was waiting for me near the drawbridge. It was a shock, after all those years, to meet him in this dream. Besides he wore a harness. It was strange, that I was now right in the middle Ages, because the students or soldiers clearly had clothes and haircuts from the thirties in the 20th century.

My father was angry. He said I shouldn't involve with strangers and he banished me to the tower. There I was sitting on a bench, crying. Crying about my life, about the guy in the pub and my unfulfilled desire for love and affection. Through my tears I saw the blue sky and wondered if help would come

from there? Is there a Father or Mother, an Energy or Universe that loves us and comes to the rescue when rescue is needed?

My tears flowed and suddenly, as in a haze, I saw something black, something big, landing on the windowsill. It was an owl. With his impenetrable gaze he stared at me for a long time. I saw that in his beak was the package that the guy in the pub had wanted to give to me. The owl opened his beak and the package dropped on the floor of the tower room. Then he turned around and flew away. And while I saw him flying away with quiet strokes of his wings, I heard the words: 'Whatever belongs to you in this life, you will truly receive.'

When I picked up the package from the floor to open it, I woke up.

It was not going to be the only miracle to happen. In fact, my life became filled with miracles. When once I was wounded, now I was amazed. Unfulfilled wishes became reality and where there had been emptiness, now there were dreams. And two weeks later, I found you on the dating site.

All this reminded me of the words of my best loved psalm, psalm 126: 'When the Lord turned my chances, it was like a dream!'

And now we must see each other, Adam, Friday afternoon in the park!

It was a miracle, too that she had dreamt about an owl. I had never told her about my soldier. Instead I had been way too busy making up stories. And I could have told her what was inside that package of the soldier.

I wrote back to her, that Psalm 126 was also my favorite psalm. Oh, what a jerk I had become. It was years ago that I had read from the Bible for the last time and as for psalm 126, I didn't even know what it was about. Even now I was too lousy to even search for the text on-line.

I was much more worried about Friday afternoon. Eve would be quick to discover that I was a completely different person than I had pretended to be in our correspondence. How would I handle that? The pain in my belly got worse.

In the night from Thursday on Friday I had a quaint dream. I was sitting with some people whom I didn't know on a fast train. Some passengers panicked, because it was said that there was no engine driver to stop the train. But we, some four or five people, were throwing dice. I lost all the time. At last I was fed up with the game.

I stood up from and said to the others: 'I'll have it'. Then I saw a tombstone with my name on it and the words: 'I have tasted and saluted love, on my first and last morning.' I woke up with a start and felt a splitting pain in my belly.

This was the end; I knew it right away. No, it was not caused by the tension that went with the correspondence. The cause of such a horrible pain could only be a massive tumor. The medium had been right all the time.

I was up for the rest of the night. Sweat pearled on my forehead. I thought of the poor woman who had put her hope and trust in me and how she would meet a man in the park tomorrow who had only to live a couple of days or weeks at the most. I cried all the tears that I had withhold all my life in that one night.

But I cried for her, not for myself. I switched on the computer and started on a long mail to Eve. I told her about the garden of my father, about how he had sent me away after I had been angry, about the

guardian with the flaming sword in my head, the journey through the desert, the shepherd and the Way of Nature and Grace, the narrow road to the Deep North, the dead soldier on the graveyard in Normandy, the Native Americans in the forest and their plan of life. I told her that I was someone far different from what she thought and that it was better that we shouldn't meet. She should forget me. She would surely find another man who would be nicer to her than I was ever able to.

I didn't tell her about the pain in my belly.

I hesitate and feel a vague wave of melancholy when I finally click on the Send button of the e-mail. There is no way back now.

I leave my village in the river foreland without saying goodbye to anyone.

12. REVELATIONS

June 17

At noon I am driving on the ring road around Paris. This is what I had always had in mind: that when life would become too difficult, physically or mentally, I was going to be the one who determined when and where it would end. On a spot in the Northwest of Spain with the suitable name of Finisterre: the end of the world. There I would jump from a high cliff into the emptiness from which I had once emerged. That image, that thought has, however crazy it might sound, always given me the courage throughout all my ordeals. The idea that there is an exit out of this life, an exit that even has some romantic touches: the need to travel and meanwhile passing by some of my beloved places, the last moments on the verge of the cliff with the ocean that separated me from the Native Americans roaring underneath me. And then the final, ultimate falling along the rugged side of cliff that according to some appears to last an eternity, so many memories pass through you at that moment.

And now I am on my way. I make a stop-over for the night in Loches, in the Loire region. I have been here before with a friend. We had eaten in a pizzeria and a very beautiful woman who sat a few tables away from us, had stared at me all the time. I was shy and turned my head away. My friend sat with his back to the woman and didn't notice it. I dared to look at the woman one more time. Before I could have given it a thought and despite my shyness, I winked an eye at her. She winked back. Again, it was a very beautiful woman and my head turned red. From that moment on I didn't look at her again. When we had finished our meal and I looked up, I saw she was gone. Back on the road I told my friend about the incident that had gone on unnoticed by him.

'Yeah, yeah, that's some kind of story,' he said and giggled while looking out of the car window. The evening sun casts long shadows over the hills along the Loire. In the distance a bird of prey was sitting in a meadow. For long I have considered this to be my best friend and maybe in a strange way he was. I cannot find back the pizzeria. It is so long ago.

I go to bed early, for as the night falls the pain in my belly returns.

June 18

Today I drive to Burgos, Spain. It is a fine, clear day and I feel healthier than I have felt in years. In Burgos I go to an Internet café. I am curious if Eve has written me. But apart from some spam there are no messages in my mailbox.

I paid the Internet café for an hour of service. Out of boredom I search the internet for news on my soldier. Then I come upon a site with a memory book dedicated to the Canadian casualties during World War Two. The page on which the name of my soldier is written is shown in a museum in Ottawa every year: on June 16.

That night I hardly sleep. The pain keeps me awake. Finally, I go out of bed and watch Spanish TV. I don't understand of word of it. When morning breaks, I write a note:

*'Sleepless nights and unknown words
Salute me
On the road to the end of the world.'*

June 19

In Leon I visit the cathedral and lit a candle. Strange gesture for someone who doesn't believe. But it is the ritual that brings peace of mind.

I notice that I want to spend more time on the road and decide to drive to Guarda in Portugal.

June 20

On a journey through Portugal I had been in Guarda before. How it happened - I had had lots of drinks that might explain - but after the last café closed, I joined with a guy to his house. We drank some more, and the guy started to read from his own poetry. At that time that was not unfamiliar in Portugal. Many people were gifted poets and wanted to join Fernando do Pessoa and his likes. He sat very close to me and in the glow of drunkenness I was convinced that I understood all those soft-spoken Portuguese words one by one. I was deeply in love with the boy. But nothing happened between us.

A few years later I was back in Guarda. But I couldn't remember the café nor the name of this guy: all drowned in a night full of love and exaltation. So became this boy, from which I cannot even conjure up his face, the icon of the purest, most spiritual existence of love.

It is the end of this pilgrimage. Santiago de Compostela beware, because here I come!

June 21

Santiago de Compostela turns out to be a bustling town with lots of students and pubs that are opened deep into the night. I am not a moment on my own. Most of the students assume that I am a pilgrim and that I have walked all the way. I am wise enough not to tell them about the real purpose of my journey. I have a lot of fun with these guys and don't feel any pain in my belly all night.

June 22

The next day I visit the cathedral. What I am supposed to do there, I can't tell. It seems that, as the end draws nearer, I start to linger. Finisterre is only 50 kilometers from here, but I don't want to die. One word, one yes from Eve and I would get into the car and drive home straight away.

I go to an Internet café. The students are a merry bunch and make much noise. I check my mailbox, but there is no message from Eve. Of course, I understand that she doesn't feel like writing me, but still I feel a tinge of disappointment. Oh, what a jerk I am, after all I have done to her. There is only spam and I am about to delete all the mails in the inbox altogether. But wait a minute. There was a mail with the subject Bonjour! that I thought to be spam, too. When I give it a second glance, I see that the sender has a name that sounds somehow familiar to me: D. D. Hey, isn't that the name of the archivist that I visited years ago in Canada? I open the e-mail and read:

'Bonjour monsieur Adam,

After all these years I want to write you about your soldier.

In the end I managed to receive some precious information from the wife of your soldier's brother, the woman I told you about when you were here. I also told you back then how tough these conversations were because she thought you would write a book about his case. She was an intelligent woman but had a difficult character. Once she had made up her mind, she wouldn't have changed it easily, no matter the reasonable arguments that could be brought against her point of view. I suggested to her to write you, but she said she wouldn't do so.

I convey to you now the things that I wrote down during those conversations. It's only now, because the woman died a couple of months ago at a very high age. She feared that you would write a book about your soldier (me, too, for that matter, believe that you will do so) and that in this book the historical context in which the participation of French speaking Canadians in the Second World War took place, would be neglected. That's why she refused to cooperate with you. In order to honor her wish, I was determined not to write you during her lifetime. That it would take so long before you'd hear from me, I couldn't have foreseen.

Once again, I am convinced that you will write a book on your soldier. I hope you will respect the feelings of the widow of his brother. We all in Québec know somebody who has been enlisted involuntarily into Her Majesty's Army. As for me, I know of a close family member and the brother of a friend with who this has been the case. It was a painful period with many subtle differentiations that can easily be overlooked by an outsider.

This said, I will convey the information that the widow of your soldier's brother gave me:

- The family came, as has been remarked already during your visit, from Brittany in France. Their arrival in Canada was, compared to other French speaking families here, relatively recent. Your soldier's parents emigrated from France in the 19th century, while most of us descend from families that emigrated between 1608 and 1759.
- All with that family name in my town are close relatives of your soldier. K., a brother has been buried here and one of his grandsons has the name of your soldier in his honor.
- The father was called René. He participated in two wars: The Boxer War in Indochina and the Great War of 1914-1918. So, your soldier came from a family with a military tradition.
- Your soldier had two brothers who both served in the Second World War. They were called K. and D. They were with the Air Force, as your soldier was with the infantry.
- Your soldier is born in a town in Ontario. I will try to verify the name of town soon. He had only lived short while in the North when he was drafted into the army. In the 1930's people came from everywhere to find work in this region. That's the reason that this family settled in this mining town after leaving the town in Ontario.
- Your soldier worked temporarily as a drilling engineer at the construction of a canal in Ontario. It was there that the military police found him through a 'spotter' and made him enlist under pressure. He was only seventeen and a half years old.
- After his training in Canada he volunteered to go to England. It is believed he did this in a whim, after not being invited to a birthday. The aunt said he was waiting for his mother to tell her his decision in a kitchen that, she added, was painted apple green.
- During the crossing of the Channel on D-Day your soldier was killing time by throwing dice. He lost all the time. He said that his bad luck was an omen. It is said that he exclaimed: 'I'll have it'. He must have had a premonition that his final hour had come. We owe these precious details about his last words and deeds to an extraordinary coincidence. Shortly after the war his brother K. and his wife met a military officer near Kirkland Lake. The man said that he had been with your soldier during the Invasion on D-day. He was a sergeant at that time, the direct superior to your soldier.
- This encounter made it also possible to learn that your soldier had a girlfriend in England. (In French speaking Québec we call that a 'blonde' or to use the English word 'girlfriend') He had bought a powder case for her in England. This object was part of the personal belongings that was sent back to the family, together with a bracelet.
- Your soldier was an elite marksman and his sister-in-law told me that he had a passionate character (in fact, she used the English word 'wild' in our conversation in French).

You know what happened next. The sun rose only one morning for your soldier in France...

As for the two brothers, I know that K., according to his widow, has been a gunner on a Lancaster. He has flown more than thirty missions over Germany. Once he was shot down over France and survived

in a burning airplane. I am not aware of any details of the other brother, except that he came out of the war alive.

At last, I would like to refer you to the attachment with this mail. As a very special gift I have been able to enclose a picture of your soldier, taken shortly before he left for England.

I wish you success with your project.

D. D.'

I sit numbed in the internet café. How on earth is this possible? The apple-green kitchen? The powder case and the bracelet? Had he both with him when he died? I, too, planned to take the compact and bracelet from London with me as I made the final jump. That's why I had packed them in my suitcase on that grey morning back home. Without any thought I open the attachment with the mail and tears are dripping down my cheek. Maybe the students will think: what's wrong with that old sentimental man? But I don't cry for myself, but for the young man on the screen in front of me. It is as if I have always known this face and as if for ages it is trying to speak to me. Just one word: live!

Quickly I close the attachment. I print the mail, fold it and put it into my pocket. In doing so my fingers touch the memory stick. I take it out and plug it into the computer. There is only one document on the stick: a story about my Canadian soldier and a German Wehrmacht-soldier and how their fate gets intertwined on the beach of Normandy. While writing, I became convinced that I had more affinity with the German than with my own Canadian soldier. Or maybe there are parts of both in me, some more developed than others?

In alternate chapters the story follows both boys during their adolescent years until their fateful end in Normandy. Once I had dreamt to rewrite the story to a film script. But it is too late for that now. As I watch the document, I notice that the last revision was made on June 16, four years ago. Absent-minded I open the document:

August 1, 1936 (Canada)

...and as the sun rose over the best of all imaginable worlds and a blanket of fog lay on the water surface so that you could see only the tops of the pine trees on the other side of the lake, and while the forest came to life with the songs of a million birds and the crackle of breaking wood as deer made its way to its resting place, Medrick woke up and silently got out of the barrack. The other men were still sleeping. Medrick opened the door cautiously and stepped into the dawn of a new day. He winked his eyes against the light of the pink and red sun. He tried to shake the remnants of a bad dream out of his body. The cook was rattling the kettles and pans at the fireplace. Medrick felt a shiver of pure energy flashing through his young body: this was the hour of the day he liked best. Briskly he walked down the slope of the hill, a towel in his hand. He passed the other barracks and the sheds where they kept the horses and the lumberjacking equipment, walked by the little canoes all the way down to the side of the lake, where Dixie was waiting for him while throwing flat stones, making them jump five, six, seven times over the water surface.

Little Dixie had run away from his home in Toronto, Ontario. He had gone east instead of west that most of the desperate youngsters did. He was brought up with English, so he spoke French with a funny accent. The others called him 'petit Dixie' with an exaggerated emphasis on the last syllable. Dixie always chuckled when they called him that way.

Dixie was the youngest of them all, a year younger still than Medrick who was 13 years old. As the other lumberjacks were in their twenties or older, it was only natural that Dixie and Medrick had become friends.

His first night in the camp Dixie had come to the fireside where Medrick sat reading, and Dixie had said:

'Hey, professeur, what's in the books tonight?'

Medrick had told Dixie about the things he had read, sometimes stumbling over his words and thoughts, realizing that he didn't understand much of the books yet, now he tried to convey them to Dixie.

They had become friends instantly and would sit at the campfire every night it didn't rain.

One evening Dixie had interrupted Medrick, saying:

'You say 'God'. That reminds me my older brother told me that before the crisis, when my father still had his business, they used to go to church every Sunday. But after my father went broke, the only times I remember him mentioning God were the times when he cursed. And, man, he did that a lot, before he went on the booze completely and took off to Vancouver forever!'

Dixie had laughed loudly and Medrick had laughed, too. Dixie had nodded with his head conspiratorially to the storage shed. His eyes had gleamed in the light of the flames. They had sneaked into the shack and in the darkness, Dixie had got out a little metal pin from his pocket and had opened the lock of a cupboard with incredible skill and taken out the bottle. They had drunk both from the bottle and felt how the liquor glowed inside. They had looked at each other and laughed without making a sound. They had taken another pull from the bottle, much longer this time and then they had gone to the lakeside and had spent the rest of the night talking. Dixie had told about his life in the streets of Toronto and Medrick about his girlfriend back home and they had laughed and dreamed under the stars of the great Canadian night. Only when the day had started to dawn, they had staggered back to the barracks.

In the beginning Dixie had slept in another barrack, but as he was young and handsome, old quivering lips and fingers had gone over his body while he was asleep one night. After that incident Medrick's uncle had made sure, that Dixie would sleep in his barrack from then on. Medrick's uncle was a broad-shouldered, good-natured giant of 35. The other lumberjacks called him 'Bruno', though his real name was Arnaud. But he was more Bruno than Arnaud, everyone in the camp agreed.

Both the boys were fond of Bruno. He was almost always in good spirits and just laughed about their pranks. He loved to tell them stories about the time when he was at sea, before the Great Depression of '29:

'Oh, guys, I used to make a lot of money in those days on a freight liner to France. Man, I have been in Le Havre, Cherbourg, everywhere in France.'

The boys had asked him with excited, expecting eyes if he'd ever been to Paris. Bruno had laughed his giant's laugh again and said:

'Yes, of course, I was there a couple of weekends, but I am not going to tell you about that. You are both still too young for such stories. Maybe I'll tell you next summer!'

Medrick and Dixie had hold on to Bruno's arms and legs and had tried to make him tell about the daft ladies in Paris, but Bruno was too strong, of course, and had gotten loose from their grip easily and laughed about their young men's innocent curiosity.

Bruno was a wise man, too, and during that summer had become the father for little Dixie that the boy had missed so much in Toronto. Off working hours, they were always together, the three of them, talking and playing. Except in the early morning when the boys used to go swimming in the lake.

'Mon Dieu, a mon age,' Bruno would say. 'I am too old for that. At my age a man likes to sleep a little longer.'

So, Bruno wasn't there that morning when the sun rose over the lake, over the blanket of fog and over the pine trees on the other side, while Dixie was throwing stones and making them jump on the water surface.

When Dixie saw Medrick, he dropped the remaining stones and asked joyously:

'Are we going for a dive?'

Medrick answered by waving his towel in the air. Quickly they slipped off their clothes and made it for the lake as fast their young legs would carry them, their naked bodies splashing in the cold, clear water. Boyish pleasure in the best of all imaginable worlds.

Afterwards they rubbed themselves dry and red with the rugged towels and went back to the barracks. They went to the cook and sat by the stove to get warm again, their hands firmly clasped around a huge mug of steaming black coffee. After a while the others would drop in, too, and sit around the wooden tables with sleepy faces, except for Bruno, who was never out of words, not even when a day of hard labor in the heat and in clouds of mosquitos lay ahead. Bruno teasingly asked Medrick:

'Bonjour, petit philosophe, did you sleep well last night?'

Medrick answered:

'Yes, but I had a bad dream in the morning time, just before I woke up.'

Bruno roared with laughter and said:

'You shouldn't read all those pessimistic books before you go to sleep. What was it, which you told me yesterday?'

Medrick had to think a second, then remembered and said:

'Oh, yeah, about silly people who say that there is always a good reason for anything, whatever cruel things may happen, and that the outcome is always the best of all possibilities that exist. Something like that, I think.'

Bruno said:

'Yeah, that was it precisely. Well, I have been thinking about it and you know, looking back on my own life I don't find those people so silly at all. There have been a lot of occasions in my life on which I thought by myself, why things must turn out this way. But later, when I was older, I could see why some doors had remained closed and that after all it is all right, they did. You see, I wouldn't have been here, I wouldn't have been Bruno. I would have been some accountant living in a Montreal suburb. Monsieur Arnaud with four kids and a car. Ah, maybe that wouldn't have been too bad, either, but it wouldn't have been me. It would have been someone else. Do you understand? And though I don't have wife and kids, I think I have become the best of all my possibilities and that's Bruno!' His laugh echoed against the wooden wall of the canteen, but everybody got silent when Dixie asked suddenly:

'Tell me, Bruno, do you believe in God then?'

Bruno answered: after thinking for a second:

'Listen, I remember being on a ship in the Gulf of Lion, in the Mediterranean, south of Marseille. There was a storm, guys, as I hadn't seen before or afterwards. People always think of the Mediterranean as a calm, blue sea, but I tell you, she can be very rough. Very rough that lady and I was young and, let me be honest, scared to death. I had never been in such a storm before and I worked 36 hours in a row. But the captain saw that I was dead tired and sent me off. So, on my bunk I tried to get some sleep, but the ship was cracking and rattling on all sides and I was scared and tired and couldn't get a minute's sleep, of course. But suddenly, I was clear awake, and in all the cracking and rattling I heard a voice, and I'll be damned, I hear that voice still in my ears, and that voice said: Don't worry, Arnaud, you'll be all right, you will get ashore safely. Almost immediately I fell into a deep sleep and when I woke up the next morning the sun was out, and the sea was quiet and fine. Ever since that time I just don't know. Maybe that voice was the Voice of God, or maybe it was, like others say, just my mind putting itself to rest. I just don't know, guys. But there's little in life that happens by accident. That's one thing I know.'

'But Bruno, do you pray?' Little Dixie wanted to know. Bruno looked at the open door and the lake beyond, the blanket of fog that was disappearing in the sunlight and said:

'I think that if God really exists, He wants us our lives to be one long prayer from beginning till end.'

Bruno stood up, a little absent-minded, clapped his hands and hollered:

'Let's go, men. There is a lot of work to do today!'

All the men got up, buoyantly now they had had their coffees and had smoked their first cigarettes and because the work wouldn't be too hard today.

It was August, the first heavy thunderstorms had already raged through the hills upstream. The lake was filled with tens of thousands of tree trunks they had cut down over the summer. Now that the river was swollen from the first showers, the moment was there to open up the dam at the far end of the lake and let the trunks float downstream the river, all the long miles through the immaculate forest down to plains where the factories and the railway stations were.

The men walked to the lakeside and listened to Bruno's instructions. They considered Bruno to be the boss and not Monsieur Durand, who was the real boss but who always stayed in his office. Bruno explained how they had to maneuver the rafts of tree trunks towards the lake's outlet into the river.

The men took long poles and got on the rafts while others were digging away at the dam. When finally, the first wave broke through, the unleashed force of the water crashed the remainder of the dam and the first trunks floated into the white of the first rapids. All the men cheered, also the men who were on the rafts at the other side of the lake.

The men along the lakeside held their poles high in the clear blue, graceful sky. That was the way they used to celebrated that before long they would go back south and be home with their families for the winter. Sweat dripped from their faces as they steered the rafts along. Bruno was making a show by jumping off the rafts just before they dashed into the rapids. Medrick and little Dixie on the riverbank looked on admiringly and longingly.

'You two are still too young for the rafts,' Bruno shouted over the noise of colliding trunks and splashing water. 'Maybe next year I'll let you have a try.' He went on and jumped on the next raft again.

The men were in a hurry and ate in shifts. Bruno, Medrick and Dixie were lying stretched out in the grass and the mild sun shone on them. But Bruno was restless and after a short time jumped up and said:

‘Come on, let’s get to work again. I just want to see a lot of them trunks go down the drain today.’

He grinned and was already steering rafts again, pushing the poles into the muddy bottom of the lake, skillfully maneuvering the tree trunks into the river flow.

Later Bruno stood on a raft, steering it just up to the first rapids. As he looked up, he saw Medrick standing on the riverbank, one hand stretched out in front of him, the other on his hatchet at his hip. From the angle he looked at Medrick, it looked for a moment as if Medrick would fall forward. Suddenly Bruno remembered a dream that he had had once while at sea on an overnight trip from Le Havre to Cherbourg, many years ago. He couldn’t remember the rest of the dream, just the image of Medrick with his hand stretched out forward, mouth wide open, with no sound coming from it.

Bruno was still standing on the raft, but his mind wandered between Le Havre and Cherbourg as he tried to remember the rest of the dream. Bruno did not hear Medrick and the others scream: ‘Jump, Bruno, jump! Look out for the rapids!’

Suddenly, the dream came back to Bruno’s mind in all clarity and he shouted something at Medrick, just like he had done in the dream on the Channel. But the noise of the rapids was so loud, that Medrick couldn’t hear it.

In the meantime, the raft with Bruno still standing on it drifted into the rapid and the raft was shaken to and fro so violently, that Bruno couldn’t keep standing right up anymore. He fell aside into the splashing, cold water. His hands, his big, strong hands clang to the raft’s outer trunk. He gasped for air and tried to climb back onto the raft. He was almost back on top of it again. The men on the side shouted: ‘Hold on, Bruno, hold on!’

But at that same moment his right leg crashed against a rock and Bruno felt how it broke. He tried to fight off the pain, but in a split of a second, he let go the grip on the raft. The next raft that came thundering down rapids, crushed into his chest bone. The white of the rapids turned red. There were cries from the men on the river side. Swiftly they stopped the flow of tree trunks at the lake’s outlet. When it was safe, Medrick and others pulled Bruno out of the water.

Bruno was still breathing. ‘I have been lucky. I am alive,’ he muttered. Then his head fell aside and between the legs of the men he could see how little Dixie came running down the hill. Dixie threw himself on the ground next to Bruno. Bruno felt how the warm hands of the kid clamped around his head, while it cried out: ‘Bruno, Bruno, don’t die!’

Bruno gathered all his rapidly disappearing strength and heard himself whisper: ‘Petit Dixie...’ Then Bruno felt how everything turned cold and the last thing he heard in his life were the words of Dixie who had pushed himself against him and begged with all his might: ‘Non, Papa, ne mouriez pas!’

Silently they brought Bruno’s body to the camp and they sat around the fire without saying a word.

Somewhere far away, in Berlin, in Germany, the Olympic Games were inaugurated that same day. A dictator in uniform tolled a bell and hollered through the stadium: ‘I call the youth of the world.’

Of course, no one in the camp knew anything about that, because they got mail only once every three weeks and there were seldom newspapers with it. But if somebody had told them that day about the inauguration of the Olympic Games in Berlin, they wouldn't have paid any attention, because August 1, 1936, was the day when Bruno died.

In the best of all imaginable worlds.

November 9, 1938: Reichskristallnacht

Ernst could not sleep. Today the people in the village had been very agitated. The adults had been talking anxiously with each other and kept silent as soon as children passed by. Of course, the children knew what the older people were talking about. There was going to be a war. For months the elder brothers and sometimes the fathers, too, had been drafted into the Wehrmacht and had left for distant barracks. Karl and Georg, the two eldest brothers of Ernst, had to leave for the border with France, to Saarland. Thomas and Günter, the two other brothers. And, Ernst's father had to help building bunkers alongside the river. They came home at night to sleep, but they had to work up to twelve hours a day.

Father look tired and haggard. His eyes lay deep within the sockets and he peered into the world with a dull gaze. Father was afraid. Even the teacher at school, who used to speak so tenderly about the Führer and his love for the German people, one morning had shaken his head desperately and said:

'I don't think this is going to turn out well, children. The Führer is pushing it too far. The Anschluss of Austria, that was all right. But this question with Czechoslovakia, the English and French will never agree. And then there will be war, children. And Russia will mingle in, too, so that Germany, just like in 1914-1918, must fight on two fronts. Our army is not that strong! It looks very bad, children.'

Two days later there was another teacher. The other teacher had accepted a job elsewhere, the children were told. But the new teacher was not so nice, Ernst found.

With the treaty of Munich, the Czechoslovakia crisis was turned down. But on November 7, 1938 a Polish Jew had shot a German diplomat in Paris. The situation in the country was very tense. Ernst heard the adults muttering about revenge. Everybody was afraid, except uncle Heinrich, the bachelor brother of his mother, who was drunk all the time. One night he had sneered at Ernst's home:

'Huh, it's all just Prussian bluff from that Hitler and Göring! We from the Rhineland are not like that. We are devoted Catholics and not warmongers! That bloody Hitler better learned to booze! It would freshen his head up!'

'Hush be quiet, Heinrich,' his mother hissed. 'You know that the walls have ears these days and that they sent Voigt the shoemaker to the concentration camp for insubordinate talk.'

At moments as this Ernst was impressed, but more often he just forgot about the fear of the adults. When he roamed through the meadows outside the village and saw the ships sailing on the river, he would lie down on the ground with a stalk of grass in his mouth and fantasize what those ships would carry and what their destinations would be. Ernst hadn't seen so much ships before. Barks from Holland, too, carrying a load of stones and rocks in the direction of the frontier. Sometimes the Dutch crew aboard made the Hitler salute. Ernst and his friends would yell back: 'Haben Sie noch Käse?' and roar with laughter.

The cargo space of German ships was mostly covered. Ernst and his friends speculated what might be underneath the cover.

'The secret weapon of the Führer,' one of them said. One way or the other that had an ominous sound and they were all silent for a while.

On their way home they used to call in the farmsteads they passed. Because almost all the trucks and many of the carts and horses had been commandeered for the mobilization, the farmers couldn't bring their milk to the factories. As they had to throw away the milk anyhow, they gave some of it in cans to the boys. At home mother took the milk thankfully from Ernst's hands, sighing that they were much better off in the countryside than her sister in the city of Duisburg, where at times they couldn't even get bread, eggs, milk and butter anymore.

Ernst had a dog, called Mutzy. Often, he roamed with Mutzy through the river foreland. He liked to lay down at a water pool, watching the birds catch flies. Poplars leaves whispered in the wind. On the horizon, clouds were gathering. A thunderstorm was about to build up. Ernst greeted the ferryman on his way home. It was a kind man...

But tonight, Ernst had to go to bed early. Father wasn't back from the bunkers yet. Ernst was afraid. He couldn't sleep and laid listening if he could hear the thundering roar of artillery in the distance. Poor father, poor Karl, Georg and Karl. Poor mother, poor Ernst, he thought. But he didn't think: Poor Günter.

Ernst must have slept for a little while. Slowly sounds from the street penetrated his mind and mixed up with his dream. He couldn't tell what that sound was, and it didn't matter now. He turned on his other side and kept sneezing for a short moment. Then a big bang, followed by the sound of breaking glass and harsh yelling of men. Ernst got up from his bed with a start and he knew: it is war now. Cautiously he pulled the blinds of the window a little aside. At the end of the street, in the direction of the church and the marketplace, he saw the orange glow of flames. More windowpanes were breaking, and the yelling became harsher still.

Ernst could see that a mob of man and older boys with torches were gathered in front of the store of the Jewish butcher Maier. Mrs. Maier, with her oldest child at her hand and her baby pushed against her breast, fled the burning building. While she tried to run through the crowd of jeering men, she was spit and kicked at.

The boys laughed at her. Some of them were not much older than himself, Ernst thought. He saw Maier coming at the door of his store. Maier hesitated a moment and then made a jump forward to try and help his wife. But some of the strongest men threw him on the ground and Maier was kicked and beaten from all sides. Then they chased Maier back into the burning butchery.

Ernst will never forget the cries of Frau Maier and the sight of the weeping children. From somewhere deep inside him his anger boils up. But he smothers that anger immediately. Someone, he doesn't where or when and who it was, had punished him severely for becoming angry. Since then Ernst chokes in his anger. So, this is war, Ernst thought.

Suddenly the crowd began to move into the direction of Ernst's home. Boots stamped on the ground and the glow of the torches crept against the walls of the houses in their street.

The roars and yells gradually changed into a chanted slogan: 'Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer!'

The boots stamped underneath Ernst's window. In the bright light of the torches he saw the face of his brother Günter. It was red with excitement and the mouth had a distorted twist. Ernst remembers that he has seen Günter this way before, but he doesn't know when that was. Ernst heard Günter yell: 'Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!'

They marched around the corner. In the distance Ernst heard again the sound of breaking glass and the roar of drunken men. In confusion he ran down the stairs and called:

‘Mother, oh mother! It is war. They are burning down the village and Günter is with them.’

‘Hush,’ his mother tried to calm him. She was standing at the front window, her back turned to him. ‘Be quiet, my loved one. There is no war. It is peace now. The Führer has signed a peace treaty with the English and the French in Munich today. Everything is going to be all right.’

She turned around and walked back from the window. Ernst saw that her eyes were red from tears.

‘But why are they burning down the store of the Jew Maier if it is peace. Why is Günter going with them?’

‘Be quiet, Ernst. You are still too young to understand these things. But don’t worry. Tomorrow, when it is daylight again, you will see that everything is all right. You will see that, my beloved Ernst!’

He laid his head down at his mother’s breast for a while without speaking a word. He felt her weeping silently. Faraway he could still hear the yells. Ernst knew that something had passed forever.

His friend, Mutzy, the dog, put his head on Ernst’s knees. He looked up at him. He wanted to go out.

The discovery of precession is generally attributed to Hipparchus, who lived in Greece from 190-120 BC. However, there are clues that the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Maya and even the Germanic in their Edda had knowledge of precession.

One of the most notorious precession numbers is 666. It is derived from the book of Revelations. When you multiply $6 \times 6 \times 6$, you get the number 216. Adding a zero, 2160 is generally considered to be a precession number.

When the Revelations were written, it was the start of the age of Pisces. Some people think that the end of the age of Pisces is accompanied by a shift of the poles.

Albert Einstein, for instance, believed that polar shifts had occurred frequently in the history of the earth. He thought that external influences were responsible for the process. But is that true?

Is it not us, humanity, who are responsible for such a disaster? We, with our insatiable greed, our contempt for our fellow inhabitants of this planet, be it humans, animals, trees or rocks?

Do we have the means to turn the tide? The answer is YES! Yes, we have all the means. We can establish heaven on earth, if only we want to.

We have a free will and we can change the way we live in the blink of an eye. So why longer hesitate? Let us start creating heaven on earth, today!

Please, Holy Spirit, help us!

I close the document. Time to leave for Finisterre.

13. APOCRYPHA

It is getting dark by the time I arrive at Finisterre. This is how I have always imagined it to be: me, standing on the cliff, looking into the last red and purple sunset of my life. But there are no high cliffs around here. The Eurasian continent declines gently into the ocean. The end of the world doesn't come with a big bang, but it peters out just as my life peters out, slowly and uneventfully. There is nothing to jump from here. I will have to look for another spot.

In the nearby village a café is still open. I order a cup of coffee.

'Don't you want to eat something?' the landlord asks.

'No, thank you,' I said. 'I am not hungry.'

'Well, it's up to you. I've got some leftovers. Otherwise I'll throw it away. It is chorizo and rice.'

After the culling of animals in the river foreland I hadn't eaten meat anymore. But I had learned that there is one thing worse than eating meat and that is throwing meat away.

So, I accept the offer of landlord. It is pitch dark by now and it will not be possible to find another place to jump until next morning. The chorizo is very tasty, and I feel very comfortable and relaxed.

'Do you have Internet?' I ask the landlord.

'Sure,' he answers. 'What do you want?'

'Oh, just checking my mail.'

'OK, that's right. You don't seem the kind of man that's looking at dirty pictures. I can't have that, you know, because my wife is always very nosy about my browser history,' the landlord laughs.

I pass by a curtain to a private room behind the counter. There is an old computer on a dark oak desk. A thick cat lays snoring on a sofa.

I surf to my webmail address and when I log in, I see that there is a message from Eve.

I am shaking as I open the e-mail:

'Dear Adam,

I am sorry that I am only writing you just now. But so many things have happened during the last few days. First Friday morning your e-mail. Of course, I was upset that your real life was so different from the life you had told me about in our correspondence. And that you had cancelled our date in the park without any consultation with me, I found that indecent. I had to let it all sink in. Saturday, I had to work at the meditation center, and I had intended to answer you that evening.

But Saturday night, I had just settled with a cup of coffee in front of my computer, the telephone rang. I hoped it was you. But instead it was a nurse from the nursing home where my mother stayed because of her dementia. My mother had suffered a stroke and was brought to a hospital. It was serious, the nurse said.

I rode on my bicycle to the hospital. My mother was lying in bed in a small private room. Although doctors came and went, I could sit down with her. In this way we spent almost two hours together. My

mother was half conscious and seemed to recognize me. But her mouth was slanted, and she couldn't speak understandable words. We just held each other's hands and looked at each other: she with her blue eyes that appeared to become paler and more distant all the time. After two hours the doctor let me know that he wanted to make a scan to measure the damage the stroke had caused. I stood up and walked away. In the doorway I looked back one more time. There she was, a little, old woman, tucked in white sheets and pillows. She looked at me and for a moment her eyes became bright and she said in a clear voice: 'Bye, my little girl.'

In that very moment the burden that had always weighed on our relationship disappeared: her life in her world of her own, not being there when I need her the most, stepping over me, the exile to the boarding school, it all just disappeared in that one golden moment. I had never understood why she treated me the way she did. But it didn't matter anymore. It was all wiped out by those four divine words of hers that I had been waiting for all my life.

Half an hour later the doctor came to tell that my mother had died while she was scanned. The tears I cried, were tears of joy, not of grief. It was all right, perfectly all right now. It seemed as if those four words of my mother were a catharsis that had also cleansed the rest of my troubled past. For the first time I could let go what might or might not have happened during the years at the boarding school and between my headmaster on the island and me. I could let go and now, as a few days have passed, I realize that I will never know if these things have really happened then. Can you forget such a terrible experience?

Maybe the abuse was conjured up by the therapists. In those years you were almost encouraged to discover abuse during your childhood. But I am not sure, and I never will. What I am sure of is that I love the headmaster and my own father and mother very much and that I can forgive, also myself. For that's is still the most difficult part of forgiving. I think I have found what you call the Way of Grace and for the first time in my life I feel free. Free from all the requirements I made to myself.

Now I can truly say that I am ready for you. Because, my beloved Adam from the river foreland, your last e-mail hasn't estranged me from you. On the contrary, I love this open, wounded Adam much more than the perfect bon-vivant from the earlier mails. And the story of your soldier in Normandy has touched me very deeply.

You know, at the time, I was looking for my real self, I underwent amongst other things a reincarnation therapy. The outcome was that I had been the daughter of Irish immigrants in Massachusetts around 1790. We owned a big mansion on the countryside of New England. I see an orchard behind the house. We used to have dinner there under a roof of green leaves during the hot summers. At the back of the orchard was a stone with the word Willard written on it. For one reason or another that stone frightened me. Maybe it was a tombstone.

One night a fire burned down the house. My family died in the flames. I was the only one to survive. I was 16 years old and without next of kin in this world. During my time at a boarding school in Boston I had met a boy. We had fallen in love, but when I left school and went back home my parents forbade me to keep in contact with the boy.

After the fire I sent a message to him and asked to come and get me out of here. But on his way to me he had fallen from his horse and died, I was told. Nuns of a nearby convent took care of me. A few weeks later, I had hidden myself in the convent's garden after an argument, I heard the abbess say to one of the sisters that my loved one hadn't fallen of his horse on his way to me, but that he had committed suicide long before the fire, because he had never heard of me again. The abbess stressed that I must never be told this. I was a wreck, but because I mocked the chastity rules, I couldn't stay in the convent. It was decided that I should go to relatives who still lived in Ireland. Just before boarding the ship, I drowned myself in the harbor of Boston.

There is a lot to say for and even more against reincarnation therapies. But as for me, I have gained the will to survive. Never, never will I give up and leave this life by choice. I want to finish that for which I apparently was born into this world. I hope you feel the same way, too.

During our correspondence I came to wonder how it was possible that, although I hadn't even met you, I felt so connected and intimate with you.

Maybe, I reasoned, you were the beloved boy from Boston in your former life. Of course, I can't tell if that is true, but I find it a beautiful, inspiring thought that the circle will be closed now. But also, a thought that scares me. When I read your mail of Friday morning and sensed the pervasive feeling of gloom, I was frightened that you might give up. I became even more scared, when I couldn't write you earlier because of my mother's demise. Don't give up, Adam, we must finish this time for what we are on this earth for: loving each other with our whole heart, our whole soul and our whole body. I want to embrace you so dearly. Here's my address. Come soon, my loved one, please, come very soon.'

'What are you doing for heaven's sake?' the landlord asks from behind the curtain. 'Are you laughing or crying?'

'I don't know,' I answer. 'Both of them at the same time, I believe.'

'How come?' he says, and I hear him coming closer on the wooden floor of the café.

'I won't die the second death,' I shouted jubilantly to the landlord.

He sticks his head around the curtain and looks as puzzled as a man can be.

'No, nothing's wrong,' I say. 'It's all right. Perfectly all right.'

He shrugs his shoulders and goes back into the café. I write a mail of two lines:

'Dear, dear Eve, it will take a day or two, I am far from home, but I am coming. I am coming to you.'

I give the landlord a hundred-euro bill.

'It's all right. I have got something to celebrate today.'

As I am about to leave, something crosses my mind.

'Can I check one more thing on your computer?'

'Of course,' the landlord answers. 'You know your way around here, now.'

I search the psalms in an on-line Bible:

Psalm 126

*When the Lord turned our chances,
It was like a dream!
We laughed and we sang
At the same time.*

*People from abroad said:
'The Lord has done great things for them.'*

*Indeed, He did great things for us;
Oh, how happy we were then!*

*Lord, bring us back our dreams and hopes,
Just as the rain brings the water back to the dry river foreland
Of my so beloved river IJssel.*

*Let all of us who planted the crops in tears,
Harvest in joy and jubilation!*

*All those who wept while carrying the seed,
Will return, singing with happiness and bliss,
As they bring in their load of sheaves.*

I say goodbye to the landlord and get into the car. Beside me, on the passenger chair, the powder case and bracelet are glittering in the light of the full moon. Lights from the towns and villages in the dark hills are twinkling in the distance. I soar over the road like a bird that has just flown up from the left hand of a child that is floundering in his mother's arms. As free as that bird.

For a moment I think I see the cherub in the rear-view mirror. He drags his sword, that isn't flaming anymore, behind him. Its point rasps over the street's asphalt and little sparks lighten up in the darkness. The guardian is walking in the opposite direction. Maybe he is looking for a cliff to jump.

I feel a sense of deep enlightenment. Everything is right: the desert, the loneliness, the obsessions, yes and even the pain in my belly has worked to make me to the man who was now driving through the Spanish night. If I die here and now, I will leave the world completely satisfied and happy. The feeling is so strong. I will never forget it for the rest of my life.

But I don't die, and the euphoria doesn't last. As the saying goes: man is a place of God only for a while. Before long I am caught up in my obsessions again. That's all right, too, because only by embracing your injury and brokenness you will become an open and free man instead of a narrow-minded, self-obsessed god. Someone who may, instead of someone who must. Besides, cherubs with flaming swords don't jump off cliffs just like that. Not even in fairytales.

14. THE LAST RED AND PURPLE SUNSET

Early Winter Morning Blues

It was an early winter morning. I drove Eve to work. Wet snow was drizzling down. Suddenly she says:

'I know what you should do. You should get off that bike, leave it stuck in the mud and start looking for a new horizon. Remember as a child, in church, what you wanted to be? Well, become that bird in the child's hand and fly away!'

I felt I was back in the Garden...

Full Circle

On another occasion I was back in the village where the cinema once had been. The story came to full circle then.

The cinema itself has been closed for years now. There is a restaurant instead. As I passed by the restaurant, I saw a child's tricycle lying in the middle of the road. Without thinking I picked up the tricycle and put it at the front door where the cinema had been.

It wasn't until I walked away, that I realized how wonderful and mysterious this moment was. I was so grateful for it.

For A Brief Moment

I remember what my wife had also said during that car trip to her work: 'You may believe that you are kicked out of paradise. Or you may believe you walked out voluntarily to experience life in a world with myriads of choices. In either case you may stay out of paradise or you may return at any time you choose to do so. Please, come home. Please, come home, Adam!'

For a brief moment I felt like flying, far away from the mud and I spotted the new horizon in front of me.

For a brief moment...

Eve and I are a year together now. To celebrate we travel with our dog, a fox terrier, to Normandy. I show Eve around my personal highlights: the beach of Bernières-sur-Mer where my soldier had died on the 6th of June 1944, his grave at the Canadian cemetery, the house where the Frenchman had lived who found and buried him that day and finally the American war cemetery of Colleville-sur-Mer, too.

We walk hand in hand down the center lane. To our right and left are thousands of white crosses. Suddenly we leave intuitively the center lane and start walking diagonally between the graves. I walk on the left side of the crosses and Eve on the right side. Every time we reach a cross, we lift our

clasped hands and let the cross-pass underneath. At each cross the bracelet from London makes a tingling sound. In the direction we walk now, we see the unmarked backsides of the crosses.

I tell Eve how I had searched for three days in the pouring rain for the text in my dream. Right after I have finished, we both turn simultaneously. We read the words on the cross that just passed underneath our clasped hands. On it is a name: it is Willard.

In silence we walk on. Finally, we arrive at the seaside, where the opening scenes for Saving Private Ryan are shot. As so often this last year, I am perplexed by the likeness of Eve to the girl from New Zealand whom I had left crying in Lisbon. It is a beautiful, sunny day. You can hardly see where the darker blue of the sea stops and turns into the slightly lighter blue of the sky.

Eve still doesn't speak. But now I grow uncomfortable with the situation and to break the silence I say a bit clumsily: 'That was kind of a coincidence, huh? I mean the cross with Willard on it.'

But Eve knows what is underlying these words and answers while she doesn't take her eyes off the sea: 'Sometimes you have to take things just as they are and stop asking questions or giving opinions. Be like the little boy again that stood bent over from laughing in front of a movie screen. So unrestrained'

I watch her from aside and see a tear trickling down her cheek.

'Why are you crying?' I ask.

'I cry the tears you have never cried for yourself,' she says.

The doors of perception are cleansed, and I see Eve's tears, the sea and the blue sky over it as they really are infinite.

The pressure in my belly has grown over the last year. Suddenly it is as if my soul leaves the body.

From on high I see Eve and my fox terrier, born on June 16. I know that I will always love them. Maybe not in this Fourth World, but surely in the Fifth World that is on the verge of emerging gloriously. This is my Last Red and Purple Sunset

Then everything is illuminated: I am about to regain Paradise at last.

15. TWO DAYS IN CHÖNYID BARDO

The Blue Light shines so bright that I can hardly stand its glow. This is my first day in Chönyid Bardo. Still I have not been reconciled with my imperfections. There is the notion that I should come with clean hands. But I am just a clown that is stumbling along the road.

A voice says: 'O nobly-born, you have been unconscious during the last three and one-half days. As soon as you have recovered from unconsciousness, you will think: 'What has happened!' Act so that you will recognize the Bardo. You wanted to come here being perfect. But remember, no one comes here with clean hands. You are human and you may make errors. The men and women you regard so highly, none of them is holy. They have a side that is bright, but they have a darker side as well. They are liars, cheaters, murderers and clowns like you are. Don't worry. The Emptiness that you originate from accepts you with all your faults. That is what is called love, isn't it? So, surrender to the Blue Light and be not fond of the dull white light of the devas that touches on your forehead.'

But I was scared away by the Blue Light and set my eyes on the dull white light. The light dims. It is pitch dark. At least some rest for a moment. Then a new Light is dawning. My second day in Chönyid Bardo.

Then I hear someone reading from a holy book: 'Be not fond of the dull, smoke-colored light from Hell.' Another voice is speaking: 'You wanted more time. You thought that might help you in accepting your imperfections. Remember what was said to you: 'He who has lost all his pretensions, will live from trust and trust only. He who understands the illusion of falling leaves in autumn and the slow budding in spring, will live eternally. You will never realize perfection. But once you surrender to your imperfection, it's all set. Then you walk the road to the Eastern Realm of Pre-eminent Happiness in one straight line.'

I hesitate and ask: 'Do I get a second chance?'

The voice answers: 'No, not on this day. Don't miss out, grab the opportunity while it is still there.'

Now is the time to choose.

16. A STORY OF HOME COMING

From the east Adam nears his father's garden. Strangely enough, he doesn't see the sword that turns every way. When he is close to the gate, he sees that angel has dozed off.

Adam shakes his shoulder to wake him up.

'Huh, what do you want?' the angel asks absentmindedly.

'I want to enter the garden,' Adam replies.

'Well, go ahead,' the angel snubs. Adam sees that the sword is rusted to the core.

'You are not going to chase me away?' Adam wonders.

'No, not anymore,' the angel laughs. 'New directions from the chief that is to say: from you.'

'What has changed?' Adam asks in disbelief.

'You have changed,' the angel says. 'You have found the child in you again.'

'The roaring boy in the cinema, you mean?'

'Sure. You thought it was dead and gone. But it is reborn every day, in a stable, in the most impure place in yourself. Listen, it took you years before you allowed yourself to go there. And you don't come as a wise man with beautiful presents. That would have suited you. But no, you come as a beggar with empty, dirty hands. Do you know who your favorite novel figure was? Not the colonel, but the other one: the child that was born in a stable and, as the story goes, crucified for your sins. You found that always difficult to believe. In a way you are right. In all books of all religions it is said that God will not be angry forever. God doesn't need these stories. People need them, to obliterate me. For I am their superego.'

Adam wishes this sermon is over.

The angel sees his impatience and says:

'Listen, it is true that you live in a Universe where the Law of Cause and Effect is the rule. But sometimes that Universe holds its breath to make way for the Grace of God. You people wouldn't stand a chance if it were otherwise. This Universe is not bound together by notions of perfection, but by the trinity of forgiving the other, forgiving yourself and accepting forgiveness. These three, but the greatest of all is accepting forgiveness. Never judge other people. With the extent you measure other people, you will be measured yourself. That's why my sword turns every way. First it points to the other and then, with a vengeance, back to you. Remember, who is without any flaw, may throw the first stone. Now enter the garden.'

Adam knocks three times and hears keys behind the door. The door sweeps open. A remarkably handsome young man waits for him. It is Adam's guardian angel.

'Uh,' Adam stammers.

Oh, don't bother,' the guardian angel laughs. 'If every time when I was bullied, I had withdrawn, you people wouldn't have gone nowhere. But I was always at your side. Come in!'

Adam walks into the garden. It is just the same as he remembers from his childhood. But there are a lot of people now. He sees the ferryman with his understanding eyes that had peered deep into his child's soul: 'It took a long time, but here you are.' He sees the inhabitants of the desert: teachers, classmates, priests, policemen, gym teachers, dentists and butchers. They nod to him. A butcher asks: 'So, have you finally understood?'

Then Adam sees the shepherd from the mountains.

'Welcome, my friend,' the shepherd says.

There is the landlord from the inn to the Narrow Road to the Deep North. She is busy putting clothes on long tables. The man with the braid is helping her out.

'And? Was it worthwhile?' the man asks.

Adam nods and walks on. There is also the man from Normandy and his wife. Further down the road the chief and his peaceful people are on an open space. They are busy talking. Adam hears one say: 'It is very good this way.'

The man from the archives is sitting behind his desk thumbing through archives.

In the pub of his village in the river foreland it is cozy.

'Come sit with us,' invites the farmer that once turned his back on Adam.

'Later,' Adam replies and walks along the therapist.

'Thank you, man' Adam mutters underneath his breath.

Then Adam looks into the open face of a man with bright blue eyes. It is his soldier from Canada:

'There is someone else here who burns to meet you. You created him yourself. That's why in some ways he looked so much like you.'

A man in Wehrmacht uniform steps forward:

'I was the same as you. I wanted to be perfect, but I didn't succeed. Never had I shown to other people my real nature. That's why I missed the love of my life, Hans. At the end I killed two people. And still I can be here.'

'I have to say sorry to you,' Adam mumbles. 'Yes, you looked a lot like me. Except for one thing: I had a brother, too, but he never abused me like you were abused by Günter.'

'It made me to the one I was supposed to become,' Ernst says.

'Thank you for your kindness,' Adam replies. 'But where is my Father?'

Ernst looks at Adam with a wondrous expression on his face.

'O, that's true. You call him your Father. Others call it mother or energy or emptiness. That name he likes the most. God is in everyone. In your friend and in your enemy. In your enemy maybe even more than in your friend. He is in the animals, especially in the animals that have suffered for our greed. And in the trees, the wind, the stars, the stones, the waves of the ocean...'

Then Adam remembers how it felt in the garden when he was a little child. All was one. Only in the dream the difference existed: you and me.

Suddenly the circle of people that stood around Adam makes way for a woman. On her right hand she carries an owl. She stands next to Adam and lays her left arm on his shoulder. The next moment friend and foe, smiling at each other, go their own way. The woman with the owl on her hand leaves Adam behind as well.

There is silence. Then Adam hears a sound. He turns around. There, as if in a dream, is his Father.

His Father lifts his hand and says: 'Now, you must walk the last mile of the way alone. All those people here and many more have helped you. The ones you thought despised you the most, were your greatest Buddha's or whatever name you want to give them. But the last mile you must walk alone.'

His Father wants to leave, but then says: 'There is nothing you must do. No, you can, and you may. You are already loved. But come home, you have travelled enough.'

Praying thus in intense humble faith Adam merges in rainbow light and obtains Buddhahood in the Eastern Realm that is called the Preeminently Happy One.

Adam is Finally Home.

THE LAW OF LOVE

*The Law of Love is not about repression, dogma or rules.
The Law of Love is about how I deal with others
every step of the way.*

*No image of god, no guru, no method, no teacher
Has ever brought me greater joy and delight
Then knowing and following the Law of Love.*

*And what does the Law of Love ask of us?
Treat every living creature in the world
The way you would be treated,
If you, by a simple twist of fate,
Had been him, or her, or it.*

*O Universe, teach me to pursue the Law of Love
Instead of the petty delusions of my own karma.*

*Everything that's been said or written about the Law of Love
is commentary, manipulation, dogma and ultimate idleness.
What I say, may be an example of that.*

*The Law of Love doesn't call for war,
It calls for Peace.
It calls for putting ourselves in the position of others,*

*Even if the others are our enemies
Or, like we say, just animals.*

*The Law of Love calls for openness
And for Belief in an Undreamed-of Perception,
That grows on the Tree of Life, far away from our dreamworld,
In the Garden that will be our Home
And where All is One again.*