

# under the newly fallen snow

part one

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Friday, late May 1951

The streets were wet with dusky rain but the air was warm. He was holding Anita's hand walking her home. It was coming up to eleven. He still thought of it as two hours after curfew, although the German guards were gone from the streets now for more than six years. They were all fighting the routines that had befallen them during the five years of occupation, all their ways of making do behind the blackouts. It was a silent conspiracy of the now redundant fears and cautions, still keeping a grip on their daily lives. There was no reasoning with the fear. Instead they busied their minds discussing politics and felt caught out when the sun shone through the curtains in the morning, or when over-indulging in butter on their bread and real cream in real coffee. They could not yet quite trust that life had hit the restart-button. The 'banana-boat' had still not arrived! He hadn't been able to taste them again until he went to America in the autumn of '49, the autumn he and Anita had met.

A cat moved in the dark, smoothly down from a fence and across the pavement in front of them into the street. Fred thought he saw the

German uniforms wherever his eyes fell in the night. He grabbed Anita's warm hand more firmly. He preferred to think about the feeling of her woollen green checked coat flapping so softly around her body, and the unpredictability of her shapes bouncing off his side were he least expected it when they were walking. His own tight athletic body moved fluently while Anita moved unevenly, always with too much nervous energy, like a skittish foal on too long legs. It irritated him a little that she could not fall into step with him, but excited him also. She leaned slightly towards him as they walked making his body acutely alert to the contact, now the electricity was fizzing along his arm, now zapping his hip. He started peeling her clothes off in his thoughts, tried to imagine the curves he had only ever felt with his hands in the dark. Now that they were nearly married.., he had some rights surely? If he asked to see her now she would not be offended? It was the trust and openness in her eyes that had kept him from asking of her what he would have asked of any other girl a long time ago. He could not get himself to violate the trustfulness. There had been others but there had never been the trust, the immediacy and honesty he felt between them. Anita could not lie if she wanted too, it was not in her nature. She was not like his family, always telling you whatever they preferred you to believe.

Whatever Anita was thinking of so easily slipped through her lips and shone from her eyes. He had longed for this honesty, this simplicity of being for so long. Although she was tactless also, and he sometimes took offence. It seemed to her everything was black and white. He would spend a couple of days on his own nursing his wounds when that happened, when she offended him, failed to see the nuances of things, but he always forgave her, he needed her. He had accepted that. She was to be part of his life forever. And he knew if it had not been for the fear of her mother,

and what others would say, he would have known the secrets of her nooks and crannies a long time ago. She was too good a girl to say so but he knew she was ready to have him.

"Will you see me in? I hate coming back to an empty house. I think the others are still at the theatre."

"Of course," he nodded reassuringly. He would take care of her always.

She bent her neck to find the keyhole in the dark porch his eyes following the sleek of her nape, her curly hair falling forwards over her cheekbones, covering her face. It was as if the white skin of her neck suddenly unfolded for him the whole white surface of her naked body, made him a promise he could not resist. He felt a bit shaky and followed her sheepishly upstairs to the flat, into the kitchen.

"Noone home," she confirmed, her pale eyes flickering towards him in the half-light of the scrubbed clean room. He was not sure if he should go or she wanted him to wait a little. Make sure there were no intruders in the house. Only the light over the cooker was lit.

She left the lights down.

"Anita," he reached out for her. She peeled her coat off and managed to slip it over the back of a kitchen chair as she came towards him and slid warmly into his arms. It puzzled him how she would walk so skittishly, so seemingly out of balance, but then suddenly manoeuvre so smoothly at will, how she seemed to be able to harness all of her uncontrollable nervous energy into one decisive move when she wanted to. The purposefulness with which she had made it over to him made him back off very slightly and he saw the sudden caution in her as she checked herself. He spoke quickly to close again the gap between them. He did not want her devotion to go away. He had to keep her open, keep her wanting him.

"Anita, I cannot take my thoughts off..hm, your skin", he confessed. "Your white smooth skin, all over you." His voice was getting thick. He looked at her quickly to see how she took it, he was feeling already the ground swaying dangerously underneath him. He could get himself into her bad books if he was not careful. She was so willing, he could feel her softening through his coat, but she was so moral too. He never knew how she would take things. "I would so love to see you," he whispered through the curls into her ear. She hesitated. "Now that you are going to be my wife?"

"O K."

She said O K! So simply!

She let go of him and walked towards the door adjacent to the kitchen, it would have been a scullery or a maids room when the house was built. It was her mother's sewing room now.

"I'll take my clothes off." She smiled and closed the door between them and he did not know what to do, was she expecting him to take his clothes off, too? He was standing in the kitchen in front of the window, although dimly lit, surely she could not expect him to take his clothes off here. He stayed as he was, in his coat.

"Freddy?" Her voice was faint from behind the door. Then it slid gently ajar. "I am naked," she whispered at him through the opening. "You come here, I can't go in the kitchen or they will see us." It reminded him, the blackouts were gone now.

He thought she sounded like an exited little girl up to some prank and was a little shocked at the lightness in her voice. Of course it was just a bit of fun, they wouldn't do anything, not in her mother's sewing room with the family expected back shortly.

There was no soft lighting in the sewing room. Only a fluorescent tube (R)high on the wall over the sewing machine. It blinded him momentarily as he stepped onto the creaky gray lino. Still the room was so small he could sense the confines of the four walls and he knew he was instantly near her. There on the opposite wall was Mrs Pedersen's mannequin on it's cast iron foot, it's carefully measured body tightly bound in beige calico. The cutting table besides it was scattered with bits of ivory silk, he knew it was Anita's wedding dress in the making. She and her mother were sewing it. The dress, still with it's sleeves loose, was smoothed to a flat white cross, shining like a bastion to innocence and purity.

Shining at him whiter still than the pile of white fabric on the table were Anita's naked breasts. There was no way he could miss them even through the gleam of the blinding fluorescent light. He giggled nervously. Her large round pendulous breast were spread across her wide chest, not at all like he was used to seeing them, in the bolstered up-pointy bras she would wear. They rolled gently as she was sidestepping the pins on the floor. He had not thought the nipples would be so red. He had thought of them as little rosebuds, small and pink and tight, pointing to his face the way they normally did. He could see the blue veins in the stark neons, on her neck, down the upper arms, finally hanging her breasts in fine meshed blue woven nets. Her waist was small, a little pink skin showed through her dark triangle. Her long pale legs. She looked at him lifting her arms towards him, poised. She was proud. He sensed it suddenly that she was about to flow into one of her elegant purposeful moves coming towards him. She was not ashamed at all, but smiling widely, nearly triumphant: There it all was for him, her full warm marbled glory, her womanhood flowing across the pins on the lino. Nothing could stop her! He felt his throat tighten and waves of heat rolling over him, wildly up and down his

body, clouding his eyes til he could not see her any more. Something was holding his breath stuck too, he could not breathe out properly! Now his vision was blackening and he thought in a moment he was going to pass out. He had to get out! Had to get some fresh air! In an instant he was out the door and down the stairs, across the shingle with the garden gate slamming behind him. He was running along the pavement into the dusky rain.

On purpose he chose a side street leading nowhere, nowhere they both knew where Anita might follow to look for him. Not til he was several streets off his usual track did he stop. He was sure she would not follow him here. He sat down on the kerbstone, shaking like a frightened rabbit in the drizzle. The shining lights from the midnight windows were averting their gaze, one by one until the street was left in darkness. After a while he calmed down. What had got into him? He was feeling cold. He was feeling a little ashamed, too. Maybe he was not very well. He had been with girlfriends before, during his year out in America. He didn't know why it was so different with Anita? He looked again quickly up and down the street to be sure he had not been followed. He had to be alone, couldn't talk to her, couldn't explain himself. Anyhow she had been all naked, she would hardly come running after him. He chuckled a little to himself at the vision in his head of his fiance thundering down the streets in her full womanly glory trying to catch up with him . What a fool he was!

After a while he got up from the kerbstone where he had been sitting. The cold from under the tarmac had risen into his bones and he started along the pavement walking stiffly like an old man. As his eyes sought along the pavements on all sides he could see only the grey streets with their wood panelled suburban houses and their pretty wooden painted fences and gates. Oslo, the Norwegian capital, was a modern free-thinking city, he

thought, but without much imagination. Things didn't change, not because people were against change but because they found nothing wrong with the old. Even the war did not seem to have altered people's outlook. As soon as the occupation had ended and the gardens were allowed to be gardens again, not utility fields to save them from starving, they had been planted over with the same plants as before. Now the big green lawns were again maturing. Peonies, roses, jasmines, lilacs, spirea, apples and berry bushes, the same traditional plants grew wherever he looked.

Norway had been a newly independent country, free of Swedish rule for only 45 years (R), they had been busy building their lives on the crest of their new found national pride when the war had reminded them again that there was a greater world out there, people who thought differently from themselves, passions and hungers they had chosen to close their eyes to. They had been a free people one day, under occupation again the next. Noone had seen the German warships coming up the fjords in the night.

The Norwegian people's will to combat adversity had been honed for many generations. They had grown up with strategies for fighting the harsh conditions of the Nordic climate, icy fjords and windswept mountain planes had not stopped them prospering. They were not a people to cow down and give up. The resistance movement had been strong throughout the five years. They had won. Freddy sighed, he was a little disappointed at how quickly they had all sunken back into their traditions and comforts. Was it only himself who still saw the uniformed shadows slipping around corners at night? Here in the city he saw them everywhere. He saw them in people's eyes, too. His year in America had been a huge relief to him. The Americans had the same hardiness as the Norwegians, they had fought many battles too, but they did not seem to be stuck with the shadows.

The Holst Nurseries had introduced a new flower to the Norwegian market, the new freesia, grown from a tuber instead of seed, an excellent cut flower. Apart from the annuals for pots and window boxes in the spring the Holst's business did not cater for the gardens. The nurseries were located on the outskirts of Oslo and the land there was expensive. Growing for the cut flower market demanded less space and gave a quicker turnover. Besides people only bought plants for their gardens during the short summer months. They died and got married the whole year, and not any less because a war was on. His father had done well. The new freesia had a long slim stem topped with rows of trumpet shaped flowers and came in all kinds of colours, red and maroon as well as white, yellow and lilac and a warm dusky blue. The scent was wonderful, feminine and fruity with a tinge of honey and vanilla. It was a popular flower with the retailers.

It had been his family's contribution and had made their business what it was. and he wanted Anita to carry them in her bouquet for the wedding. He wanted roses and freesias lining the aisle of the church, cream and purple edged Italian Coburg roses and white and yellow freesias everywhere!

Fred started walking along the pavements looking for his way home. The houses stood around him in the overgrown gardens. They were guardians of both past and future, of continuity. Germans left. Lawns and bushes grew as before. Listening he thought he could hear all around him in the quiet night a very faint thunder. It was the thunder of his future that was about to embrace him. It was his heartbeat, the dark tumbling sound that was so hard to detect, you had to listen so carefully, and who had the wherewithal to listen so quietly, so intently, all the time? He feared the future would come and he would not be ready for it. Something new would surprise him, overtake him, just as the Germans had done, something he had not even thought could happen. He shuddered in the

dark drizzle. They had paid dearly for their national complacency. They all needed to stay alert to the dangers, to keep the evil from their doorsteps for ever. Only noone wanted to listen now. Their childhoods and teens had been trampled on by marching boots, they did not have time any more for waiting and watching. They wanted to live! They wanted to swim midstream! They had to believe that nothing and no one could stop them ever again!

He did not know why he had such a feeling of foreboding. His wife to be, he smiled to himself at the thought, Anita still had the spark. The shadow of war had not managed to settle on her. He was never sad in her company. Their wedding was only eight days away, so close! Monday they were already due in church for rehearsals. He would have to make light of their encounter tonight, when he saw her again, make out it was nothing, that she was just a little overwrought if she thought it mattered. Or maybe pretend it had been a game? He would give it a few days, let the whole thing cool down. Anyway, she and her mother would be busy sewing her dress and the bridesmaids dresses. When the time came for him to be with her, naked again, he could keep the lights down. He could have a drink, maybe make sure to pour her a glass, too. He would keep his nerve. He would get used to her, it wasn't that he didn't want her. It was her fearlessness that scared him so, it thrilled him too. She did not foresee trouble the way he did. He couldn't quite understand how she could seem so vulnerable and still be so fearless at the same time. It made him want to take care of her, although he was never really sure that she needed him to. He just couldn't figure her out. He was never vulnerable himself, not so anyone could see it. Still he was always scared somehow, mostly of himself. His own emotions were stalking him, made him run for cover sometimes, like tonight. The next time she was naked with him he might

have to close his eyes, he thought, and it might be best if she didn't see that.

Anita remained standing in the doorway between the kitchen and the sewing-room her big eyes staring at the blue kitchen door across the room. It had just slammed behind Freddy. Now he was running down the stairs. The front door was closing. He was across the yard and out the gate. For a moment she looked down at her long white body, her soft round belly shining in the half-light. She was expecting to see some horrible blemish, some alien growth to have put the fear of God into him. But there was nothing there, a small mole above her left hip bone. Her eyes grew wider, paler, expanding in puzzlement trying to take in an explanation that she could not locate. Then they sprung full with tears. What now? He had not liked her. What if he did not want her any more? What if he did not come back? Her wedding dress in the sewing room...she tried to keep the sobs from coming and tiptoed along the wall over to the window, blinking, searching through her tears along the yard. Was he there still? Maybe he had gone out to get a rubber, although surely he should have asked her first?

She pressed her face all the way up to the window trying to hide her naked body from the shine of the street lamp out on the road. She thought she could hear his footsteps again. Lots of them! Dear God! It was her parents and her sister Eva coming back! Backing away from the window she wiped her tears quickly. What would they think seeing her standing here in the kitchen naked and red eyed? Desperately she pulled her face into a wide grimace, trying to get the muscles to perform a more cheerful face. It had only been moments since she had been standing there proud thinking

she had all the reason in the world to smile. The keys were in the front door now, and she bolted for the sewing room again, half shutting the door behind her so they would not see her straight away. On the floor next to the prim calicoed mannequin was her bra and knickers. She slipped them back on with nimble determination, her mother was not going to know a thing! Then she took the sleeveless wedding dress from the table and pulled it over her head making sure first that her cheeks were dry to protect the silky fabric. Trying on her wedding dress, of course, it was why she was in the sewing room in her underwear. Her parents and sister were in the kitchen now, she could hear father continuing into the lounge to sit down and smoke his pipe of Petteroes Extra before going to bed. She hoped her mother would follow through, that there hadn't been any mess left in the kitchen for her to stop and get her hands into. If she had just a few more moments on her own she could get her composure back. She grimaced again into the mirror as the door to her refuge slid open, her smile was not quite convincing but she hoped it would do. It was her sister Eva winding her face around the door frame. She raised her eyebrows smirking at Anita as she usually did: "Hello starlet". She and Eva were only a year apart, she had been there as long as Anita could remember. She knew her sister didn't like the wedding dress. Too outre, too silver screen Eva had said. She was sewing it in an ivory coloured satin, one of the new synthetics, with a three-quarter length sleeve and a fashionable butterfly collar. She had wanted a modern short length dress and the fabric had anyway been far too expensive.

Whoever got married in a short dress? Eva had demanded. Who did Anita think she was, some Hollywood film-star? Besides, the dress symbolised the end of their union, Anita and her's. She knew it would never be the same again now that she had Freddy. Her sister was leaving her, so what

was she expected to feel? What did Anita care how she felt anyway? Anita was always concerned with herself.

"What's the matter with you?" Eva said. She had seen it at once!

Anita stared with defiance at her sister hoping a counter attack would distract enough to save her from explaining the red-faced calamity in the mirror: "Don't push your hair back like that, it looks so awfully dreary", she retorted feebly. The damned fluorescent worklight, it did not hide a thing! If she had been crying, so what? Was it so strange if a girl got a little emotional trying on her wedding dress? God what would happen now? Would she ever be wearing the dress up the aisle? She jabbed her lower lips with her teeth trying to bite the tears back but she could not stop herself bursting out crying again: Did Freddy not want her any more now that he had seen her? Her mother had always pressed how she should save it for her wedding day, but times had changed, she thought stubbornly, being engaged these days gave people license to do a lot of things, and they were as good as married. Besides, they all knew her mother had been pregnant with herself at her own wedding, although it was never spoken of.

"What's the matter with me?" Anita was shouting. "Look, now my lip is bleeding!" She blamed it on Eva, if she hadn't appeared just then..! "Help get the dress off me! It will ruin the dress!" The pitch of her voice was bordering on hysterical. Eva backed down.

"OK, OK, stand still then!"

There was their mother in the doorway, her black hair shining like a beacon, watching them both, her brown almond eyes serious under raised eyebrows, their lovely, youthful mother who they both adored. Somehow the hardships of the war had only set Liv Pedersen's features more calmly, more coolly. It had stretched the canvas a little tauter and perfected the

brush strokes, a little softness and roundness that had used to blur the lines had been straightened out. Now shining with acquired timelessness, nearing forty, her beauty so defiantly preserved was greater than before. The girls both knew it. They knew none of them could ever compete with her. She was the measure of everything in their lives and no hardships would ever break her. They could not even imagine time in the end having to catch up with their mother, it seemed impossible. Nothing and no one could bend her will. They counted on it.

Liv Pedersen did not say anything on seeing her red-faced daughter. Like her serene beauty her even temper seldom if ever spilt over the edges. Anita had always been a trial of her strength, from the time onwards when she had laboured for a day and a half to give birth before finally expelling her first born from her body. When she had got through it and survived she had vowed never to have another child. It was like they had endured the deciding battle at their very first meeting, and in the process none of them had won. She had felt wary from the start of the little screaming girl by her bed, knowing somehow that the birth of her first baby was in as many ways an ending as a beginning. Her husband she knew how to get around. This little girl's and her own differences would weigh more heavily; she thought she was going to have to live with another will as strong as her own under her roof.

When she took the tiny girl home and found herself for years guiding her, comforting her in her sudden storms, she always felt the child with her small but firm embrace was taking something from her, never giving. It was a paradox, spontaneous Anita who shared her feelings so easily never really gave herself. She always came to her mother in some way or another needy, hungry for more. Liv thought she had looked after the child well. She was a mother, it was her own "enfant terrible". She had

completed her own creation as best she could. But from under the surface she and Anita were always watching each other uneasily, the child anxiously, the mother resignedly, both always taken aback by the diametrically opposite logic of the other. All the effort and understanding the relationship had required, her investment in the girl, it had been so great, in a way she loved her more for her contrariness than she could ever love any other child.

She had vowed after the birth that had nearly killed her never to get pregnant again, but they were both healthy and young, her husband and herself, and she could not be a wife any worse than she could be a mother. Liv had dreaded the birth of her second daughter. To her surprise Eva had been completely different all along. She had been calm and thoughtful, a quiet little warrior. Eva and herself had got along without effort.

Still, Anita was the one that no one could resist, her temper and dimpled smile endeared her to everyone. Eva had the same dimples and it was curious to the mother how people just did not seem to notice them on Eva's cheeks.

Now Liv Pedersen was marvelling at the sight of her daughter in her wedding dress, the one she had always been able to rely on to spill the drink on the tablecloth. Her grown up girl was standing barefoot on the lino on long legs, blood from her lips and tears from her eyes dripping onto the dress, the precious fabric! Anita had not changed. Why on earth did she try it on in such a state?

Liv Pedersen's eyes sidestepped disapprovingly to the pile of clothes on the floor. In 21 years she had not managed to teach her daughter to fold them as she undressed. She handed Anita the handkerchief from her purse and sighed nearly inaudibly as she disappeared from the sewing

room. Someone else would take care of her from now on. Fred Holst was not a bad man and there was money in his family.

Anita was always high and low, she would be OK in a couple of minutes. They had enjoyed a good evening out at the theatre, Liv Pedersen thought, Eva and herself, and her husband.

Eva helped Anita get the dress off in the sewing room before following her mother through to the lounge, to the welcoming spice of her father's tobacco. Enveloping their light evening chatter the smoke was making white swirling circles in the air hovering like a large transparent meringue, before gradually unravelling and sinking into a gentle blanket under the green floor lamp. From the lampshade's swell of magical green light it got the strength for another reincarnation, rising again in the corner clothing the room from the far wall. They were a family together, at home in their smoky micro universe.

Anita stood behind in the sewing room on the cool lino, her feet feeling numb and cold. She thought she could barely move them! She was relieved that they had all left her alone but disappointed too, was nobody paying attention? Did they not care about her, about her marriage, that her life was coming crashing down! The wedding dress was ruined! She wanted to be safely in bed under the duvet, still and feather all the thoughts that were hammering her. But to get to bed she would have to transverse the livingroom, were the three of them sat so peacefully together. The unfairness of her situation made her feel angry. So what if they sat there in their smug cosiness shrugging at her anguish? So what if she made a fool of herself again, she was not going to let them stop her! Why was it always her life that was falling apart? And why did this kind of disaster never befall Eva?

She did not bother getting dressed. Sweeping her heap of clothes up from the lino she covered her front and marched herself stubbornly towards her bedroom, pretending not to notice her sister and parents enjoying their nightcap in the lounge. It was hurting her eyes, the evening smoke that she usually enjoyed so much, the scent of her father's presence with the late night family comforts and togetherness. They were having biscuits and coffee. "Hello Pappa," she muttered. "I must be coming down with something." She could not stand their familiar calm in the green lamplight. Her limbs were growing so heavy as she sauntered through the room, hovering on the outskirts of their cosy world, her feet were barely obeying her. Managing to shuffle through to the bedroom at last she dropped the clothes again onto the floor and slipped under the cold puffy duvet. Mother always left the window open. As long as they were busy and left her alone, she did not care. She started sobbing into the pillow. She could not let anyone see her face. She thought the memory of her excitement and anticipation in the sewing room such a short time ago was still showing. How could it all change so quickly? She could not have met her parent's eyes without revealing what she had been about to do, or at least been willing to do, if Freddy had insisted. He had run away! Now she did not even know if he would still have her, his own fiance. He had taken one look at her naked body and headed for the door, as if he had found her repulsive. Surely she did not look that bad? Surely he had seen naked women before, at least in the magazines the boys shared. She had caught them group together looking, in the middle school, under the staircase. The boys always tried to hide the magazines away from her but she knew what they were doing.

As she was drifting into sleep her mother appeared to her in the doorway . She floated quietly across the room, in her quick gentle steps on soft

slippers, her thick black hair tied in a hoop at the nape. She had come to close the window, to make sure Anita was warm enough. Anita could see her mother clearly for a moment as she let herself sink further into the puffed up pillows. She felt like a little girl again, she wanted to reach over to embrace her beautiful mother, tell her how much she loved her, that seeing her happy was all that mattered. It did not even matter about Freddy any more, but the bed was too huge to crawl across. It was engulfing her. Now she could feel her mother's strong arms lifting her up, putting her safely right in the middle of the bed between mother and father. She could see the ice-cream pastel shades of their nightclothes leaning like towers of Pisa over the steep hills of eider-downs, the duvets were like a gentle vice keeping her still on all sides. They were smiling, saying it would all look quite differently in the morning. The thought rolled through her mind as she eased herself over on her side that she could phone Freddy up straight away, have it all cleared up there and then. It was late and the Holsts would be alarmed maybe, her mother would never let her phone anyone after ten in the evening, but when it came to matters of the heart...? She realised in her sleepiness that matters of the heart had never come up before, there never seemed to have been a crisis in their family that could not be contained to before ten o'clock. It was their watershed for pain and trouble. She frowned at this for a moment but then slid back into gratefulness, she could rely on her mother always to handle matters. Still, she thought, feeling surprised, she did not think her mother could handle this one. She had to talk to Freddy herself and it felt urgent!

Not knowing what to do she fell asleep. She fell into dreaming of crisp white linen. There was a curious room in her dreams, a ward full of beds, but no one was lying down in them. People were just standing around pretending the beds were not really there. They were all dressed up in their

finery, and there was her wedding dress! It had been finished and looked fabulous! Someone else was wearing it!

When Anita woke at eight fifteen the summer sun had been up for four(?) hours. Her mother had been up for two. At the age of five it had been Liv Pedersen's job to feed the dogs twice a day, at six she was given the added duty of keeping clean and in order the annex where the dogs slept. It was a dirty job requiring frequent use of buckets of water and sticky green soap, as the dogs, the small grey and white elkhound and the German shepherd had a flap enabling them to access a run. The run was a half acre of land between the main house and the road, too stony for growing anything on. But it was a good run for the dogs, both for the purpose of exercising them, when they were not with father on the hunt, as for having them guard the front door to the house and the gate to the smallholding.

Life was easy still for little Liv at six, she had been able to go about her duties at her leisure. Her mother would wake her at eight fifteen as the older children were leaving for school. She had been allowed to sit by mother's side in the kitchen having bread and warm milk before slowly assisting in the unrolling of the day.

The summer she was seven and due to start school, her duties changed. The early shift in the outhouses feeding the livestock and mucking out was from then on left entirely to her and her older siblings. She was to muck out the henhouse and collect the eggs every morning, before leaving for school. From that age she had been considered not a child any more, she

was now part of the general rhythm of the smallholding, being up early with the others.

Then as now she would step out of her bed at six in the morning, both summer and winter the floorboards cold and smooth under her feet. Now, living in their centrally heated flat on the first floor she made a point of always keeping a window open at night. It gave the cotton rug next to her bed just the right feel, the chill under her feet that belonged to her mornings. In the full size mirror on the wardrobe she brushed her hair rigorously twenty strokes before smoothing it backwards and rolling it up in a bun at the nape. She had been both teased and admired for her hair. It was a shiny bluish black like her father's, but straight, not curly like his. Although her father had grown up on a farm not far from where he and her mother had settled it seemed to Liv they had maintained a lack of clarity as to from whom he had inherited his dark sultry looks. It was an uncommon trait in the Norwegian east-country communities. The only people you saw sporting shiny dark curls were the Romanies passing through in the spring and autumn, plying their wares at the farms, maybe stopping for a few weeks giving a hand with the hoeing or the harvest. They were not unwelcome as they brought extra hands during harvest and goods often much needed at the farms, kitchen-ware and tools and good fabric for clothes. Still they were infamous for their passionate talk and hot tempers, with their company often followed squabbles and thieving. The settlers made sure the dogs were handy when they saw the gypsy-wagons approaching.

Liv's black hair and her father's curls had been a source of speculation and amusement more than derision in their small community, but it had made her wary of deserving her place. Just in case she was not as good as the others she had made a point of working harder than the rest.

In the bathroom she washed in the basin and put on clean clothes.

She had managed to add two new dresses to her wardrobe since the goods came back into the shops after the war. Her weekend attire was a cotton dress printed with rectangles in a variety of green shades, it had the front buttoning and slight shoulder-pads that had been the fashion carried over from the war, influenced by their menfolk's uniforms. The green colours in their small angular shapes were clear and lush and the dress had small tortoiseshell buttons, eight of them going down to just under the knee. She thought it looked efficient and orderly and still pretty. It showed a little of her strong slim legs. Liv slipped her feet into the soft and well worn tan moccasins and walked through the lounge to the kitchen. In the living room she drew the heavy hand-woven curtains, her stints at the loom had been one of the chores she had liked the most as a child. She had enjoyed the process of the soft woollen threads slowly covering the string (R), the colours blending together into new shades and shapes, weaving sometimes eclectic but more often traditional patterns. She loved how blue and yellow created green, red and blue became purple, how the colours could cool you or warm you. At the loom she had been able to slip away into another world. She had imagined herself sometimes with these strange exotic people, a traveller along the potholed roads through the endless woodlands, never knowing what would be around the next bend. She was surrounded by painted wagons and the black-haired women in their flowery full skirts, the jewellery from their ears and around their necks rattling on the bumpy ride in between the tall trees. She could feel the heat of their campfires, in a clearing or on the corner of a farmer's field in the evenings, hear their melancholy singing. She had sometimes sneaked up close enough to watch and listen on the warm half-lit summer nights when the sun never properly set and mother forgot about calling her in. At the

loom she felt a drawing out some exotic mystery from deep within herself, though still the mystery was not quite hers. The most colourful fabrics she had woven had never looked right on the floor or at the window in her home. It did not blend with the pragmatic Norwegian blue skies and the pious dark spruce forests guarding their farmhouses. In the end she had fallen in with the traditional colours and patterns: red, blue and white, a little dark green or grey.

The rugs on the wooden floor in the livingroom, too, they were all her own work. They were mostly in greens and blues, it worked well with the golden wood in the floorboards and the pale birch in the settee and the coffee table. There was a dresser under the south facing window, it was where her husband kept his pipe and tobacco and a little liquor. The wall towards the bedroom had bookshelves in the middle flanked by cupboards for their Sunday dinner set and the silver cutlery that had been in her husband's family, handed down through generations.

Liv made sure the wood was dusted and polished at all times. If there was ever any mess lying around it was not hers and it did not stay long. She liked everything to have its own place, it was like a puzzle to her, a game where every bit slotted into another. She delighted in her puzzle always being completed. She admired it. Their home was her creation as was her children, and she felt, even her husband. She was grateful for the man she had managed to mould out of the raw clay that had been her young spouse.

Her weaving had stood them in good stead when there were no cloth for new coats during the war. She had made the girls new coats from the winter curtains. They had the blackouts anyway for the windows and along with the summer-curtains they were enough to keep the cold at bay. She had become a competent seamstress.

In the kitchen the magazine on the AGA was waiting warm and welcoming. She lifted the heavy lid and put the enamelled kettle over the hot iron hob. She could drink her coffee in peace because she was holding all the pieces of their lives neatly together. Life and death outside did not affect her. Within her home she knew life and work to be the same, life did not stop and neither did her husbands and her children's needs for care and food. As long as she did not stop working nothing bad could affect them.

Time provided stows, she kept putting the wood in, as she had done when her mother got ill and could not any longer get out of bed early enough to do breakfast. She had passed on her duties at the henhouse to her younger brother and had taken over the stoking of the fires in the morning making them all breakfast. She was never ill herself, she could not afford to be. When she was fourteen and the elkhound had been crushed under the tractor, or when her youngest brother lay dying in the guest room from the polio, people and animals got fed and watered as usual. It was the only way. Her baby sister was born, or her father came home with a whole elk from the hunt and there was feasting for several weeks. The animals got fed and watered as normal. No one ever took a day off. As long as the family was eating within the white panelled wooden house, so were the animals in their pens in their red painted outhouses. The farm and the livestock, her brothers and sisters, they were her stability, her order and her defence against death and destruction, even the smelly henhouse had offered consolation. She had known every feather on the hens, every eye in the wooden roost. She was a cog in the machinery, alongside her siblings always happy at work. The sun kept doing its own thing, teasing them always being up before them in the summer, mocking as it lay in till ten in the winter, while they struggled through their chores and transversed drifts of snow on their long walk to

school in lingering darkness. Little black-haired dark-eyed Liv was as constant as the fir trees in the yard. Like them she had grown taller and stronger, unmovable, unbendable, as seasons came and went.

In the City, in her home, with her husband and her daughters she had forged her roots equally deeply. She had become impervious to outer circumstance, the rhythm of her days had become her own, had become physical, it was as much a part of her body as her bones and muscles were, it was the power by which she breathed and slept.

Throughout her personal trials: Her husband entering her life, her children being newborn, she had not let them dictate her days and nights to her, but had expected them all to fall in with her, to comply. It had been necessary, it was not just her own way of life she was asking them to comply with, it was the rhythm of survival, of life itself, the fine timing of things that decided whether you lived or died. You fed the animals, they fed you. There was no refusing nature, no lying in on Sundays.

She had circumvented the fact that there were no animals to feed in the city by letting her own children stay in their childhood patterns. She woke them at eight fifteen and they had breakfast together in the kitchen, before she fed the dog.

She made herself an open sandwich at the kitchen counter and cautiously put the radio on trying to dull her nagging fear that it might spoil the air of calm and order she had so meticulously created. It was from the radio that the announcement of the war had leapt out at her.

Filling hot water and green soap in a bucket she started getting about her chores. She had clung onto the rhythm of her work through the Gremans' scattering of terror and loss around their streets, even in the households of

their neighbours. She felt her strict discipline was what had saved her and her own.

At twelve past eight Liv had finished cleaning the bathroom and the staircase down to the front door. At eight twenty-seven Anita was still in bed. When she was still not up at half past eight her mother came in and asked if she was ill.

"I'm fine" She turned away from her mother towards the window, pretending to be not quite awake yet. She did not want to talk, especially not to her mother, she had a vague sense that her troubles must all somehow be her mother's fault although she could not quite figure out how.

"Are you sure you are quite well, maybe we ought to check your temperature?"

"I need to sleep."

"There's still quite a lot of sewing to do, Anita" her mother carried on. All she could get in reply was a groan from deep within the girl's pillow. Liv Pedersen relented, her daughter seemed in an odd way, she was sure she could not be quite on form. "I'll come back and check on you in a while," she said. She could hear Eva getting breakfast ready in the kitchen.

As consciousness of the imposing morning grew in Anita so did the pain she had been feeling in the pit of her stomach, it was a dulling ache that was now spreading up into her chest and out in her arms and legs making her feel as if she could not move, she was without will or force. She was obviously in need of rest, she must have been working herself too hard lately, she thought. The dress! She could not bear the thought of it! She buried her head in her pillow trying to stop the tears that were coming

back, she did not want her mother to see them. She had to phone Freddy, as soon as her mother was not around.

Having a plan she felt a little better and got out of bed wiping the last few stray tears from her cheeks. She would get dressed and have her breakfast to stop mother fussing.

Sliced bread, coldcuts and cheese was on the kitchen table, it was her favourite breakfast of the week. On Sundays there were eggs and bacon and on weekdays the endless porridge, she could not any longer stand it! Since the war when the only oats they could get hold of was green and bitter and not yet ripe, and there were no alternatives if you wanted to eat at all, she had hated the morning porridge with a passion. It had not been uncommon for her to slip it under the table to the dog, although it meant she would go to school without having eaten at all. But Saturday morning they would have whatever meat and fish that could be found in the house, with pickles and cheese and conserve that her mother had made. They could feast on their open sandwiches, although still not pile the toppings too high, moderation was in all things a virtue, drink strong coffee and chat without worrying about work and school.

"Feeling better?" Liv Pedersen was inquiring with a smile. She was glad to see her daughter out of bed, even if nothing serious had been the matter. With her daughter in bed one of the cogs in her machinery was disengaged, the engine of her daily life faltered. "We need to finish your dress today."

Anita shook her head her mouth full of her mother's home-baked bread and cured ham. "Last chance to go shopping today." She declared. The wedding was next Saturday and apart from the rehearsals on Monday morning she was working all week. "I need to get some hairpins, and stockings. If I could have 10 krone, maybe, from the wedding budget?"

Surprisingly her mother did not argue. "OK. We need to get on with it this afternoon though," she said. The shops would be closing at twelve on a Saturday, there would be time enough for sewing later. She wanted most of the work on the wedding dress and the two bridesmaids outfits to be finished this weekend, Anita would be back to work during the week and she didn't want to be stuck with finishing the dresses off herself.

"Oh, and hair spray." Anita added. She excused herself from the table and slipped away. A moment later she was out the front door, glad to be out of her mother's range of observation, pulling her coat on and pinning her hair back from her face as she hurried down the road to the tram stop at St Berner's Place. She could hear the shins of the tram-tracks squealing as the tram was approaching and she bypassed the newly restored phone booth on the Trondheims road. She needed to catch the tram to get to the shops, Saturdays they could be up to half an hour apart. She would phone Freddy from downtown.

On the tram she lit herself a Cooli and lent back on the warm vinyl seat enjoying the day rolling by. The lighting-shop on Carl Berner's place was twinkling with it's display, fully lit in the clear day, as she slid past it across the square. She had always liked the lighting shop and it would not be too long, she hoped, before she would have a home of her own to furnish. To start with though, they would have to live with the Holsts. Her in-laws to be, Georg Holst and Freddy's stepmother Katrine, had a large house in the garden suburbs and had offered her and Freddy the basement, a livingroom and conveniences consisting of lavatories and a washbasin. They would share Katrine's kitchen and the large bathroom upstairs when they needed it. The housing market had been an even worse squeeze

since the war, there was no hope of them finding a property for themselves for a while yet. Something would come up. The thought of starting her married life with Kat and George around made her feel gloomy again and she flicked the last tip of her cigarette onto the floor under her shoes and lit another one. Her mother did not like her smoking, but everybody did it these days, and she always made sure she did not appear unfeminine with it, she smoked only ever when sitting down.

The tram was picking up speed as it hummed along the long and straight Storgata, the wagons rocking from side to side on the worn and weary old shins. The soft rhythmic movement comforted Anita somewhat and she fell into soothing visions seeing herself in a ballroom full of elegantly attired men and women, dinner jackets, taffeta and ruffles sweeping past her as the tram progressed past the haute couture houses lining the far end of the street. She hadn't told Freddy about her encountering Hugo, the proprietor of the largest model school in Oslo. He had told her she ought to have a go at being a model, with her height and good stature, Anita giggled, he had meant her large breasts. He had said it could turn out a good career for her. She had dismissed the idea. Her chest was too large, she thought, and her shoulders too broad, and anyway she was marrying Freddy. She would soon have children to take care of and modelling was a life of late nights and travelling. There were those who became international celebrities and made a fortune from it. She envisaged herself for a moment as the new face of Dior, her hair elegantly swept backwards and her blue eyes enhanced by carefully laid make-up. Maybe if Freddy did not want her, she would go and visit Hugo. Perhaps she was destined for a more glamorous life than being a wife and mother? The tram rocked left around the circular surrounds of the great church at the end of Storgata. It was the church where the king had married his English princess. She

stayed on for another three stops finally disembarking in Prinsens Gate. She would go to the large department store 'Steen og Strom'. It had the latest fashion for the summer and she could get everything she needed from under one roof, maybe try on a few dresses for fun. Outside the store she stopped for a minute on the pavement to admire the display. The mannequins had softly rolled back short hair, a bit like her own although she found it hard to get as much height on top. Her curl was natural and a little too tight. She loved the wide round necklines and the three-quarters length sleeves, the Dior style, it was feminine and elegant at the same time. Some of the outfits had matching little pillbox hats. The skirts were ankle long, full and gathered. She had not been able to make the skirt on her brides dress quite as full, fabric was still so expensive. White satin more than anything else seemed to be in short supply. The style of her dress was anyhow more upright and slimmer, having a low wide skirt simply made her look frumpy. The standing butterfly collar and short skirt drew the focus to her neck and head and to her long legs. It suited her figure better.

Inside the department store doors was a phone box and she felt her heart sink again and her stomach churning remembering her predicament. She had to talk to him, she had better jump to it. Lifting the mouthpiece she put her coin in and dialled his number. The long plaintive ringtone was torpedoing her high spirits as she counted fifteen signals before putting the receiver back on the hook. He was not home. She would have to try again later.

In the end she did not bother trying any dresses on. Instead she sat in the cafe on the top floor looking out over the summer-clad city in the company of a strong cup of coffee and her favourite apple Danish with icing. Maybe she was a hopeless case as her mother seemed to think. Too emotional,

too scatty, too untidy, not disciplined enough? Now maybe she was too loose as well, maybe she had made a big mistake taking her clothes off for Freddy. If she was on the slippery slopes already would she be able to handle a modelling career? She would perhaps end her days all alone in some seedy bar in Berlin or Paris, taking her clothes off for money. She finished off her ten-pack of Cooli with another cup of coffee before trying the phone again getting only Katrine's voice on the line: "Oh no he's not here. Freddy has gone to work, dear, he is doing the retail round for the nurseries. "

She frowned. He should have finished that hours ago.

Anita tried the nurseries but he was not there either. There was no way she could reach him. She thought perhaps he would have left her a message at home by now, with her mother. The shops were already near to closing, she would hurry and pick up the bits and bobs she needed, but maybe still not go home quite yet, she didn't fancy much working on the brides-dress, it really didn't seem much point.

The tram rocked her homewards on the cobblestoned streets. The midday sun had come out throwing it's light into the coach like a stratocaster as the tram wobbled on it's whining shins up and away from the busy city centre back towards the hilly suburbs. Closing in on her destination Anita felt again in her stomach an ache, a growing resistance towards reaching it, and in the end she could stay on the tram no longer. At Hasle fields she gathered her shopping and jumped off a stop early. She would take the long way around under the railway bridges and up across the green between the two school, the infant school where she had enrolled and the high-school, tall and imposing on the far end of the lawns where she had not been allowed by her parents. They did not think a girl had any need for a higher education.

Still the road did not seem long enough and she made a detour past the shop fronts with the hosiery and the sweetshop and wandered in between the four story tower blocks behind it. At the back was a walkway leading between rose borders and patches of grass onto the large sandy playgrounds. They were the playgrounds of her childhood. Two little girls, maybe four or five years old, were playing on the swings. They did not yet have to worry about schools and marriage and careers Anita thought jealously. She sat down on a bench opposite the children where the sun was reaching down between the tall buildings and swung her shopping onto the seat besides her. The sun was warm here. Closing her eyes she could feel the rush of the air under her skirt as she remembered the swings taking her up and down and up again, the accompanying scent of roses and the sunbaked sand in the sandpit, faintly spiked with the odour of the cats that had visited it. It was just as it had been. She was on her way home with the shopping, stopping for a little carefree relief before returning to submit to her mother's watchful eyes. She roamed through her bags: Two pairs of sheer stockings shade of 'mother of pearl', a garter; it had not been on the shopping-list but she hadn't been able to resist it, four pretty diamante hairpins, hair spray, medium hold. No milk or slices of ham that could go off today, she did not have to rush. And she would not forget it under the bench. It was here behind the tower blocks she had found her father's rationed tobacco, one night after black-out, in the darkened playground on her own. The cat's pee smelt stronger in the dark although the night-scent of the tall spruce next to the swings freshened the air somewhat. She had heard the screams of the tram-shins in the distance, and then the faint voices, getting nearer. They were calm and deep voices, men, conversing in a hushed staccato tongue, not the language she understood. It was the German night patrols.

The day had been a carefree warm sunny day and she was still in her light dress, a cotton cardigan thrown over it. It was a yellow cardigan that she had liked a lot, only there in the dark with the German guards approaching she had wished it had been dark, black or navy, and not so visible in the quiet night. What would they do to her if they found her here, on her own? If they caught her, she thought she could maybe make them let her go if she gave them her father's tobacco. Father would be cross, it was his only luxury, his small weakly ration, and she had already mislaid it once, forgetting it as she stopped to play when doing the shopping. It meant a lot to him, so much that he had sent her out in the dark to pick it up. It was after black-out, there was not a glimmer of light from the dark musty gardens along her way. She knew she was always forgetful and she had to be thought a lesson but she saw goblins and ghosts around every fence and hedge. She had been told she would not have supper until she had fetched the tobacco and she didn't really care about supper but they were too cross and she just had to go. Now back in the playground she was ten and trembling in her light dress, crouching under the bench praying to God that the guards would pass without noticing her. And they did, they passed, slowly, still talking. They did not hear her quick frightened breath against the benches leg or the beating of her heart drumming so loud inside her head. She had sat very still for a very long time until not another sound of the guards passing could be heard. In the end she was losing the feeling in her legs, and she was having to lie still on the cold ground and stretch and wiggle her toes in full view of the night before she was able to run on them home to her parents and safety. Finally home she had burst out crying, but they had laughed it away. Did she really think they would have sent her out after the tobacco if there had been any real danger to her? She had just been foolish.

After that she had got the scarlet fever. She had simply resolved deep within herself not to get the polio. Her uncle had died from the polio and she could not have coped going through the rest of her life with a limp. So many people got the polio that year, they said it was something on the fruit that autumn so she had scrubbed every bit of apple or pear she had put in her mouth. It had been her biggest fear during the war, the polio, and she had managed to avoid it. She had resolved to firmly exclude it in her mind as a possibility. It had worked. She still had two strong long legs, her best feature even now, she thought. But she did get the scarlet fever. She had it very badly but did manage to pull through in the end. Her mother had stayed by her bed night and day, cooling her off, washing her down diligently with her scented water. Tossing in her deep hot haze Anita learnt to trust her mother's unbendable will again, and her father's provisions. They were determined not to let their daughter go after all. So they had not sent her out for the lost tobacco, to the playground in the night with the German guards to die. Mother wanted her to live, she was convinced of it again and she finally pulled through. Still she had never understood, why they had fought so hard for her during the fever but risked her life so easily for the sake of a pouch of tobacco. She did not understand why a little forgetfulness should be punished so severely. It seemed they had brought her to death's door, for a smoke. Still, her parents were always there for her.

The thought of her parents' persistent presence rather than cheer her up made her a little more depressed and she gathered her bags and started the walk towards the underpass with the railway-bridges leading up across the green. It was a quarter to three. With any luck her mother was planning an elaborate Saturday dinner and would have started preparing it by the time she got home. She did not feel ready yet to continue the work on the

brides dress. She was not sure she would ever wear it. She would pull herself together tomorrow. Perhaps she would hear from Fred before then. Maybe he had already phoned her.

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Liv Pedersen sat at the kitchen table for nearly a whole hour drinking a cup of coffee and browsing through the morning paper. For this her usual furnace of energy had been forcibly quenched low onto a very slow burn and she did not enjoy it much. Had there been any other job she could have put her hands to she would have started at once but her mind was set on the fabrics waiting in the sewing room and she simply could not think of anything else to do. She never left work sitting around, the housework had been taken care of yesterday as they had planned to sew today. She had hoped to as good as finish the dresses, maybe have a Sunday free for once to visit her parents and tend to the grandparents graves. She was depending on Anita to try the dress on for the next step of the sewing so there was nothing she could do. The clock above the cooker was edging it's way past three o'clock. If her daughter did not show in the next fifteen minutes it would be time to start preparing dinner. Where on earth had Anita got to, the shops had been closed since midday? The realisation drew her lips a little tighter. It was the kind of disruption to her life she had become accustomed to through the years, however hard she worked and however well she planned there was always some point where other people came into the equation and decided to do their own unpredictable thing. The only one she could rely on to flow with her own meticulous rhythm was Eva, she somehow seemed to see the need for order, just like herself.

There was no news from Freddy that afternoon. Anita quietly endured her supper cowering under her mother's cloud of dismay. She was feeling tired

and confused. It seemed the only thing that could clear her mind up was talking to Freddy directly, yet she could not make herself call him again. She spent the rest of the afternoon and evening secretly circling the phone, circles that only she knew about, covert manoeuvres in and out between books and dishcloths, news on the radio and visits to the bathroom. The phone was always in the middle, right there to the side of her path. It remained silent and she did not know how to take a step into the circle and pick up the receiver, phone Freddy up and ask for an explanation, it simply could not be done. It bore all the signs of a crises, and crises did not have any room next to her mothers determination. To her mother there was still an indisputable wedding seven days away. It was a fact and Anita could not sow doubt on it. She was not sure anyway that it was really up to her and Freddy any more.

The clock passed ten in the evening. It had passed quicker than she had anticipated, and it gave her a jolt but also brought with it a sense of relief realising it was anyhow too late to phone now. It would have to be resolved tomorrow.

She turned the light out in her bedroom and crept under the towering quilt. It was early but she had nothing more to do staying up. Lying under the downs neither could she sleep. She was feeling as if she was afloat, drifting, but where to? Something new was happening to her, she was suspended between the past and the future, waiting at a fork in the road. What alarmed her the most was that it did not seem to be up to her which direction to take. She had always relied on her mother's judgment and now for the first time she realised that there might be other ways, that she could possibly make a different choice. Her mother had always warned her against herself, against her impetuous and impulsive nature, her lack of discipline. And she had let it get the better of her the other night in the

sewing room stripping off for Freddy. There hadn't seemed to be anything wrong with it at the time. But now she realised even Freddy had disapproved. Now she was already on the slippery slopes like her mother had predicted. She hoped Freddy was not as strict as her mother, that he might forgive her the frivolity and take her back, but she did not feel certain. She suddenly realised she did not know what Freddy was expecting of her at all. He had never elaborated on what he liked about her. They had just both known that they somehow belonged together. She sighed, she had always found it hard to live up to people's expectations. What might married life be like living under the eyes of Georg and Katrine Holst. What did they expect from her? And Freddy's sisters in their beautiful, expensive clothes? Her own parents had grown up on east-country farms, strong health and ability to persist, to work hard, to rise early, those were the values she had grown up with. She had no artistic flair, no college education. She did not have jewellery. Would Freddy's family be able to accept her as one of their own?

Maybe she would meet Hugo again, do some modelling for him. She would not have a home and children, she could feel her heart sinking at the thought, but she would be in the forefront of fashion, of culture, of society. She could be admired for her glamour, be something for everybody to look at, not just her husband. Maybe the right clothes could make her bosoms look smaller?

Or she might just carry on staying here with her mother, continuing her work at the telephone-exchange, learn to cook well and end up an old maid. She had never had much patience for cooking though her mother had tried to teach her. She did always lose interest before it was properly seen through. She did not have that little extra effort to give, that last bit of staying power that mother was master of, that made everything she did

next to perfect. She had tried, but it seemed inhumane to her to be called in early on a sunny summer's afternoon for the sake of washing the cooker, or to miss the cinema trip on Sundays for the sake of perfectly ironed shirts at work during the week. Sometimes she wondered if her mother really knew how to live at all. Was it true that all living ought to be ordered and thoroughly thought through, just like following a recipe? Whenever she tried following a plan or recipe herself it never worked out as expected. She was not sure of the value of planning everything. Her life always worked out differently from what she planned.

She knew she would never be as good as her mother at cooking or at keeping the house spotless or at making cushions and quilts and sewing her own clothes, all she could do was try her hardest. She could still do her best at living a decent and good life, earn some money and be of help to the family. At least she and Freddy had not gone all the way. She would avoid being frivolous, she had her family, she did not need to fall prey to loneliness and desperation, or her mother's biggest fear, drinking. She would not stay out late at night with men she did not really know. She could even give up the cigarettes. She yawned. The idea of smoky bars and late nights partying with strangers, had a strong appeal. She would be wearing high heels and smoke a cigarillo in a long cigarette-holder. Wear some make-up and a low cut dress and charm everyone with her childlike dimpled smile. She knew her own strengths.

Still the road ahead was not up to her. She did not understand all of her mother's many rules and regulations but she had always been a good girl and in the end Freddy or mother would decide. Both alarmed and reassured at her own conclusion she fell into a light restless sleep.

A bright Sunday morning sun broke through the hazy argument of her night. She just knew there was something wrong with the way mother went about things but she could not put her finger on it. Wearily she filled up the washbasin and dipped the flannel into the hot water, dabbing her eyes with the warm cloth. She did not bother washing anywhere else, it was weekend after all.

The family gathered around the breakfast table as always on a Sunday. Anita made light conversation as she buttered the home-baked bread and hacked the top off her boiled egg. She always lived up to other people's expectations so poorly. Her mother had endless reserves of strength and calm and logic. She went by her days like clockwork. Anita's own days were woven in strands of imagination, mysterious, unpredictable threads that suddenly sparkled and glittered but also frequently snared her neck to choke her, made her sad. Her mother's rules hooked into her magical weave like reminders of a different world, remnants from a dusty past. She dragged them along through her day because she had to. They were like chicken wire woven into her magic cloth, it was her mother's subversive work, or maybe it was just the need to survive, she conceded. Maybe it was really true that a good life was constructed of all these little tasks performed at their optimum time. She had been thought not to complain, to be positive and disciplined and work hard and she couldn't see any wrong in that. Still she wasn't sure. Mother seemed to see this grey metallic structure as being life itself. Getting up at eight, brushing your hair 20 strokes, washing and changing your knickers and socks, putting the dirty clothes in the linen basket, folding and putting away clothes that were still clean, putting slippers on, drinking a cup of coffee, listening to the news on the radio, buttering bread for her lunch-packet, eating a slice of bread, clearing off the table, cleaning the dishes, brushing her teeth. The

structure was tight. There were tasks belonging to every moment of every day, the netting a little tighter for the weekdays, a little looser at the weekends, but still it was there, holding her prisoner within their cosy little chicken run. The cloth that Anita wove for herself, that kept her warm, it flickered with hope and imagination. It was all her dreams. It was her home of her own with parties in golden lamplight, there were people laughing in it, joyously, not politely. They were allowed to spill their drinks if they wanted to. It was Freddy's deep glittery green eyes when he said something clever and smiled towards her as if they were fellow conspirators in a world of hopeless dimwits. His self-assurance and arrogance fascinated her always, and it thrilled and surprised her that he considered her to be on his side of the divide. The divide between the dumb and dreary and the dazzling few. Still Freddy got on so well with her mother, he teased and flattered her and she seemed to enjoy it, to sparkle momentarily in her serene beauty. It was the only time Anita could remember ever having seen a glint of girlyness in Liv's eyes. Everybody loved Freddy.

The lack of Freddy's presence, realising the uncertainty of his return, sent Anita's spirits tumbling again and she settled down to eating her bread and boiled egg. Obediently she cleared off the table when their breakfast was over and did the dishes with Eva. She could hear her mother behind her switching the lights on and readying the sewing machine. Today there would be no escaping. She did not feel like fighting. She would let the netting imprison her, hold her until her duties were done and her mother was satisfied.

" Anita! The fabric is snagging! You really need to keep your eyes on it love, and keep the foot-pressure nice and loose on the pedal."

"Yes. Sorry.I'll unpick it."

"I think you'll need to loosen the pressure on the spool a little."

"Yes" Her mother always told her what to do next. Her parents loved her of course, she knew that.

Anita bit her lip and sewed on. She knew her fun-seeking nature had made her mother weary always, but she had thought her daring and mischievousness was what had appealed to Freddy. She had felt he had thought her special for it, but she was not sure any more.

"I need a break, mamma. A cup of coffee and a cigarette. Would you like some coffee?"

"Just let me finish this side so you can try it on first please. I want to see if it needs taking out a little at the bust."

Anita sighed. Her mother always needed her to do a little more, always had to push her that little bit further, when she was tired and she had already had enough, until it hurt inside. She was not trying to abscond, she just needed a little relief. She put the dress on obediently, gingerly not to get jabbed by the many pins that were still holding the front together, and let her mother make the adjustments.

She could not tell mother why she was so upset, that she had doubts about the wedding. Whatever was to come she had brought it on herself. Freddy would have to let her know how he felt about her at some point. They were supposed to be meeting for the rehearsals in church tomorrow at half past eleven. If he was not there she would know.

She would let her mother discover for herself that he had deserted her, she could not bear telling her for fear of her disapproval and of her wanting explanations as to why. She would not be the one who let everybody down again. It was true that Eva was better at following through the tasks she was given, but was discipline the only important things in life? Where was

the fun in it? She herself was warm and affectionate, spontaneous and alive. She got on well with people, liked listening to their experiences. Was hard work and tidiness more important than friendliness and understanding? What of tolerance, compassion, and being appreciated for what you were, even if you were scatty and lacked somewhat in patience and calm. She did not know. She could only see the forbiddingly small measure of conciliation in her mothers cool but friendly face. It demanded a smile on her face always and a steady and positive work ethic. It was all that she had to do and she would have her parents love and support for ever. She knew they would always be there for her. They knew best. Her mother could never stand people complaining, and maybe she was right. Maybe the only solution was keeping a cheerful face and finding some satisfaction in your daily work. She quite liked the work at the telephone-exchange. The switch desks had ashtrays and people were friendly. She chatted with everybody and they liked her there, it was at home that she was always the poorest performer on the team.

Liv Pedersen sensed her daughter's resignation and restlessness. "Only another minute", she assured, her voice a little sharper than she had intended. Anita was so impatient and she had seen so many times in her life what happened to the once who did not do any work. Their farms did not yield and the children did not have winter coats to wear to school. Alcohol often followed in it's wake. It was as if they had given up the will to live, the will to fight for their survival, and there was nothing that scared her more. Everyone knew that the good things in life did not just land in ones lap. There were times when you had to struggle through, and in the end going on was simply a duty, it could not always be fun. When people gave up it was all down to laziness and sloppiness, she thought, and it was not to happen to any of hers, not as long as she was alive. She would instill in

them forever how hard work was in the end the only thing they could rely on.

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Freddy and best man to be, Erlend, stepped down from the nursery van. Throwing a quick glance in the wing mirror Fred tightened the knot of his tie. Then he stretched back in for his blue jacket and carefully picked away strips of packing-twine and bits of carnations. It had hung over the back of the passenger seat as he had been serving at the wholesale market. The van was his 'salesroom' during market and the inside of the white Volkswagen was scattered with debris, leaves and petals and twine and cut off stems. Now in front of him was the 19th century stone church where the wedding was to take place on Saturday. He wanted to look his very best on seeing Anita again for the rehearsal, he was wearing a blue suit. It was a well cut, expensive, poplin suit. It had been made by their family tailor and he thought he looked rather handsome in it, he had even put a tie on because he knew Anita liked them, even though it made him feel like choking. He was hoping she had forgotten about last time. Thankfully there would be a few other people around and they probably wouldn't get any time on their own. It was just that he could never be sure what Anita would do or say. Her emotions so easily burst through the confines of the conventions of good behaviour. It was a little unnerving if you were on the receiving end.

The green lawns of the Ulven cemetery were sloping lazily towards the east like a shirt-cuff surrounding the pointing finger of the church spire. There were always many visitors to the pleasant cemeteries, the hilly lawns were punctuated with benches and rose borders and mature trees

between the rows of polished gravestones. He came here regularly himself, not for Sunday service but to put fresh flowers on his mother's grave, she was on the east facing lawn just a hundred or so yards down the hill. She had died after the birth of his younger brother. He was not sure if the memories he had of her were real or imagined, he had photos. It had just been a habit of his since childhood to tend the grave with his father. He always thought of his mother as young and very pure, the way she looked in the faded monochrome wedding picture, her eyes so innocent and clear, so much like Anita's. Fred felt he had regained some of the innocence of his childhood again in his young wife to be, he longed for her. He was coming home finally.

Elated at being so close to their union but also nervous at her reaction to him, he entered through the large wooden church doors butterflies fluttering in all directions of his stomach. Stranded inside in the sudden dark he could feel the tingling for a moment all the way out into the tips of his fingers. The darkness of the large hall was cut through with rays of coloured light from the stained glass high above and as his eyes adjusted he could see the movements of people at the far rows of pews and hear the rustling of clothes and soft steps coming towards him. Getting accustomed to the patchy light he stretched his hand out as he was welcomed by the sexton:

"We're all up here, Sir, if you would come this way. Father Sofus will go through it all with you first step by step. And then you will get a chance to...hmm...try it out... hm.. so to speak."

Fred followed him up the aisle towards the others. There was the vicar and Mrs Pedersen, Anita's maid of honour Lisbeth, and Eva who had come along just for the performance. And Anita, she was not meeting his eyes. He took her hand and squeezed it firmly trying not to look into the pensive

lines on her face. It made him feel guilty. Gently he leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. He could feel the tension of her skin softening lightly and noticed large warm tears rolling rolling down the corners of her eye. For a moment he was afraid the worst would happen! Then she turned away towards the pews, embarrassed, and wiped the tears off her cheeks. Freddy wanted her after all! She could not ask him here what had been going on but she was so relieved that he had forgiven her, she felt like a stone had been lifted from her shoulders. So he had not deemed her too frivolous to be his wife. She would do her very best to behave appropriately in the church, she did not want to embarrass him ever again. She was just grateful that he had taken her back. She turned away from the others for a moment and discreetly powdered her face, producing a big smile turning back to Freddy. She was still feeling like screaming but she would not let him down with her unruly temper. If he would only have her she would not ever cry in front of him again. She would make both Freddy and her mother proud. She would do her little rehearsal with flying colours and only think about their big day ahead.

On Saturday at two fifteen in the afternoon August Pedersen walked up the aisle with Anita's arm in his and calmly handed her over to Fredrick Holst. The fanfares of Mendelshon's bridal march blew any lingering vapours of doubt out of the high stony arches of the church, the vibrant tones filling the bows and chambers. Honeyed scents from freesias and roses in sparkling cascades in lilac, yellow and white, were numbing and lifting the senses in the colourful church with its fully packed pews. Even Anita's colleagues from the telephone exchange had come and Freddy's college mates were all squeezing in at the back. Outside the sky was high and blue. It had taken no time at all for Anita to finish her dress, the stylish eggshell satin smoothing the long sleek lines of her body as she walked

on her father's arm up the aisle. Every pew had lavish flower arrangement, it was no meaner spectacle, she thought, than on a Hollywood set, it was one of the perks of marrying a nurseryman. The silky edge of her dress was bobbing gently around her knees, her sleek calves and ankles in full view in their white shimmering nylons. She knew it worked. She had only a small heel on her shoes although heels of six or seven centimetres was the latest fashion. She was a tall girl and she wanted to look just right next to Freddy who was a shorter more athletic build. She had never seen him so handsome, his black tailored morning dress with the snugly fitted waistcoat. His hair was combed up carefully and jelled into a thick black quiff, for once it was not hanging into his eyes. There was the bright green sparkle in them that she loved, and the comfort of his strong warm hand finally reaching for hers. He looked at once taller and manlier than usual, but also softer, more humble, she thought. She was sure everything would be all right now. They took the last few steps up to the alter and she leaned against him fleetingly and whispered in his ear: "Do you like the dress?" "You look fantastic! Beautiful!" Her face lit up. He never said much, but when she asked him he always came good. "Anita, you always look good." He added. It took the edge off her happiness a little. She didn't want to look 'nice as always' but glamorous and special like never before.

They were at the alter and the priest's voice was sounding loud and clear in the full church, a hush falling over the teeming pews. She was in the middle of everything now, it was finally happening, everything she had craved for so long. She was the centre of everybody's attention, they were a good looking couple and there was nothing any more that could get her down.

In the taxi on their way to the Grand Hotel, after dinner with its endless speeches and the dancing, in her tiredness she lent against his shoulder.

A little tension she had not sensed before was seeping through the confines of his jacket crawling under the silk of her dress. It made the little fine hairs on her arms stand on edge, the silky fabric of her dress suddenly feeling rough and foreign against her skin. She knew his skin against hers would feel even smoother, even softer than any fabric could. The thought calmed her somewhat.

Inside their suite as she felt herself tumbling against him instantly he quickly gave her a squeeze and let her go, to her disappointment, taking his jacket off meticulously and looking around the room for the champagne he had ordered. It was on the table by the window. The city was wide awake outside partying the Saturday night away. The nights in midsummer never properly fell dark, they clung onto the daytime, only hung suspended in half-light for a few hours until the sun cheerfully crawled back up again. He drew the curtains tightly to keep the light out.

The time had come, Fred was thinking to himself, from now on he would be sleeping with Anita, there was no turning back now and he would make everything go all right. He popped the cork off the champagne and poured them both a glass doing his best to keep her entertained while she drank. He could not touch her yet or see her naked or he might lose control of himself. Filling their glasses up once more he loosened his tie. There was no other way than turning the lights off. He did so much want to see her, his head had been filled with images of her nakedness for a long time, both before and after the revelations in the sewing room. But he was not quite ready to let her see him. It was not his body he was worried about. He had a good strong body. It was his eyes. They always revealed too much, his vulnerability and his longing for comfort, for the security he hoped she would give him. They were hiding the longing for the arms around him that he had been missing his whole life.

In the end she had drunk too much champagne to manage undressing herself and he helped her undo her clothes and turned the lights off. He could trace the soft contours of her body in the light that was seeping in at the sides of the curtains. Her breasts were not patterned and angry in the dark room, but soft like gently rolling waves. It was all he had ever wanted. There was no need to wait now, she was so ready and had drunk far too much champagne for her comments to require any answers. He could not really make sense of what she said any more. But he could still sense her courage, even now her lack of hesitation was imposing. Again it rattled him somewhat, made him nervous and sent a shudder through him and he entered her quickly, it was the only way he could do it. He was shivering with the danger and the thrill of her forthrightness, he could never understand nor could he resist it. He would need to have her again and again until he got used to her.

The wholesale fruit- and flower market was held on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. As soon as the first cool rays of sunlight were climbing the pale velvet of the short summer nights or while the icy dark still prevailed in the winter, long rows of vans and trailers would gather outside the new market hall. The hall was a flimsy construction of steel beams and corrugated iron put up in haste to give protection to the increasingly exotic and perishable goods for sale in the quickly expanding capital.

Waiting for the doors to open at 6.00 AM the drivers switched off their engines and turned up their radios or abandoned their cars altogether for a breath of fresh air and a chat. Some had travelled a short distance from the smaller and increasingly specialised hothouses within the borders of Oslo city. Others had been on the road throughout the early hours, coming from faraway flower-farms growing mainly dahlias, asters and chrysanthemums. All had started their day early and all were they determined to capitalise on a growing demand for flowers amongst the inhabitants of the ever more sophisticated capital.

Freddy arrived at ten to six just as the caretaker was sliding aside the tree-tall metal sheet doors. It was carefully timed, it suited him to be one of the last to enter the hall. He didn't like hanging about and liked chatting to all and sundry even less. His allotted space was just inside the doors so he found it convenient to be one of the last to drive in. Although the Holst Nurseries was one of the larger businesses at the market Fred's father had insisted on renting only a small space, just big enough for their volkswagen van. They had been given a place by the doors where the smaller van would not unduly obstruct the passage in and out of the hall. It had the advantage of all the retailers having to pass their sales stall on the way in and gave them a lot of extra trade, as his father had shrewdly anticipated.

Freddy had become an expert at packing the van to the brim. For the rest he took orders that were delivered directly to the shops later in the morning. The Holsts stall was usually sold out by the closing of the market.

At ten past six Fred and other latecomers had found their places, and the bubble was closed up again in expectance of the retailers. Fred unlocked the side doors of the van and pulled out the large black buckets of various sizes from the bottom shelf. He would fill them up with water now. Then it would take him only a minute to ready his display before the market opened up. In the mean while he would visit the canteen for breakfast. It was a quarter past six and he was well ahead of schedule.

It the smoky canteen he purchased his customary coffee and two rolls and headed for a table at the far end, paper under his arm. There in the corner by the window he was hoping he might be allowed a quiet moment to himself. He yawned loudly sinking down on the chair brushing away a few strands of thick black hair from his forehead. It was straight and rough and had a tendency to strut out of place no matter how short it was cut. it wasn't like him felling tired at the market but his youngest, his eight year old had got into the habit lately of climbing into his bed in the early morning. She had been suffering from nightmares. He had been lying in an awkward position and his back was hurting. He counted six sugar-cubes dropping them into his black coffee. He needed his sweet strong coffee to get going.

"Mind if I join you?"

Fred looked up in surprise and poorly concealed disappointment and nodded to the man towering above him to take a seat. Although the Holst Nurseries were well known people didn't usually disturb him. He had been accepted as something of a recluse, a little serious and shy. He preferred it that way, people usually left him alone unless he invited to a chat himself.

Fred shook the tall ruddy man's outstretched hand as he sat down on the small wooden seat.

"Paul Lundin", he introduced himself, "pleased to meet you, I've met your father a few times at Lions meeting. We're in the same business, of course, I'm at Odnos Nurseries, near Hamar." He spoke with a Swedish accent.

Fred nodded again, not offering a reply. Most people in the business knew his father.

"It was my brother who started it up in '43. Did pretty well during the war, many funerals", Paul Lundin continued. He grinned.

Fred offered a reserved smile, still hovering somewhere between mild curiosity and irritation at the intrusion. So Lundin had a sense of humour, one man's death another man's bread, it was literally true in the flower business. Reluctantly he put his paper down submitting to the chat, he was still wondering what Paul Lundin really wanted, surely he had not approached him just for company? There were plenty of more sociable fellows in the canteen and Fred thought he could sense behind Mr Lundin's gregarious front a calm eye taking measure of the room and himself. This intangible sense of direction stirred Fred's interest in spite of his tiredness and he brushed his straying tufts of hair away to pay better attention.

"Yes, I have heard of Odnos Nurseries."

Mr Lundin's blue gaze gathered on Fred:

"I am buying a part in it, going in with my brother. I would have liked to start up on my own but I'm afraid I lack the expertise." Mr Lundin smiled disarmingly. He was wondering how much Fred Holst could be worth? Surely his father was more than well off. His thoughts wandered to his own

past endeavours, his importing of precious stones from South Africa. It had given him the capital to buy into his brother's business as well as purchase three acres of land under the forest-clad hills of Nordmarka, at the Northern edge of the city. It was big enough for building both a house and a row of greenhouses, and with the new towerblock suburbs springing up all around there would be no shortage of customers in the years to come. At forty seven he felt he was getting too old for all the travelling and establishing of new contacts that were required for his import business. The politics of the South African countries were changing. His sources from many years back were becoming less reliable. And he had never settled down with anyone, he thought maybe it was time.

"I have heard you are an art collector" Mr Lundin changed the subject.

"Not really, barely a novice," Frank smiled. He would have liked to be so lucky, he simply couldn't afford to indulge his hobbies. Whenever he bought something remotely luxurious he was running the risk of upsetting Anita.

"You may be interested in precious stones? I have just received some emeralds this week? It would make a lovely ring and pendant."

Fred threw a stolen glance at Paul Lundin's hand. He wore no wedding ring. Free and single, he thought and surprised himself feeling a twinge of envy. To shake the feeling off he shook his head vigorously. "I was thinking of getting a television-set, he confessed. I don't have the money at the moment. I'm only a waged worker, Mr Lundin," he admitted surely.

People always thought he was flushed, judging him by his father's flash Mercedes and constant show of wealth. It wasn't worth mentioning that he was trying to save up for a car, too, and with his house and mortgage, his wife and two children and still being kept on regular wages at the nurseries...

His father did not even pay him extra for overtime, maintaining that it was better the money was reinvested as anyhow it would all belong to Fred one day.

"Please, call me Paul. Then let me buy you another coffee", he joked. They had another few minutes on the clock before the opening of the market.

Fred nodded and smiled.

Mr Lundin headed for the canteen counter. He wasn't really surprised that Georg Holst was keeping his son as a waged worker in the Holst Nurseries. The old man was known amongst his business associates to have a cautious streak, or a good business sense, depending on how you saw it. Perhaps he was really run by his hearty wife as the gossip went. He had a gentleness of appearance that made people surprised at the hand of steel with which his business was conducted.

Mr Lundin put the cups on the table and sat down again:

"I am just having a house built myself," he told Freddy. "I had a lucky find of a good property in Grorud, no mining needed." Most of the houses around Oslo were built on Granite, the north, east and west of the city being surrounded by mountains and woods, at the southern end the city ran into the fjord.

We should be starting the excavations as soon as the frost has left the ground, hopefully April.

"What kind of soil have you got?"

It had slipped out before Frank had time to think. He continued not giving Lundin a chance to answer: "Would you need somewhere to dispose of the surplus from the excavations? We've got a patch of bracken land by the greenhouses, I could possibly use the soil in the nurseries if it's not beyond refining?"

It couldn't be practical for Lundin to bring it all the way to Hamar, so he reckoned he couldn't have much use for it himself. He might give it to Fred for a pittance. He tried not to sound too eager, if he could get Lundin to bring him the soil at the Nurseries he could enrich it to be used on potted plants, bag it and sell it through the sales department at the nurseries. It would be a big job, but once refined and in the bag good soil would sell at one krone at the wholesale market and twice as much if he sold it bag by bag from the shop. It could be the extra money he needed.

Lundin looked up and nodded having read the thoughts in the young man's eager green eyes. "The entrepreneurs have a site in Nittedal. I could have them leave it somewhere else, the nearer the better. Let's say I'll have a word with them", he suggested. He got up.

"I have a lovely set of emeralds I thought I wanted to show you", he added amiably. "Thought you might enjoy seeing them, extraordinarily good quality."

Fred smiled. It was a deal. Sure, he might find a use for a couple of gemstones, or anyway his father might want to make jewellery

out of them for Kat, if it was possible to hang any more on her, he thought spitefully. He would be in for a lot of late night's work refining and packing the soil. If he could afford to have the stones set into a ring and pendant for Anita she might not mind as much. He would pick up a book on gemstones from the library, his stepmother had always had gemstones of all kinds but he wasn't quite sure what a really good sapphire looked like, how he might tell if it was inferior? He had bought Anita a piece of jewellery at the birth of each of their children but so far it had been no life of luxury for either of them.

In his sudden mood of anticipation he longed for Anita and wished for a moment to hold her near, to feel her warm strong body next to him. She had been sleeping soundly when he left the house in the early morning hush. She was not a morning person. Even when she slept she was beautiful. She still had an innocence about her. He wanted so much for her and for their two lovely girls. Wanted them all to have their share of everything life had to offer. He loved them all so much!

Fred Holst and Paul Lundin got up from their seats and exchanged addresses and numbers. Paul Lundin would direct the lorries to dump the soil at the Holst Nurseries. It was an advantage to him, it was near and would be quicker than bringing it to Nittedal. And he couldn't deny that the Holst Nurseries were a powerful force in the net of dependencies and loyalties that ruled the lucrative and rapidly growing flower trade. His brother's trade had been weakened when he failed to cultivate the right connections. Now that he was getting in with him at the nurseries in Hamar Paul would make sure that mistake was corrected. Besides he had plans of his own. There would be more buildingwork to follow the new house. He was more than pleased to be of use to young Fred Holst. He would see to it that the favour was well returned, in time.

In the new settlements on the winding dirt-roads by the woods, the cooking smells were seeping out of the kitchens, transversing fences and drives. In between the newly painted wood-panelled houses the scents mingled with specs of snow and fragrant spruce, infiltrating the clean cold air. It was hanging like an invisible film over the gardens and the tumbling play in the afternoon. School had finished at a quarter past two as

usual, leaving an hour and a half before the sun set and parents called the children home. Home to set dinner tables with boiled fish, meatballs or fried sausages. Boiled potatoes, there were always boiled potatoes, with everything, and maybe peas and carrots or stewed white cabbage.

Pudding. The mothers were labouring over the stows subversively sowing the seeds of hunger in the back of their children's minds. It was just lingering there at the very back, hardly noticeable at the minute, the children breathing in the freshly fallen snow and the last hour of daylight. It could not be wasted. They were playing tag, more under the snow than over.

The black and white Buhund, it belonged on the other side of the gravelly snowed over road, was familiarising itself with Lita, the family terrier. Lita was in heat and had been happily won over. Now she was rotating her hind quarters towards the dog flagrant with interest. Holding her tail to the side she waited impatiently as her smaller mate struggled to get into position. He was a younger and less experienced dog. The bitch was already four and had born three litters, reared under the staircase in the cellar. They really should put a gate in the drive!

It was already late March but winter was not yet willing to loosen it's grip, it had given them two feet of snow in the last week. Underneath the last few inches of sticky fresh snow were the older, drier, more crumbly layers. The children had dug out caves in the larger snowdrifts, the snow lying four and five feet deep where the wind had blown it into a ridge or the plough heaped it up high. It was many weeks worth of white heaven! From the dug out caves tunnels had sprung and then more tunnels meticulously added, links made to larger snowdrifts with larger caves. There was a whole city under the snow. The children's city.

Intermediate thaw was the only threat to the children's white world, they did not wish for spring with its warm air to come. It would eventually be sweeping up over the country from the south-west, the sudden warmth shrinking their subterranean world. Tunnels tightened and roofs sank, or collapsed altogether. Once thaw had done its damage there was no reversing it. If it finally gave way to cold again the sunken walls and ceilings were permanently glazed in a hard slippery crust, unmouldable, and everywhere a little tighter to squeeze through. The little people inherited 'Old Town'. The larger children who could not get in left for other games, until snow fell again and the plough threw up new islands of soft malleable white bliss. Then they were back in business, constructing!

In the half acre of garden, to the south of the white wood-panelled house belonging to Anita and Fred, the children of eight and ten were 'kings' now in tunnels and caves. The most resent resizing having excluded the bigger children from down the road, Fred and Anita's girls Monika and Linnea were in charge. They had brought chase-master Tom with them home from school. And Tormod, his mate, who would sometimes join in the chase, too, but the girls had the upper hand, they knew the tunnels like the back of their hand, where they widened and narrowed, the dead ends and the secret exits.

The canines in the yard had separated finally, the dog salacious, the bitch perky. Linnea peeped out of the tunnel into light snowfall. Their Airdale terrier Lita, too, had heard the slur of the car wheels on the loose snow. Little dirt roads like these were not priority with the plough drivers. The residents would have to dig their own cars out for the next couple of days, till the plough drivers caught up. Now the bitch was on her way out the drive. Not many cars came here, but when they did she could never resist the chase!

"Lita, back here!"

Seeing the Airdale head for the drive Linnea for a moment forgot the play. She could hear the panic in her own voice. It was in a pinch, weak and thin in the cold air. It would not carry through to the dog. They really must put up a gate!

"Lita, now! Come! Back HERE! Stupid dog!"

She was already out on the road full throttle towards the car!

Then the front door opened and the dog made a u-turn galloping cheerfully towards Anita on the steps, overtaken by visions of a full dish of food, tail bobbing. Cooking smells have a short-cut to the dogs attention. Anita had not seen Lita nor the impending disaster. Smiling she held her hand up in greeting to the man stepping out of the car. He opened the back taking out a large grey bubble tray: Two dozen eggs from the smallholding in the woods.

In a minute the rest of the children too had scrambled to their feet outside the caves, the chase having dispersed into toe-tapping unease. A teasing comment, a frozen rope of hair pulled, it did not bring wind back into the game. Instead the adult presence across the yard had left the children standing, bemused. The girls watched their own version of the chase, the female version playfully unfolding. They could not help but tune in : Linn and Monika's mother lightly touching the egg-man's arm. The tilt of her head, brushing a strand of hair back from her forehead as she smiled. She said:"Come inside while I find you the money."

Sway in her hip, see-saw skirt swinging as she turned and closed the door with her tray of twenty-four eggs. They were sucking it in like air. Breathing in their future.

In the snow Tom and Tormod staged an ambush. Monica was down on the ground, struggling to slip away. Tormod the biggest boy in class had pinned Monica into the snow. But she wriggled, she was good at it, and soon he had got only a leg, then a bit of trousers. She was free and they were on their feet, down the little slope from the drive to the tunnels opening on the flat lawn. Now it was Linnea he was chasing. She wriggled in and he slid after. In the deepest cave there was nowhere further to go. They could hear the others giggle, muffled by the frozen walls. They were somewhere, closer nearby than they sounded. Tormod got a good grip on Linn's leg as she turned her back against the cave wall and looked for him in the dark. Having her face to face mad him feel a little embarrassed. He slowed down and slid up to her, but she only laughed and fell sideways pulling him along on her ride down the icy wall.

Their mouths together were frozen at first, then tinglingly hot and wet. The ground was hard and cold, Linns legs curled up against the curve of the small icy enclosure. Not much light in here, just his breath and hers in the thick quiet. Soggy woollen mittens and his warm weight leaning over her, but not hesitantly, the weight of his body was increasingly leaning onto hers. She was getting squashed. And he was not gentle, he had kissed girls before, he knew what to do.

Now she wanted to get out and he didn't want to let her go, after all that chasing! His mouth was all over her face. His tongue all over, everywhere, inside her mouth! Yuk!

Linnea could hear the other's crawling by and quickly kicked Tormod in the shin.

"Ouch!!"

The boy realised the snog was over and the chase back on. She was already out in the tunnel, hot on the heels of the others. In her nylon suit

Linnea slid through the tunnel easily. Monika was wearing woollen skipants that tended to get stuck where the tunnels pinched. As the chase stagnated again, she was waiting impatiently for Monika to ease herself through a particularly sunken passage, she could hear Tormod behind her. There was nothing to do but wait. Turning was impossible and backing too cumbersome. Inside the tunnels they were all confined by each other's progress, held by the darkness in the icy quiet and the stuffy smell of wet mittens and candle wax. No light got through here. They were heading back where the play started. To the big cave by the exit. There they had candles burning in niches in the walls.

At last after ealing through on their tummys the girls could with relief crawl on all fours. They stopped for a moment to catch their breath. Where the tunnel widened into the cave candles were shining along the walls, pale quiet flames sucking in the thinning oxygen. From here there was only a short passage out. They could see again! And hear! In the muffled distance children's voices were riding like kites on the air. There was the cheerful hello of a car horn nearby, herding the play out of the icy road.

"That's Pappa. Let me through, Linn, that's his car!"

Monika looked back at Linnea as she was squeezing past. Tom was already way ahead out in open air. Then the alcove lit up with a curious yellow glow, just a hesitant flicker at first, then a halo of yellow waves around Linnea's shoulders, hissing along her hair and tugging at the home-knitted Hardanger hat. Linnea's frightened scream filled the tunnels as the air swelled with the thick stench of burnt wool and melted nylon.

"Roll over! Roll over!"

Monika was screaming at her and tugging her onto her back, hitting out as much as space would allow trying to quench the flames with her wet

bemittened hands. She had pushed Linnea too close to the candles in the niche as she squeezed past! Now the back of Linn's nylon jacket was on fire!

Monika's woollen mittens were hammering down around Linn's shoulders and head. She had to stop them, had to put them out, the hungry tongues flashing on and off around Linnea's back, the hiss of the snakes of sizzling hair jostling the edges of her woollen hat!

The icy wall was in an instant melted, hollowed out around Linnea, the white of the afternoon air shining through, circularly and framed in black fuzzy ridges of soot. The sickly smell of the melting wind-jacket overtaken by the sour stench of scorched wool and hair. Monika's hammering hands were getting to the flames, finally! Or the melting snow. It didn't matter, it had stopped burning. Still wriggling against the melted wall Linnea finally burst through the black-speckled frame on the white garden, projecting herself through the gaping sooty whole, out into gentle snowfall. Large tender flakes now, teasing and drifting towards the ground. The horizon was hazy.

"Pappa!!!"

Fred was walking slowly, peacefully towards them, he had not heard the fracas, muffled from under the snow. Linnea lifted her hands in agony. The lovely white on blue knitted snow crystals in the Hardanger borders were edged in burnt brown around pink skin. Linnea's red jumper was beaded with melted nylon haphazardly lumping and ridging over the neck pattern. Her hair was curiously short, frizzled as if shorn with a blunt and dirty knife. But the fire had been stumped out! Thank God for busy mothers churning out woollen knits to keep their children smartly warm through the winters in the biting unforgiving cold of 10 degrees below, when acrylics

and polyesters just wouldn't do! Whole natural wool did not burn well. The woollen layers had saved Linnea!

Fred lifted her up. She looked small and childish, the boys watching in horror. Her father's face was pale but contained, a deep frown on his forehead. He checked her over quickly. "Your jumper saved you."

He pulled gently on Monika's scorched mittens to get them off her hands. The skin was pink and raw around her wrists.

"Monika, come along!" He bundled the two girls into the car. Someone else has parked their car in the drive.

"Better take you both to Casualty." He looked for a sign of Anita behind the windows. She was elsewhere, he would give her a ring from the A & E.

When Anita passed the gravy her tongue was pushing out from behind underneath her closed lower lip. It created a funny bump above her chin and made her face look long and disfigured. It was not a good sign to the children, their mother was pondering something.

"You can count yourselves lucky," she said at last. "It could have been a lot worse."

There was no warmth in the statement. They were to blame. They should have known better. Monika had got her wrists bandaged and was numb from the aspirin. Linnea was fighting back the tears. It was hard to eat, her tongue felt funny and her jaw ached. The meatballs and gravy tasted odd! Phuh! It was the last time she was kissing a boy!

"Is it a good idea to give them candles for outdoors?" Fred tried.

"They're big enough to know not to put candles in dangerous places! "

Anita retorted. "Don't you think I have enough to do, I certainly don't have the time to sit and watch them play all day."

She had been drinking coffee with Harald, the delivery man. She just needed some company, Freddy knew the boy too, she figured it was all right. He was a nice boy. She always had the coffee simmering on the stov and it would have been rude not to offer him a cup. Harald had such a long round and it was a cold day. It had given her an excuse for a cigarette. She felt a chill creeping up her neck watching Linnea struggle with the knife and fork with her bandaged hands.

"I have told you time and time again, Linnea, to be careful with candles and matches! Just be thankful that your luck was better than your sense this time"

Linnea looked harder at her potato. The bit in her mouth was getting stuck. She couldn't eat. Mother was noticing: "Now, eat up your dinner! Do I have to worry about you, big girls that you are, all the time?"

Anita rose from the table and quickly cleared Fred and Monikas dinner plates away. She put her own plate by the sink, she had only eaten half. She felt more like a cup of coffee and a cigarette than food. She had put aside an apple Danish. On the AGA was the crumble she had prepared for the children's pudding. She put in on the mat on the table and brought dishes down from the cupboard. Fredrick declined and got up, he had to get back for a couple of hours of cutting in the nurseries, tulips and daffs for the market tomorrow morning. She followed him into the hallway. For how much longer was he going to be working overtime?

Monika scoffed her crumble down and shouted after mother for permission to leave the table.

"Linn finish your dinner!" Linnea was always the last to finish. Always meticulous with food.

She sat slumping and despondent, the potato was just growing in her mouth, she couldn't eat. Then Lita sauntered into the kitchen in anticipation of the leftovers. The girls looked at each other, a little smile as they listened out for mother still talking to father in the hallway. Quickly Linn slid the potatoes under the table. They were gone! She listened out again and the girls giggled. The kitchen had two doors, one from the dining room and one from the hallway where mother was. Noone was approaching either side. It was safe. Quickly the rest of her dinner went the same way.

"Good dog," Monika whispered, patting the dog's golden head. "Good girl." The girls slid off the chairs. Linnea ran outside to give father a big hug on his way out. "I've finished," she said to mother. She skipped upstairs.

Anita returned to the kitchen and cleared off the table. She dumped the dishes in the sink and filled new fresh water in the kettle. Shaking the tablecloth off she grabbed the dishcloth and wiped the table-top before throwing the cloth back on. It was a green and yellow cloth with rabbits and daffodil. She was hoping for spring. The water came to the boil and she spooned the ground coffee in, the rich aroma spreading, again instantly bolstering her good humour. She waited a few minutes to let the coffee steep while she rinsed sauce and crumbs off plates and dishes. Then the coffee was ready and she poured her cup full, a dash of double cream, two cubes of sugar. After a couple of cigarettes she felt tired and decided to have another. She shouted to the children to put their pyjamas on and go to bed. It was near to eight o'clock. She finally got up and started filling hot soapy water in the sink. There were plenty of time for the chores, Fred would not be back for at least an hour.

Anita put the radio on and soaked her fingers in the hot water, her feet were doing a mini-jitter-bug to the music while she scrubbed the dishes. Oops! She had dropped a glass on the side of the sink, it shattered at the edge of the work top and shot like fireworks through the brightly lit room. She checked herself for a moment, it was only one of the kitchen-glasses, no big deal really. Smiling she fetched the dustpan and brush out from the broom cupboard. Her mother would not have approved. Dropping the broken glass in the bin she turned the radio up louder.

When Fred finally came home Monika was lying awake listening out for him. He had worked a lot of late hours lately cutting daffodils and narcissus in the nurseries but he always came up to the girls bedroom to say good night. As he slid open the door there were white bandages shining at him in the dark room, it made him hold his breath a little tighter, his little girls! What could have happened if the worst..., scars, disfigurements, he stopped the thought, it was making him feel shaky.

"Hi sweetpea. How are your hands?"

Fred sat himself down at the end of the bed.

"Oh, Pappa, it really hurts!"

"Really?" Fred put on a mock surprise? "I can't feel a thing."

"Oh Pappa, you're being stupid, not your hands, mine!"

"Oh, well if they're bothering you, maybe I should get a knife and cut them off for you?"

"Stupid!" Now Monika was laughing. She kicked him off the bed in exasperation.

There was Linnea, she was awake too, in the other bed, behind the chimney-breast:

"Pappa, am I old enough to have a bike now, when the roads clear again?"

"Linnea," his voice was a velvet ribbon. Soft and deep blue.

"I think you are."

Then he kissed them both and left the room.

Linnea had lost her jumper and hat, they had been scorched by the fire. Her thick brown hair had been cut short. The Emergency Room nurse had bandaged both of Monika's wrists.

For another while Monika lay awake looking out into the grey wide space that was her and Linnea's room, it was two-thirds of the whole first floor. The radio was playing downstairs. She was waiting for Anita to bring more aspirin. "In a minute," she had said, a long time ago.

Linnea was in her bed across the room, was she sleeping? She was very quiet. She was not breathing. She might have died from the shock of their accident? The only sound now was of mother clattering dishes in the kitchen. Then father's steps were on the stairs. Father's steps on the landing. He was in the doorway and had brought the aspirin.

"It will be all right. Get a good night's sleep, now."

"Will Mamma come and say good night?"

"She'll be up in a minute."

Mother did not appear in the strip of light in the doorway. There was the clattering of the kettle being put on. Now she was talking on the phone.

Linnea heard father going to bed, he had to get up at half past five for the early market. She heard Linnea sigh in her sleep, so she was not dead.

The snow was falling outside. It was slowly covering the tunnels and caves. The sooty hole in the tunnel wall and the children's tracks to and from had already nearly disappeared. No one looking into the garden over the white-painted fence, onto the wooden panells of the white-painted house in the white snow, would know now that the tunnels were even there. All they would see in the grey snowy nightfall would be the blue door and the warm glow of the lamp through the window. The red hat that Monika had lost, Tone's spade, they were hidden now. The cones that had fallen from the spruce, the ones they had been throwing at each other. The candles left behind in the caves. It was all grey, under the newly fallen snow in the quiet night. Only when spring came, when it finally all melted away would it be there again for everyone to see, scattered on the frozen yellow lawn.

When Monika woke again, it was suddenly pitch black. She knew father would get up early. He was having to make wreaths for a funeral. She slid off her bed and tiptoed quietly out of the room. Monika was sleeping in her bed behind the chimney. The chimney was a square pillar through the middle of the room. It was wallpapered with comics from floor to ceiling. Linn could faintly make out the Donald Duck cartoon strips in the dark. The door to mother and father's room was closed, but not locked. They were both in bed, asleep. All that showed of mother was a tuft of hair sticking out from under the quilt. She was curled up under the warm downs. Father was stretched out on his back. Pale and clearly drawn in the cold air. The window was always ajar at night.

The child slid under the duvet next to her father pulling the nightie down around her feet. His body was solid and steady in his resting position on his hard orthopaedic mattress. He felt warm and cool at the same time. Half asleep Fred put his arm under the child's neck as she was trying to ease a dent in the firm pillow. Finally she was resting her head besides his, breathing the faint aroma of shampoo and aftershave, the clock ticking away quietly. Fred and Mon were on their backs, side by side, like lookouts on a ship. In the end the alarmclock rudely intruded on the child's reveries and the man's sleep. Fred got up rubbing his aching back, careful not to hurt Monika's bandaged wrists. She looked a little better now, smiling to him sleepily in the dark in the cold room. There was colour in her cheeks.

Mon watched the pyjama flapping behind him out the bedroom door. Then she tucked the duvet in against the cold winter air. Her mother, from inside her eithersdown swamp was soundly snoring. Anita drew in a loud barking noise, finally turning over. The quilt opened up and drew the child under into the warm soft hollow of the mother's grasp.

Her husband was never there in the morning. He left so early, even at the weekends. Anita noticed Monika moaning and realised she was squashing her wrist with the bandage. Moving out of the way she made the mattress sink under them both making an even bigger hollow for the child to slide into. Maybe she should not have got angry with the children, it had been an accident after all. But they really were old enough to be sensible with candles. And she had got so frightened realising what had happened. She could not be there all the time to watch them. Anita sighed in her sleepy state. It was always the same, it was not her fault but she would be the one everybody blamed.

Fred made his way along the flower beds towards the sales department . The long rows of tulips were a lovely sight now they were all just ready to be cut. The nurseries had hedged their bets on a new variant, it had been a bit of an experiment and had been Fred's idea. He had read an article about it in the Chronicle and had talked his father into trying them. They were a particularly stout and fast growing sort which meant they had to be cut and sold within a short span of time, before passing the saleable stage. It had meant a lot of overtime most of which had fallen on him since the whole thing had been his idea. It had been well worth the gamble for the nurseries. Having good strong stems and large brightly coloured heads they had been popular with the retailers. For himself he was not sure it had been such a good idea. His father had refused to pay him overtime for the long evenings and weekends of work when rapid harvesting had been necessary. Anita had not been pleased.

From the green houses he continued into the packing room, and dug a brochure and a large apple out of the pocket of his overalls. He rubbed the apple against his sleeve to clean it and spread the glossy paper out on the desk in front of him. It was about television-sets, a device that could receive live pictures being transmitted from a central, broadcast they called it. It would be just like the movies but in your own livingroom. He found the idea fascinating. It had already been around for a while abroad, but the Norwegian government had been slow introducing it, they had just started sending the first trial pictures a few months ago. So far there were only transmissions at the weekends. He had seen them at his dad's house, Georg had of course already got himself a set. There were a large broadcasting central being built on the other side of town. Oslo was meant to have regular transmissions within a year. They were saying there would soon be a television set in every house. Frank pulled down a sheet of

wrapping paper from the shelf above the table and fished a pen out of his pocket. He was spending a lot of time at the nurseries lately, the black gleaming heap of soil was a constant reminder to him of all the things he wanted and of all the time he was not with his wife and children. He sighed. He didn't see much of them packing and refining compost every evening for as long as the daylight lasted. He didn't mind, for a while, Anita would have to manage. There had been many more loads coming from Lundin's excavation site than he had anticipated, money that neither he nor Anita had counted on. Encouraged by the thought he started doodling designs on the rough grey paper, rings and pendants inset with sparkling stones. He drew the jewellery complete with Anita's slim neck and beautiful hands, his father had always dabbled in painting. He had often thought he might be an architect or a designer himself. He had painted a couple of oil paintings after his eldest was born, lovely blue-eyed Monika. He ought to have been an architect or a designer, he thought to himself, even an artist, not a nurseries dogsbody. He really had to get a book on precious stones.

There were so many things he wanted to do , so many places and things he would have liked to see. He loved his Anita and their children so and wanted for them all the best that life could offer: Art, travel and education. But right now he had work waiting, four long rows of tulips to be cut and bunched before he could leave. Anita would have dinner ready at seven. On the grindstone by the table he sharpened his knife and tested it on the edge of the old worn table top. It was nice and sharp. He picked a pair of padded gloves out of the cupboard and stuffed them in his pocket. He would only wear them if his fingers got cut or too sore. He worked faster with his bare hands. Slipping through to the greenhouses he wondered to himself why Paul Lundin was letting him have the compost for free. He

would be expecting something in return surely, it was always the case. He had never been given something for nothing.

He watched another dumpertruck arriving and depositing its load, there was his father too in his black Mercedes. It was rare seeing him in the nurseries before lunch.

"Ah, there you are."

Fred ignored his father's less than welcoming greeting. He nodded towards the truck departing.

"It makes good compost with a little sand and manure added, I'll continue refining and packing it in the evenings", he assured his father. "You won't have any trouble with it. Well, better get back to work." He slapped his dad's shoulder lightly as a close to the conversation and set off for the greenhouses leaving the older man standing. His shoulders were lightly stooped and his hands clenched behind his back. His face gathered around a deep furrow between his eyes. Fred sighed quietly. His father was thinking, no doubt scaming again. Now what was he up to? Opening the door to the warm humid hothouses he tried to shrug the sudden gloom off. He was too happy about the soil to worry about his parents. His father had been bending the rules getting himself into some corner? It was nothing new, he would bend another rule to get himself out, it was their speciality, his and Kat's. They had always done it and somehow they always came out of it landing on their feet, they were good at it. Katrine was the most cunning woman from here to hell! He chuckled to himself, relishing in his stepmother's devilish reincarnation posturing in his mind. He had often damned her in his younger days when she was scaming at his expense. These days he expected it, he had no sympathy any more for her and his father's dilemmas, they could solve their own problems.

Talking of the Devil! There was another car in the drive, it was Kat's little Ford. He had better take five minutes and put the coffee on, with his father already in a bad mood he would be better off keeping them both sweet.

Katrine spotted Fred through the glass doors and opened them with a large red smile: "Hello, Freddy", her voice-box chimed, the sound of her voice always seemed somehow disconnected to the rest of her face. "Good to see you, dear. How are Anita and the girls? Don't bother with the coffee, darling, I've only come to have a word with your father. And I must take some flowers for the chairman of the Flowertrader's. There's the General Meeting this evening." She nodded approvingly at her own intention and waved at Fred as she scuttled over to her husband on her spiky heels. Fred had to admit it, in spite of her slightly ridiculous air, her heels being slightly too high, her hair a little too blond, that she was a handsome woman, a lot younger looking than her 48 years. She had the Norwegian vivid-blue eyes, nearly as bright as Anita's but the shape was slanted and always smily, like leaning half-moons. Kat had always been good at making her own bed, with nothing less than silk sheets and eitherdowns. She did not believe in letting her long nails break by doing things others could do for her. A smile came to Freddy's face as he watched his parents talking and gesticulating out in the yard. Katrine was a Nordic beauty but had the temperament of a Mediterranean. It had never been dull growing up with her. He watched her leaving again and put the coffee on anyway, helping himself to a cup, pouring another for his father who was returning to the sales room. Georg accepted and lit himself a cigarette, but continued to pace the sales department up and down until finally stopping in front of Fred.

"Shouldn't you be on your shop-round, Ah, it is Olav doing the round." He was doing his 'friendly distracted' act, something had to be up! Fred knew

his father's various tactics, and he knew there was never anything helpless or flaky about him. He had a sharp mind and always knew what he was doing.

"It is a problem, it is a problem, he was muttering, conversing into the air, not looking at his son as he was pacing the floor again. Fred's suspicion grew, what did his father want?

"It is getting urgent with the tulips," he finally said, they will need harvesting now within the week."

"I know, dad, I'm onto it."

Was that it! Fred gathered his knife and gloves up and waited for Georg to move out of the way to let him through the misty door to the west wing. No time to hang about.

"This compost of yours, it is a bit of a problem, upsetting our usual thrift somewhat. Of course we do sell bags of compost," he said."You will be offering this for sale..." he hesitated, "maybe sell it from here?"

Fred saw the point: His father was going to lose a few bob selling compost in the shop, the odd bag or two that he would normally be selling directly to customers himself.

"OK, I'll sell you my own compost wholesale price for sale in the shop, it will be lower than your usual brand, we both win?" Fred suggested.

"Half of wholesale price." His father negotiated. Another lorry load was backing through the drive and onto the adjacent field.

"An eyesore," his father muttered.

"You will have no trouble with it, dad, I'll go out and buy what I need on Saturday and do all the packing in the evenings.

Fred considered the conversation for ended. If there was such a hurry he had better get on with the cutting.

His father moved to the side letting him through: "Ah, well yes..", he said "We are somewhat behind with the cutting. Well, as long as you have cleared the soil by next Friday, we are lending the land out to a Lion's bazaar, one of Kat's little charities, you know how much they mean to her."

Fred stopped in the doorway. There it was then, the impossible term. The usual pettiness. He was convinced it was an invention, he had heard no talk of a bazaar before, and who wanted to hold a bazaar in a field in the middle of nowhere? They knew very well there was no way he could have all the soil cleared in ten days. There were another three or four loads to come, it would be an ongoing job taking him the best part of the summer, a couple of months at least and after that he would still need somewhere to store it. It was a ridiculous term. They had planned it all, pushing him into a corner, then pretending to take pity on him, making a little profit on his behalf. Always trying to milk him for a little bit more. He knew how they worked.

Standing stiffly in the doorway he knew what was coming. "One week? You know I have work out there for at least a month"

"Oh, well, I guess Katrine will have to find them a different location," Georg continued. You could maybe give her a little something, to compensate her, she will have to rent another field, a couple of hundred I guess should do it. All for a good cause." He chuckled goodnaturedly and winked at his son. Fred raise his eyebrows in irony only, it was not worth offering a reply.

"Mr Lundin was wondering if you'd be interested in a set of emeralds? I'm sure Kat could do with a little cheering up?"

He let the door slide quietly behind him, his parents were not worth a tantrum, and continued across the moist tiled floor under the glass ceiling. He knew them all too well, they had worked it out between them out in the yard, how to squeeze another drop of blood out of their own son. He had given them years and years of hard work and what had he got in return, not even a partnership in the business. Freddy had learnt a long time ago not to oppose them, he had learnt the hard way, Katrine and his dad were always one step ahead. Kat had never liked him much the dark eyed eldest son of Goerg's first wife. All the opportunities his half-sisters had been given she had cunningly denied him always waving the big carrot in front of his face: The Nurseries were all to be his one day. One day! He was sick of the whole bloody business, his ball and chain. While his sisters had graduated at university and had good years of travelling he had always been indispensable in the nurseries. What did he need an education for, he was learning it all on the job? His business? It had to be his in the end! It had happened to him too many times, Katrine stealing his piece of the cake! There was always something keeping him down!

How had he ended up spending his time picking flowers? There were so many things he could have been good at. All he needed was to be given a chance. Fred clenched his jaws trying to chase away the feelings of melancholy rolling in over him. Seeing the bright rows of red and orange ahead of him filled him only with resentment. One thing he knew for sure: He would never allow his own children to enter the family business. He would see them in well paid independent profession: Architects, dentist, lawyers and doctors, people being masters of their own lives. His girls would have the freedom his parents had denied him. He bent down letting

his frustration whistle out between clenched teeth. He had four rows of tulips to cut, sort by colour and bunch before the end of the day, he had to get on with it. He wanted to get home for dinner. One by one he started cutting the bouncy green stems with his sharp knife.

The tenth of June was Anita's 30th birthday. She was having a big dinner for all her family and friends. In the morning Anita's mother and Eva were helping Anita set the table. The house that Fred had built for his family had a through lounge, it made it an excellent space for big traditional family dinners. The menfolk were all there, sweating and swearing as they were struggling with the two and one piece of the three piece settee. The heavy furniture were to be stacked in the bedroom next to the lounge. The door frame was just big enough for squeezing through the chair, and hopefully the two piece, as well. If they raised it up vertically, and slightly diagonally, armrest towards the ceiling, and lifted it a little...

The table for the big dinner was to be a C-shape, for seating about thirty guests, so both lounge and dining room had to be cleared. As the menfolk were sweating and swearing Mrs Pederson's mouth was getting thinner. A slight twitch of the head and a downwards disapproving glance, directed slightly to the side of Eva did like magic, for a split second, collapse the daughter's stature. She quickly regained herself. "But Bjorn!" she said to her spouse in a voice expressing both her faith in and her disapproval of him. There was only one way to do things, the right way.

There was the reply, the exasperated: "Women!!" on Bjorn's lips, but he didn't say it. Instead Eva's husband minded his language.

"Fredrick couldn't be here, then?"

It was Anita's turn to cringe: "No, mother, he couldn't get away from the nurseries."

"Saturday morning, you would think they could do without him!" Mrs Pedersen held on. She did not approve. She and her husband had always put their family first!

"Yes, you would think so. He'll be back this afternoon."

The table had finally gained its C-shape, put together by the extended dining table and six fold-up tables borrowed from the local community centre. Six places in the middle: Anita and Freddy, then their parents, Liv and August Pedersen and Georg and Katrine Holst