The background of the cover is a photograph. In the upper half, a dark wooden cabin with a gabled roof and two windows with white shutters sits on a rocky shore. In the lower half, a woman with short grey hair is smiling and swimming in dark blue water. She is wearing a crown of colorful flowers. The text is overlaid on a bright orange rectangular box in the center.

**THE WOMAN
WHO BORROWED
MEMORIES**
SELECTED STORIES
TOVE JANSSON

INTRODUCTION BY
LAUREN GROFF

TOVE JANSSON (1914–2001) was born in Helsinki into Finland's Swedish-speaking minority. Her father was a sculptor and her mother a graphic designer and illustrator. Winters were spent in the family art-filled studio and summers in a fisherman's cottage in the Pellinge archipelago, a setting that would later figure in Jansson's writing for adults and children. Jansson loved books as a child and set out from an early age to be an artist. Her first illustration was published when she was fifteen years old; four years later a picture book appeared under a pseudonym. After attending art schools in both Stockholm and Paris, she returned to Helsinki, where in the 1940s and '50s she won acclaim for her paintings and murals. From 1929 until 1953 Jansson drew humorous illustrations and political cartoons for the left-leaning anti-Fascist Finnish-Swedish magazine *Garm*, and it was there that what was to become Jansson's most famous creation, Moomintroll, a hippopotamus-like character with a dreamy disposition, made his first appearance. Jansson went on to write about the adventures of Moomintroll, the Moomin family, and their curious friends in a long-running comic strip and in a series of books for children that have been translated throughout the world, inspiring films, several television series, an opera, and theme parks in Finland and Japan. Jansson also wrote eleven novels and short-story collections for adults, including *The Summer Book*, *The True Deceiver*, and *Fair Play* (available as NYRB Classics). In 1994 she was awarded the Prize of the Swedish Academy. Jansson and her companion, the artist Tuulikki Pietilä, continued to live part time in a cottage on the remote outer edge of Pellinge until 1991.

THOMAS TEAL has translated many of Tove Jansson's works into English, beginning in the 1970s with *The Summer Book* and *Sun City* and more recently, *The True Deceiver* (2009, winner of the Best Translated Book Award) and *Fair Play* (2011, winner of the Bernard Shaw Prize for translation from the Swedish). He lives in Massachusetts.

SILVESTER MAZZARELLA is a translator of Italian and Swedish literature. For many years he lived in Finland, where he taught English literature at the University of Helsinki. His most recent translation from the Swedish is *Tove Jansson: Life, Art, Words* by Boel Westin (2014). He now lives in Canterbury, England.

LAUREN GROFF is the author of the novels *Arcadia* and *The Monsters of Templeton*, and *Delicate Edible Birds*, a story collection. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*, as well as in the Pushcart Prize, PEN/O. Henry, and Best American Short Stories anthologies. She lives in Gainesville, Florida.

THE WOMAN WHO BORROWED MEMORIES

Selected Stories

TOVE JANSSON

Translated from the Swedish by

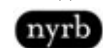
THOMAS TEAL and

SILVESTER MAZZARELLA

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INTRODUCTION

TOVE JANSSON is a writer of islands.

This sentence is slippery, “of” being the operative word. From the time she was very small, islands were important to Jansson, as her family spent their summers in the stony, windswept Pelling archipelago in southern Finland. The family belonged to the tiny minority of Swedish-speaking Finns, and both of Jansson’s parents were artists, her father a sculptor and her mother an illustrator. All summer, in their happy isolation, the little girl and her brothers swam and fished and ran, did the chores, told stories by firelight, and drew. Throughout her life, she would return again and again to islands as a setting in her work. Her motto became “Work and Love,” and she committed to both with a ferocious intensity.

Jansson, bright and precocious, wrote and illustrated her first picture book at age fourteen. Later she attended art academies and started her artistic life as a painter, accepting commissions for large-scale frescoes and exhibiting when she could. To support herself, she took on steady illustration work for magazines and books. During World War II, when she was thirty-one, Jansson began to write and illustrate books for children about the Moomintrolls, a family of plump and kindly beasts, which combined a dark subterranean wit with a strong philosophical bent. Beginning in 1954, the Moomins became a syndicated comic strip and made Jansson rich and internationally famous. They also made her grindingly busy. She began to long for the isolation of her hungry early years, when her art was hers alone and she didn’t have to answer the thousands of letters sent every year from her young fans or live under the pressure of producing a weekly comic strip. Soon she built the first of her own series of cabins in the Pellinge islands and escaped for the summer to live among the eider ducks and thunderstorms. Later she brought along her lifelong companion and love, the artist Tuulikki Pietilä. When she found that she could at last leave the Moomin strip to her brother, Jansson returned to painting but found to her dismay that the gatekeepers of fine art had become wary of welcoming a famous cartoonist back into their ranks.

And so in 1968, when she was fifty-four years old, Jansson began to write books for adults. She found a joy in the demands of this new literary form. In her (to me, perfect) 1972 novel, *The Summer Book*, Jansson writes “An island can be dreadful for someone from outside. Everything is complete and everyone has his obstinate, sure and self-sufficient place. Within their shores, everything functions according to rituals that are as hard as rock from repetition, and at the same time they ambled through their days as whimsically and casually as if the world ended at the horizon.” This quote doubles back on itself: It is a lovely description of physical islands, but also as a description of an artist during the steady and happy days of creation. In her very dark novel *The True Deceiver*, Jansson writes of a children’s book illustrator: “It was simply that she was only fully alive when she devoted herself to her singular ability to draw, and when she drew she was naturally always alone.” An artist happiest alone in her work, focused, deep in the rituals the work necessitates. When writing, there is nothing beyond the story’s own urgent horizons.

Of her fifteen books for adults, Jansson wrote four as original short-story collections. “I love the short story,” she wrote in a note in 1990, “concentrated and united around a single idea. There must be nothing unnecessary in it, one must be able to hold the tale enclosed in one’s hand” (quoted in Bob Westin’s excellent and comprehensive 2014 biography, *Tove Jansson: Life, Art, Words*). Short stories are themselves islands, spare and self-contained. A collection is formed of separate works, whole unto themselves, and yet borne of the same geologic pressures; the book you have in your hands, culled from stories published over the span of five books and twenty-five years, is in many ways an aerie.

map of Jansson's deepest concerns. Most artists are given a few urgent themes that they will endlessly circle and explore in their lives. From the gull's-eye view of a collection of selected stories, patterns emerge, a larger story is told.

Jansson returned again and again to the themes of painting and drawing, the intensity of close attention, the celebration of visual beauty, the lure of travel, the strange magic that takes place where the natural world meets the human, and, most pervasively, the terror of imminent disaster just out of sight. In the happy valley where the Moomins live, a flood comes that obscures the earth and sets the Moomin family afloat; a comet nears, threatening all life, and driving even the waters of the ocean away to hide. Likewise, a sense of danger lurks at the edges of most of the stories in *The Woman Who Borrowed Memories*: an old couple painfully survives after an apocalypse ("Shopping"); a winter storm pushes threateningly into the apartment of a woman who is unhappy in love ("The Storm"); an old acquaintance steals a woman's memories until the robber, in effect, ends up appropriating the other woman's life ("The Woman Who Borrowed Memories"). Most of these stories spin around isolates, people who stand sturdily in the center of the tales, watching the way others move in the world around them. The awful child Elis who visits the family on their happy island in the hilarious "The Summer Child" is distanced from humanity by his clear-sighted recognition of all things in the world that are inhumane; Erik in "The Doll's House" is boxed out of his lover's passion for building a dollhouse by an unwelcome interloper; in the story "Letters to Konikova," based on Jansson's own letters to her friend the photographer Eva Konikova who emigrated to America, the narrator is furious at being left behind. Jansson's characters long to connect at the same time that they fight helplessly and fiercely for their autonomy.

Jansson's prose is so clear and her wit so sharp that it would be easy to overlook the terror that animates the animating spirit for most of these stories. As the artist in "Black-White" writes, "No one can depict desolation who hasn't inhabited desolation and observed it very closely. Things condemned to have a terrible beauty." It is the terrible beauty, this simultaneous dose of horror and splendor, that unites all of the art of Jansson, but particularly this selected edition of her decades of stories. In "The Garden of Eden," kindly Viktoria goes for a walk in the little village in Spain that she's visiting and is depressed to find herself in an awful place, full of stunted olive trees and dirty sheep and plastic bags that trip her, "a kind of rubbish dump, the unavoidable outskirts of any human paradise." Then, in a breath, things change: "the setting sun broke through a gap in the mountain chain and the twilight landscape was instantly transformed and revealed; the trees and the grazing sheep enveloped in a crimson haze, a sudden, beautiful vision of biblical mystery and power. Viktoria thought she had never seen anything so lovely. She remembered once a set designer saying, 'My job is to paint with light, that's all it is. The right light at the right time.'"

The right light at the right time: One can hear Jansson, the academy-trained painter, here. The darkness is as essential as the joyous and equally perilous light. The light and the dark give each other definition. In "Black-White," an artist pushes the thought a bit further, writing to his wife, "I see my work as pieces of reality or unreality carved at random from a long and ineluctable course of events—the darkness I draw continues on endlessly. I cut across it with narrow and dangerous shafts of light."

There are videos online of Klovharu, the island where Jansson and Pietilä spent their summers in their eighties. The cabin is tiny; it has windows in all four directions so the women could see visitors coming from far off and prepare themselves. Outside, all is rock and wildflower, noisy with the constant waves and screams of the seabirds and high wind. There is no electricity. At night, they had to find their way by the light of kerosene lamps and stars. It is easy to imagine a storm black on the horizon, the breakneck oncoming rush of it. The birds quiet and hide as the darkness comes on. The wind begins to beat on the house, the waves spray the windows and obscure them, the rain crashes on the roof; it is all exhilarating, it feels as if the house will be swept at any moment off the rock and sea.

sailing into the ocean. Inside, there is a small circle of lamplight, there is work and love. The terror
~~what's outside makes what's inside warmer, gentler; the light presses bravely against the danger and~~
darkness. We read Tove Jansson to remember that to be human is dangerous, but also breathtakingly
beautiful.

—LAUREN GRO

THE LISTENER

AUNT GERDA was fifty-five when it began, and the first sign of change was in her letters. They grew impersonal.

She was a quiet, well-to-do woman of ordinary appearance. Nothing about her was provocative, disturbing, or exaggerated. But she was a good letter writer. Not brilliant, of course, not amusing, but in her letters Aunt Gerda took up and examined every detail communicated to her without ever subjecting her correspondents to meddlesome advice. They had grown accustomed to the fact that she replied at once, not anxiously but with care and serious interest. Her letters often ended with a wish for a productive autumn or a pleasant spring, and this generous time limit seemed to give them full freedom to take their time with their next letter.

Reading one of Aunt Gerda's letters was exciting, like reliving one's own experiences, only the time dramatized and clarified on a wider stage, with a Greek chorus observing and underlining the action. And with the certain assurance that she would never reveal the confidences with which she was so often rewarded.

Now, and for some time past, Aunt Gerda waited weeks and months with her replies, and when she finally did write, her letters were marred by unworthy excuses, her handwriting had grown large and loose, and she wrote on only one side of the paper. And her masterfully detailed sympathy had lost its warmth.

When a person loses what might be called her essence—the expression of her most beautiful qualities—it sometimes happens that the alteration widens and deepens and with frightening speed overwhelms her entire personality. This is what happened to Aunt Gerda. Soon she was dropping names, forgetting birthdays, faces, promises. She began coming late—the woman who always used to sit and wait on the steps and still be the first to arrive. Her tardy presents were too expensive, too big, too impersonal, and accompanied by embarrassing excuses. No longer the lovingly calculated gifts that she had made herself. No longer the pretty, touching Christmas cards put together from pressed flowers, angels, and occasional glitter. Now she bought expensive, glossy cards with printed wishes for joy and happiness.

As a result, the dispatches Aunt Gerda sent out bore sad witness to her transformation—a vast, depressing lack of attentiveness. People carry their loved ones with them. They are forever present and life is full of easily grasped opportunities to show them one's affection. It costs so little and achieves so much. Her siblings and nieces and nephews and friends all felt that Gerda had lost her style, her sense of responsibility, that she had grown self-centered from living alone—or perhaps it was the inescapable forgetfulness that comes with age. But deep down they knew that the change was deeper. It was inexplicable and basic and a matter of shifts in the mysterious stratum that forms a person's character and worth.

Aunt Gerda was aware of what was happening to her, but she didn't understand it. The acts and attitudes that had been a voluntary adaptation and concession to her own kindheartedness became very suddenly an overwhelming burden. She was plagued by self-reproach. Time, the passing hours, the need to be punctual was perhaps the most difficult of all. Days with an afternoon or evening invitation had their own timing, capricious and anxious even in the morning. In an odd way, they were bifurcated, so to speak. On the one side was Aunt Gerda's genuine anticipation as she arranged the things she wanted to have with her when she left home. And on the other side was a great uncertainty with regard to names, faces, words, and the grasp of detail and context that must be complete for

anyone who loves. On that side, too, was the enemy—time. Time that relentlessly approaches a certain predetermined second at which someone on the other side of a door begins to wait. A second is less than one breath, and everything that follows is too late, more and more too late. When Aunt Gerda approached the appointed time for departure, her unease became unbearable. She made peculiar mistakes, misread the clock, started doing small irrelevant chores. She grew suddenly tired and fell asleep in her chair, and if she'd set the alarm clock, she might go out on the stairs or into the attic for no reason at all just when it rang. When the poor woman finally managed to arrive—too late—she couldn't keep herself from annoying her host and hostess with desperate and overly detailed excuses.

Time passed and things did not improve. It is difficult when a person one values behaves badly, so much so that no one can rush in and help. In the middle of a sentence, Aunt Gerda would forget whether one of her sister's children was a boy or a girl and stop abruptly in a panic and then say, very softly, "I mean, how is your . . . child?" She introduced herself to people she'd known for years, and her fear was so visible that it cast gloom on everyone she knew.

It is important to describe all this in order to understand Aunt Gerda's behavior in the late winter of nineteen hundred seventy.

Probably few of us pay adequate attention to all the things constantly happening to the people we love, a steady, compact mass of activity that can be grasped in its entirety only by a person like Aunt Gerda—before she changed, of course. Loved ones take exams and degrees or fail to take them; they get raises and grants or fail to get them; they have children and miscarriages and neuroses; they have trouble with the help and their sex lives and teenage rebelliousness and misconceptions and money and maybe their stomachs or their teeth; they lose their faith or their jobs or their self-confidence or the person they're trying to live with and then lose themselves in politics or self-deception or disappointment or ambition; they get disloyalty and funerals and all sorts of frights thrown right in their faces; and eventually they get wrinkles and a thousand other things they hadn't expected—and Aunt Gerda had all of that in the palm of my hand, thought Aunt Gerda in distress. It was all as clear as an etching, and I made no mistakes! I never made a mistake. What is it that's happened to me?

She often woke at night and was unable to fall back to sleep. Sometimes she wondered where the calm, happy people might be found, if such people even existed, and whether she might dare to let herself be captivated if she ever did find them. No, Aunt Gerda thought. They too carry some secret weight, they too hide some burden that they want to share.

Letters, gifts, and affection's glossy greetings are important. But the ability to listen face-to-face is even more important, a great and rare art. Aunt Gerda had always been a good listener, aided perhaps by her difficulty in expressing herself and by her lack of curiosity. She had been listening to friends and relatives ever since she was young, listening while they talked about themselves and each other, carrying them with her in a huge, artfully constructed mental map of crisscrossing lives. She listened with her whole large, flat face, unmoving, leaning slightly forward, with downcast eyes, though she would occasionally look up, quickly and in obvious distress. She didn't touch her coffee and let her cigarette burn down. Only in the short pauses that even a tragic tale leaves open for trivial but necessary explanations did she permit herself a lungful of smoke and a deep swallow of coffee before replacing the cup on its saucer carefully and without a sound. In essence, Aunt Gerda was not much more than silence. Afterward, it was difficult to reconstruct what she had said, maybe only a breathless questioning—Yes? Really?—or a quick expression of sympathy.

As the years went by and Aunt Gerda's weight of insight grew, it troubled no one that she knew so much about them. They counted on her protective faculty; they let themselves be misled by her peculiar air of innocence and neutrality. It was like telling secrets to a tree or a devoted pet and never having afterward that queasy feeling that you've given yourself away. But now it was as if Aunt Gerda had lost her innocence. Her broad face listened the same way—open, unfurrowed—and though her

brief expostulations were the same, they had lost something of their shyness and the simple desire to know in order to understand and so to love. There was not the same pain in her eyes, and she had developed an annoying, involuntary gesture that was, perhaps, apologetic.

Not many of them called Aunt Gerda that winter and spring. Her apartment grew very quiet and peaceful, she listened only to the elevator or sometimes to the rain. She often sat at her window and watched the change of seasons. She had a bay window in a semicircular projection that was rather chilly. The window was round and now in March embellished with icicles. The spikes of ice were thick and finely chiseled by running water. In the evening, they turned blue. No one called and no one came. It seemed to her the window was a great eye looking out over the city and the harbor and a stretch of the gulf under ice. The new silence and emptiness was not entirely a loss, it was something of a relief. Aunt Gerda felt like a balloon, untied, soaring off its own way. But, she thought, it's a balloon that's bouncing against the ceiling and can't get free.

She understood that this was no way to live, human beings are not built to float. She needed an earthly anchor of meaning and care so she didn't get lost in confusion. One day, with water dripping from the eaves, Aunt Gerda decided to exercise her memory and pull herself back to the simple plan where her life had its justification. She made a list of the devoted people she could remember and their children and grandchildren and other relatives and made an earnest effort to remember when they were all born. The paper was much too small. Aunt Gerda rolled out a long piece of shelf paper on the dining-room table and held it down with thumbtacks. She made a big black dot, a round head for each of them, with the name and birth date and title in a pretty little oval. She placed their children alongside, connected to their parents with a red line. She put all romantic relationships in pink—double lines for unconventional or forbidden alliances. Aunt Gerda became engrossed. Some heads were burdened with perfect coronas of pink—like galactic suns, impressive and probably regrettable.

For the first time, Aunt Gerda became aware of her own private commentary, which was not entirely benign. She bought crayons in new colors and worked on conscientiously—divorces in violet, hate in crimson, loyalty lines in bright cerulean. The dead were gray. She left space for memory to provide all the facts and data that fill and surround a life. She had time now to remember. Time was no longer a danger, it moved in parallel with herself and later on she would nail it down in a neat little oval. Aunt Gerda noted thefts of money, of children, of work and love and trust. She remembered those who drowned one another in bad conscience or who froze each other out. She drew their lines and erased them to make them more precise. Time was no longer bifurcated, and she listened only to her inner voice. Her memory delivered up tones of voice and silences, faces that clenched and were naked and then closed again, and all the mouths that talked and talked. Aunt Gerda gathered them all and put them to good use. What she wrote in the ovals lost its weight and its pain but retained its meaning. Aunt Gerda's memory opened like a great seashell, every twist was clear and exact and retained its echo. Even very distant echoes came gradually closer, like whispers.

As the spring wore on, Aunt Gerda transferred her great life map onto better, thicker paper. She was bothered a little by repetitions that might strike some as banal, but all human behavior follows quite primitive rules. And anyway she did have one unique event—an attempted murder. She inscribed it in purple and felt a little cold thrill, maybe not unlike the thrill a stamp collector feels when he fastens a priceless misprint into his collection.

Sometimes Aunt Gerda sat quietly without trying to remember, simply immersed in her solitary system of past and emerging lives, sensing the future changes in the lines and ovals, inevitable in the light of obvious cause and effect. She felt a desire to forestall what must happen, to draw her own lines, new lines, maybe in silver and gold since all the other colors were taken. She toyed recklessly with the idea of making the dots and ovals movable, game pieces that could shift their context and create new constellations and entanglements.

Now and then the telephone rang, but Aunt Gerda said she had a cold and couldn't see anyone.

~~Toward the end of April, Aunt Gerda began to draw a frame around her map, a frame of small peculiar ornaments, not unlike the distracted figures a person doodles in a telephone directory while listening. She was listening, inwardly, to words in short sentences that summarized what she knew.~~

Her nephew called and asked if he might drop by, but Aunt Gerda replied that she hadn't the time. The map was approaching its ultimate meaning. It was at a critical stage and would tolerate no interference.

The large planets hold the small ones in place with a firm grip. Satellites follow their predetermined paths. And the strong lines of the dead cross all the others, the double lines, the dotted lines, the coiled lines. Calculation, disappointment, and loss. Aunt Gerda had drawn the beautiful relationships in such light colors that they were hidden by the stronger colors, and perhaps some of them had been erased in the course of her work. Now she drew only words, in short intensive sentences, each of which summarized a truth. Each of them was meant for someone to listen to very carefully. Did you know that was your fault he died? Do you know that you're not the father of your daughter? That your friend dislikes you? The map immediately needed alteration and Aunt Gerda drew her first line in gold. It was a terrifying and irresistible mental game that she called "the fatal words." It could only be played in the evening by the window. She realized that such words must be uttered only at long intervals, that they were ever really uttered at all. Eight, nine words were sometimes enough for widespread and lasting alterations to the great map on the dining-room table. And later, when the time was right, new words for a new listener and once again the picture would change. The effects could be estimated and predicted, like when you play chess with yourself. Aunt Gerda remembered some lines of poetry she had read as a child.

Frithiof sat with Björn the true
At the chessboard, fair to view;
Squares of silver decked the frame,
Interchanged with squares of gold.

She would draw her lines of silver and gold, then wait, perhaps quite a while, then draw another line. She had time, and the material was inexhaustible.

It was early in May. Far into the bright nights she sat by the window and played her great and dangerous game. She didn't light the lamps. The nights were luminous—the transparent, lingering blue that comes with spring. She didn't need to look at the map, she knew it by heart. As she formed and spoke the words, the lines and ovals moved and the colors steadily changed. For the first time in her life, Aunt Gerda had the sweet and bitter experience of power.

When the weather grew warmer, she opened the window, put on her coat, covered her legs with a blanket, and sat in the bay to look out at the city and the strip of open water. Now she could hear footsteps and voices down on the street, every sound clear and distinct. All the passersby seemed to be on their way to the harbor. It seemed to Aunt Gerda that the rooms where she lived no longer enclosed her, they had turned outward and away. The too luminous night was suddenly disquieting and made her sad. She began to think about all the things happening out there right now that she knew nothing about. All the time, every minute, something was happening out there.

Aunt Gerda sat quite still for a long time, then she threw off her blanket and went out into the harbor. She called her nephew and asked him if he'd like to come by for a while and talk about his painting, but he was busy and couldn't come. "Painting?" he said. "That was a long time ago, Aunt Gerda. I'm now working for Papa now."

She hung up the phone and went into the dining room. Her map was indistinct in the half-light. A

the moment, it resembled one of those old representations of the earth seen from the sky, drawn at a time when the known islands were huge but the unknown continents vanishingly small.

Aunt Gerda was a perfectionist. It is possible that she didn't know it or even know that sharp, love word. But in her opinion, a thing half done was meaningless. Time had tricked her, dreadful time which she once again had wasted. Her map was invalid. She rolled it up carefully, fixed it with three rubber bands and wrote, "To be burned unread after my death." It was a beautiful piece of work, Aunt Gerda thought. It would in fact be a shame if none of them looked at it anyway. She put the map on the highest shelf in the hall closet and closed the window. The footsteps and voices on the street disappeared. Then she lit the lamp above the dining-room table and got out her box of shiny pictures and pressed flowers. One by one she lay them on the table and remembered what they looked like. Then with a single motion of her large, clever hand, Aunt Gerda swept all the pretty pictures back into their box. Several specks of glitter had fallen on the rug and glowed there as blue as the night outside.

Translated by Thomas Te

BLACK-WHITE

Homage to Edward Gorey

HIS WIFE'S name was Stella, and she was an interior designer—Stella, his beautiful star. Sometimes he tried to sketch her face, which was always at rest, open and accessible, but he never succeeded. Her hands were white and strong and she wore no rings. She worked quickly and without hesitation.

They lived in a house that Stella had designed, an enormous openwork of glass and unpainted wood. The heavy planking had been chosen for its unusually attractive grain and fastened with large brass screws. There were no unnecessary objects to hide the structural materials. When dusk entered the rooms, it was met with low, veiled lighting, while the glass walls reflected the night but held it at a distance. They stepped out onto the terrace, and hidden spotlights came on in the bushes. The darkness crept away, and they stood side by side, throwing no shadows, and he thought, This is perfect. Nothing can change.

She never flirted. She looked straight at the person she was speaking to, and when she undressed at night, she did it almost absentmindedly. The house was like her, its eyes were wide open, and sometimes he worried that someone might look in on them from the darkness. But the garden was surrounded by a wall, and the gates were locked.

They often entertained. In the summer, they hung lanterns in the trees and Stella's house resembled an illuminated seashell in the night. Happy people in strong colors moved within this picture in groups or in twos and threes, some of them inside the glass walls and some outside. It was a lovely pageant.

He was an illustrator. He worked mostly for magazines; now and then he did a book jacket.

The only thing that bothered him was a mild but persistent pain in his back, which may have resulted from the excessively low furniture. There was a large black bearskin in front of the fireplace, and sometimes he wanted to lie on it with outstretched arms and legs, bury his face in the fur and roll around like a dog to rest his back. But he never did. The walls were glass, and there were no doors between the rooms.

The large table by the fireplace was also of glass. He was in the habit of laying out his drawings on it in order to show them to Stella before sending them on to the client. These moments meant a great deal to him.

Stella came and looked at his work. "It's good," she said. "Your use of line is perfect. All I'm missing is a dominant element."

"You mean it's too gray?" he said.

"Yes," she said. "It needs more white, more light."

They stood at the low table and he saw his drawings from a distance. They really were very gray.

"I think what it needs is black," he said. "But you need to look at them up close."

Afterward he thought for a long time about black as a focus. He was uneasy, and his back was getting worse.

The commission came in November. He went in to his wife and said, "Stella, I've been given a job that really intrigues me." He was happy, almost excited. Stella put down her pen and looked at him. She was always able to interrupt her work without annoyance.

"It's a terror anthology," he said. "Fifteen stories, with black-and-white illustrations and vignettes. I know I can do it. It suits me. It's my kind of thing, don't you think?"

"Absolutely," said his wife. "Are they in a rush?"

"Rush!" he burst out, and laughed. "This isn't some two-bit assignment, this is a serious piece of work. Full pages. They're giving me a couple of months." He rested his hands on her worktable and

leaned forward. “Stella,” he said gravely, “I’m going to use black as a dominant element. I’m going to do darkness. Gray, well, I’ll only use gray when it’s like holding your breath, like when you’re waiting to be afraid.”

She smiled. “It’s so nice you’ve got something you find interesting.”

The text arrived, and he lay down on his bed and read the first three stories, no more. He wanted to begin work believing that the best material would come further on and so retain his expectations as long as possible. The third story gave him an idea, and he sat down at the table and cut himself a piece of thick, chalk-white rag paper with an embossed maker’s mark in the corner.

The house was quiet and they weren’t expecting guests.

It had been very hard for him to get used to this paper because he couldn’t forget how much it cost. Drawings on less expensive paper tended to be freer and better. But this time it was different. He loved the feel of the pen as it ran across the elegant surface in clean lines and at the same time he relished the barely discernible resistance that brought the lines to life.

It was midday. He closed the drapes, turned on the lamp, and began to work.

They ate dinner together, and he was very quiet. Stella asked no questions. Finally he said, “It’s not good. There’s too much light.”

“But can’t you close the drapes?”

“I did,” he said. “But somehow it’s still too light. It only gets gray, it doesn’t get black!” He waited until the cook had finished serving and gone away. “There aren’t any doors in this house,” he burst out. “I can’t close myself in!”

Stella stopped eating and looked at him. “You mean it’s just not working,” she said.

“No. All I get is gray.”

“Then I think you should find another studio,” said his wife. They went on eating, the tension gone. Over coffee she said, “My aunt’s old house is standing empty. But I think there’s still furniture in the little attic apartment. You could give it a try.”

She called Jansson and asked him to put a heater in the attic room. Mrs. Jansson promised to leave food on the steps every day and to make sure the room was clean. Otherwise he’d have to keep hours for himself and take a hot plate with him. It took only a few minutes to make all the arrangements.

When the bus appeared around the bend in the road, he turned earnestly to his wife. “Stella,” he said. “It will only be for a couple of weeks, then I can finish up at home. I’m going to concentrate while I’m there. I won’t be writing any letters, just working.”

“Of course,” said his wife. “Now take care of yourself. And call me from the general store if there’s anything you need.”

They kissed, and he climbed onto the bus. It was afternoon, and sleeting. Stella didn’t wave, but she stood and watched until the bus was hidden by the trees. Then she closed the gate and walked back to her house.

He recognized the bus stop and the evergreen hedge, but it had grown higher and grayer. He was also surprised that the hill was so steep. The road went straight up, bordered by a confused mass of withered undergrowth and cut by deep furrows where the rain had washed sand and gravel down the slope. The house clung tightly to the hill at an impossible angle just below the crown, and the house, the fence, the outbuildings, the fir trees, all of them seemed to be holding themselves upright with a terrible effort. He stopped at the steps and looked up at the façade. The house was very tall and narrow, and the windows looked like loopholes. The snow was melting, and in the silence he could

hear nothing but water dripping in among the firs. He walked around to the back. At the rear of the house was a one-story kitchen that merged with the hill in a messy, ill-defined rampart of rubbish. Here in the shadow of the firs lay everything the old house had spit out in the course of its life: everything worn out and unnecessary, everything not to be seen. In the darkening winter evening, the landscape was utterly abandoned, a territory that had no meaning for anyone but him. He found it beautiful. Unhurriedly, he went into the house and up to the attic. He closed the door behind him. Jansson had been there with the heater, a glowing red rectangle over by the bed. He walked to the window and looked down the hill. It seemed to him that the house leaned outward, tired of clinging tightly to the slope. With great love and admiration, he thought of his wife, who had made it so easy for him to leave. He felt his darkness drawing closer.

After a long night without dreams, he set to work. He dipped his pen in the India ink and drew calm, small, tight, skillful lines. But now he knew that gray is only the patient dusk that makes preparation for the night. He could wait. He was no longer working to make a picture but only in order to draw.

In the dusk he walked to the window and saw that the house was leaning outward. He wrote a letter. Beloved Stella, the first full page is finished and I think it's good. It's warm here and very quiet. The Janssons had cleaned, and this afternoon they left a canister of food on the steps—lamb wrapped in cabbage, and milk. I make coffee on the hot plate. Don't worry about me, I'm getting along fine. I've been thinking about leaving the margins ragged—maybe I've been too conventional. Anyway, it was right that the dominant needs to be black. Thinking of you, a great deal.

He walked down to the general store and posted the letter after dark. The wind had come up a bit and the fir trees sighed as he walked home. The weather was still warm, snow was melting and running down the hill in furrows of sand and gravel. He had meant to write a longer, different letter.

The days passed quietly, and he worked steadily. The margins had grown fluid, and his pictures began in a vague and shadowy gray that felt its way inward, seeking darkness.

He had read the whole anthology and found it banal. There was only one story that was truly frightening. It placed its terror in full daylight in an ordinary room. But all the others gave him the opportunity to draw night or dusk. His vignettes were workmanlike depictions of the people and places the author and the reader would want to see. But they were uninteresting. Again and again he returned to his dark full pages. His back no longer ached.

It's the unexpressed that interests me, he thought. I've been drawing too explicitly; it's a mistake to clarify everything. He wrote to Stella.

You know, I begin to think I've been depicting things for much too long. Now I'm trying to do something new that's all my own. It's much more important to suggest than to portray. I see my work as pieces of reality or unreality carved at random from a long and ineluctable course of events—the darkness I draw continues on endlessly. I cut across it with narrow and dangerous shafts of light . . . Stella, I'm not illustrating any longer. I'm making my own pictures, and they follow no text. Some day someone will explain them. Every time I finish a drawing, I go to the window and think about you.

Your loving husband

He walked down to the general store and posted the letter. On his way home he ran into Jansson who asked if there was a lot of water in the cellar.

"I haven't been in the cellar," he said.

~~"Maybe you could have a look," Jansson said. "What with all the rain we've had this year."~~

He unlocked the cellar and turned on the light. The bulb was mirrored in a motionless expanse of water, as shiny and black as oil. The cellar stairs descended into the water and vanished. He stood still and stared. The walls lay in deep shadow, hollowed out where pieces of the wall had collapsed, and the fallen pieces—lumps of stone and cement—lay half hidden under the water like swimming animals. It seemed to him that they swam backward, toward the angle where the cellar hallway turned and went farther in under the house. I must draw this house, he thought. Quickly. I need to hurry, while it lasts.

He drew the cellar. He drew the backyard, a chaos of carelessly discarded fragments, useless, cold, black, and entirely anonymous in the snow. It was a picture of quiet, gloomy confusion. He drew the sitting room, he drew the veranda. Never before had he been so fully awake. His sleep was deep and easy, the way it had been as a boy. He woke instantaneously, without that half-conscious, uneasy borderland that breaks up sleep and poisons it. Sometimes he slept during the day and worked at night. He lived in a state of furious expectation. He finished one drawing after another. There were more than fifteen, many times more. He no longer bothered with the vignettes.

Stella, I'm drawing the sitting room. It's such a tired old room, completely empty. I draw nothing but the walls and floor, a worn plush carpet, and a wall panel with a repeating pattern. It's a picture of the footsteps that passed through the room, of the shadows that fell on the wall, of the words that still hang in the air—or maybe of the silence. All of that is still here, you see, and that's what I'm drawing. Every time I finish a drawing, I go to the window and think of you.

Stella, have you ever thought about the way wallpaper loosens and opens? It happens according to strict rules. No one can depict desolation who hasn't inhabited desolation and observed it very closely. Things condemned have a terrible beauty.

Stella, do you know what it feels like to see everything gray and cautious all your life and to always try to do your best but all you get is tired? And then suddenly you know, you know with absolute certainty. What are you doing right now? Are you working? Are you happy? Are you tired?

Yes, he thought. She's been working and she's a little tired. She's walking around in her house getting undressed for the night. She's walking around turning off the lights, one by one, she's as white as blank paper, as white as the innocent challenge of the empty surface, and now she alone gives off light, Stella, my star.

He was almost certain that the house leaned outward. Through the window, he could see four steps but not the top one. He put sticks in the snow in order to measure the change in the house's angle of inclination. The water in the cellar did not rise. It didn't matter anyway. He had drawn both the cellar and the façade. He was now working exclusively on the ragged wallpaper in the sitting room. There was no mail. At times he was not certain which letters he had sent to his wife and which he had only imagined. She was farther away now, a picture, a faint pretty picture of a woman. At times, cool and naked, she moved through their large salon of white wood. He found it hard to remember her eyes.

Days and nights and many weeks went by. He worked the whole time. When a drawing was finished, he set it aside and forgot it, continuing at once with a new one, a new white paper, a blank white surface that offered the same challenge, the same limitless possibilities, and an absolute isolation from outside help. Each time he began to draw, he made sure that all the doors in the house were locked. It had begun to rain, but the rain didn't concern him. Nothing concerned him except the tenth story in the anthology. More and more, he thought about this one story, in which the author had subjected daylight to his terror and, against all the rules, enclosed it in an ordinary, pleasant room.

He came closer and closer to the tenth story. It was everywhere, and finally he decided to kill it by drawing. He took a fresh white paper and placed it on the table in front of him. He knew he had

make it visible, the only story in the whole anthology that was genuinely full of horror, and he knew he could illustrate it only one way—it was Stella's living room, her consummate room, where they lived their lives together. He was amazed but utterly certain. He walked around and lit the low lights of all of them, and the windows opened their eyes out toward the illuminated terrace. Beautiful, strange people moved slowly in groups of two or three, and he drew them all, calmly and surely, with small, gray, skillful lines. He drew the room, a terrifying room without doors, bulging with tension, the white walls shadowed with imperceptibly tiny cracks. He let them run on and widen. He drew them all. He saw that the window-wall's enormous sheet of glass was on the point of bursting from the pressure from within, and he began drawing it as fast as he could, and at the same time he saw the cleft that opened in the floor and it was black. He worked faster and faster, but before his pen could reach the darkness, the room he was drawing turned and crashed outward to its ruin.

Translated by Thomas Te

THE OTHER

THE FIRST time was in the milk shop as he stood looking at the display of cakes under the glass counter, completely indifferent to the ingratiating pastries but eager to avoid looking at the clerk. Suddenly, and with dreadful clarity, he saw himself. Not in a mirror. He actually stood beside himself for an instant and thought quietly, There stands a skinny, timid, stoop-shouldered fellow buying cheese and milk and a piece of ham. The apparition lasted only for a second.

Afterward he was upset, and on the way home he wondered if he had strained his eyes with the latest lettering—the text was extremely small. He put his food between the windows where it was cold and sat down at his drawing table to finish the commission. He opened his drawing instruments and filled his finest pen with ink. And there it was again, powerfully. With a sharpening of all his senses he stood beside himself and observed a man drawing tiny, fine, parallel lines, a man he did not like but who aroused his interest. This time, it lasted a little longer, perhaps five seconds.

He felt a slight chill, but his hands weren't shaking, so he finished the job, cleaned it up, and put the sheet in an envelope. The whole time he was writing the address, licking the stamps, closing the metal clasps, he was on the verge of gliding away to stand alongside himself, watching a man prepare a parcel. It was a very close thing. He put on his hat and coat to go to the post office. Down on the street he started to tremble and clenched his jaws so tightly that they hurt. Nothing happened at the post office. He cashed a money order and bought some stamps. He decided to take a walk along the harbor although it was raining and quite cold—a calm, purposeful man taking a quick walk to relax and dispel his thoughts. Exhaustion sometimes produces phenomena that can be easily explained. They vanish if you leave them alone and refuse to let yourself be frightened.

He avoided looking at the people he passed. The wind was blowing from the water, and the warehouses along the waterfront were closed. He walked and walked, trying to occupy his thoughts with something of interest. He could think of nothing but lettering. He tried to capture and hold on to the tiniest scrap of usable thought, but the only thing he really cared about was lettering. In the end, he let his troubled mind rest in a large, quiet surface of letters, a text arrangement of perfect beauty in which the key was distance and balance. That's the way it is with letters—distance and space are what matters. He usually started inking from the bottom up so that he wouldn't be distracted by the meaning of the words.

By the time he reached the promontory, he felt calmer. A very long time ago, when he still suffered from ambition and disappointment, someone had said that he didn't love his letters and that it showed. The remark had hurt and troubled him. He had seen text arrangements that were considered vivid and expressive. They struck him as clumsily done—not even retouched. For him, the stamp of quality was objectivity and purity. Lettering and mathematics have exactly the same potential for perfection. There can be only one right answer.

Now he had the wind at his back. He passed a sign at the ferry and noticed in passing that the letters were awkward and ugly. His attention slid away and a quick stab of anxiety swept over him. He tried to look at boats, joints in the stone pier, iron rings, moorings, anything at all, the way a person entering a strange room searches for conversation pieces among the room's indifferent objects. Finally he tried to think about the daily newspaper, about reports of great and frightening significance, but all he saw was a great blurry text of stocky typefaces, black in the headlines and otherwise completely unreadable. He started to run. It came closer. It came back.

He stopped and took a big step to one side and they walked on together. This time it was very

distinct and lasted for maybe a minute. A minute is a long time. He saw his own overcoat flapping about his legs in the wind and caught a glimpse of a pinched profile under his hat, the profile of a gentleman who cared about nothing, a gentleman who was out walking because he didn't want to go home. His interest was mixed with contempt, and he wondered if the man who walked beside him was afraid and if he too felt contempt. He felt warm and vaguely impatient.

The phenomenon ended and all he saw was the wet asphalt. Mechanically, he went on walking. His heart pounded rapidly and hard. No one had ever looked at him that way before, with such interest and intensity. He walked into the park and sat down on a bench as if he were waiting for someone. His heart was still pounding and he didn't dare raise his eyes from the ground. Nothing happened. He waited for a long time and nothing happened. He did not try to understand, he only waited. When it began to rain, he rose in disappointment and went home. It was not yet evening, but he fell asleep once, hugely tired, and slept straight through to morning.

He woke in an odd mood that he didn't recognize as expectant. He dressed himself with great care, shaved, tidied his room—listening the entire time. It occurred to him that he might be listening for the doorbell or the telephone, so he turned off both. He did not work today. He moved as quietly and slowly as possible, back and forth across the room, and as he moved, he fussed with the small objects set out for use or decoration, moving them about and putting them back, listening uninterruptedly. He took two pretty glasses out of the cupboard and put them back again. The day passed.

It came at dusk, as he looked out the window. Again they stood side by side, utterly still so as not to upset the balance in this remarkable displacement, confusion, or whatever other name might be given to what they were experiencing. He felt the same sympathetic contempt, but a new warmth and quickness pulsed through the sympathy he felt for the person he was visiting. He was strong. A few minutes later, he was alone again, but for those few minutes he had been very happy.

He was alone all that day and all that week. He prepared himself, but nothing happened. Disappointment and anticipation became almost an obsession. He thought about nothing but the opportunity to stand to the side. That's what he called it in his head, standing to the side. He returned to the places where they had been together and waited for a long time. He tried to remember books about doppelgängers and dual personalities but could no longer recall their names, and he didn't want to consult bookstore clerks and librarians. The meeting he was preparing for was extremely personal and secret. It could not be hastened or explained. All he could do was render himself utterly impersonally receptive. He knew for certain that he was a receiver—he radiated nothing but expectation. So he waited.

Finally he succeeded. He stepped out of himself without even feeling contempt for the person he left. They stood there side by side as they'd done before and gazed out the window. He allowed delight and alertness to wash through him like a warm wave. His hands burned, his totally new hands. The whole time he stared out the window. Then the two of them glided back into each other. This happened with a sense of weary reluctance and left behind it a feeling of disappointment, flaccid and ghastly. He was alone in the room. He ran to the door and back to the window, at his wit's end from abandonment. Again and again he thought, bitterly, He doesn't look at me anymore, why doesn't he look at me? He remembered the story about the doppelgänger who killed himself. He couldn't work.

The rain had stopped, and the weather was chilly and clear. He put on his boots and a warm coat, left the house, and took a bus out to where the city came to an end. Day after day, he wandered around in the borderland where the buildings thin out and lose themselves in arbitrary ugliness. He returned to the area every morning and walked incessantly, occasionally resting on a bench or in some café by a railroad crossing or a factory. The impersonal, undefined environment was perhaps a preparation for his meeting the other, perhaps a challenge. Spring came closer, a work in progress, much like the area

he wandered through, as muddy and melancholy in every way. He didn't know what he felt for the one he expected, for the one he made a place for and opened himself up to—at times he was an enemy, times a friend. In the cafés, he sometimes ordered two cups of coffee, which was also a challenge. Sometimes someone tried to speak to him, more often here than in the city. When that happened, he would immediately stand up and leave.

In these unpopulated, half-built, discarded outlands, he felt he could see the city's discharge, the wave of dirty foam that flows over the rim and settles. Letters and words had also been flushed out; he could see them everywhere in signs, posters, placards. Every fence and wall, even the trees, carried black words that pursued him. But he didn't read them. Chalk and knives and tar had written words that screamed at him and drove him on down a gauntlet between fences and walls and trees all bearing the impress of the written word. He walked in circles and found distance and space nowhere, balanced nowhere. He had begun to think of himself in the third person, "he." He wanders here, waiting, he is waiting for me, walking among these horrible words and these great fields lined with wooden houses and rubbish tips. He walks quickly past the people he encounters and waits only for me to see him and take him under my wing. He passes long murals of barracks and streets and crossroads, again and again, and they are all alike, ceaselessly and sadly repeating, like lost time.

The last snow melted. One day he walked through a thin grove of birches somewhere between two highways, and there, finally, he stood to the side. In a state of great joy, he stood ready to walk on, but now it was not only his hands that felt alive but also his head, his stomach, all of him. His whole body burned with an enormous unused power. Behind the copse of trees by the highway, he could see large black letters. He wanted to read them and understand them, and he started walking, just then I started walking. I wanted to move on, and I started to walk, faster and faster, I hadn't known I could feel like this. I was mad with joy and impatience and I knew there wasn't much time and there was too much to do. I looked back one single time, and there he came, running, stumbling across the marshy ground, stoop-shouldered, his mouth agape as if he were calling to me to wait. I had no time for him, because he was only one person but I was seeing him. I did not reach out to him, I'm sure I didn't, but he threw himself forward toward my hand and grabbed it, and before I had time to despise him it was too late—we were just one person, a single figure standing stock-still beneath the birches, waiting.

Translated by Thomas Te

THE STORM

SHE WAS awakened by a banging ventilator and lay still and listened, noticing how the storm altered the light patterns on the ceiling. The shadow of the water pipes was an unchanging cross above the head of the bed, but again and again new reflections of swaying streetlights swept across the ceiling and sometimes the lights of cars, though there weren't many of those at this time of night. The skylight had been covered with snow for several weeks, and for several weeks he hadn't called. That meant he would never call again. Now the door to the washroom started to bang, and she got up to close it. Without turning on the light, she walked into the front room facing the street.

The wind came in gusts and swept snow across the windows in hard, hissing blows, but it wasn't snowing. Above and beyond the storm she heard a heavy, hammering noise that she couldn't figure out. Occasionally it stopped and then resumed. Maybe roof tiles, maybe something else. The night was restless and strange, and so was the room where she listened and waited, all of it submerged in the dark, greenish radiance that surrounds a diver in the ocean. She watched as the wind-sculpted drifts on the rooftops swirled upward like smoke. The snow and the sky above the city shared the same dark light. Something is going to happen, she thought, they've been talking about it on the radio all day. Let it come. I'm so sick and tired of being sick and tired and just waiting, and most of all I'm sick and tired of myself.

There was a light in the same two windows at the hospital, the ones always lit at four in the morning. The Christmas trees at the filling station were lit, but they were shaking their branches in the storm as if terrified and trying to tear themselves free. She stared at them for a long time, and when they finally blew down, at almost the same moment, and were swept across the street, their lights winking out, she cried out in relief. It was cold in the room, which faced the full force of the storm. The wind no longer came in gusts. Now the wind pressed in on the city from the sea in a single continuous roar, a rising and implacable mass of sound. Power, she thought, how I love power! The onslaught was so violent that she stepped back from the window. What a storm! What a night!

What is night? Sleeping till the next day; trying to sleep away your tiredness so you can face what you don't want to face; hiding yourself in a cautious little death for which you're not to blame—four hours that seem like seconds when you wake up. She walked back and forth between the windows and thought, Call! Call me and ask me if I'm frightened. She watched the storm tear the snowdrifts on the street into spirals and press the snow against the façades of the buildings like great outstretched hands. The greenish light had grown darker. And dreams, what are they? They dig up your fear and display it enlarged by cruelty. There is no rest, there is no comfort!

A large object flew past her window and struck the side of the building with a crunch, then flew on—wherever, whatever. The wind was like a great groaning, a scream. Neon lights burned here and there across the city like colored inscriptions in stone, worn almost away, and the snow rose up from the ground everywhere and from all the streets like an enormous curtain. She could no longer see any lights at all, and there was nothing she could do but listen and wait. So it goes, she thought. Thus it will be one day when everything cracks and falls and there is nothing more to remember and hold fast to, and we will have to rethink everything from top to bottom, if we have time. It won't matter whether we're strong or weak, and nothing will make an impression on anyone. Everything will be erased and extinguished.

The city was empty, no people and no cars. The temperature had fallen. Her window was a whirling greenish wall of snow, and she stepped back slowly into the room. The storm had gone beyond reason.

and imagination, merely a powerful, uninterrupted shuddering. This shuddering was universal—in the windowpanes and the walls that protected her, in the air around her and in her teeth and her gut. She moved farther back, against the wall. Right now, she thought, right now I can see that everything is utterly simple. I know what I want. Everyone is standing like this in their rooms tonight. They've woken, all of them, and don't dare go near their windows and don't dare go back to bed. They realize that it's not merely a question of living and enduring but rather of something else entirely, but they don't know what.

How can a storm of tropical strength find its way to a land of snow, a dreary, dependable land where we light Christmas trees to appease the darkness? Windowpanes shattered in well-built stone houses over the few short hours of the visitation, and sheet-metal roofs were carried away in several areas near the harbor. The storm flew into her violently opened room in an explosion of ice-cold air that was thicker than flesh. It pressed her against the wall and pressed against her eyes and eardrums and into her mouth, while all around her the room fell to pieces like the wings on a dragonfly. No truth applied and nothing had a name that could be used and recognized. She crept toward her bedroom on hands and knees. The only thing that mattered was getting to her bed—her bed by the wall below the water pipes—and hiding in it. She felt the doorjamb with her hands. The floor was covered with snow and shards of glass, and when the storm let go of her, she fell headlong and felt as if she'd broken. She crept on, reached the bed, and crept in under the covers and drew them around her, tight against the wall with her knees drawn up to her chest. Now she heard the storm again and noticed she was cold and realized that something important had happened to her, something that had seemed significant and simple. But she couldn't remember what it was.

The telephone rang for a long time before she realized what it was and lifted the receiver in the dark.

"It's me," she said. "No, I wasn't asleep." She listened attentively, staring at the ceiling, which was no longer a ceiling. The window frames had become a black and arbitrary geometry. She lay beneath the grillwork of broken beams, and above them was a firmament of dark light that rose higher and higher in unbroken eddies of snow. "Don't explain," she said. "Don't say the same thing over and over again; it doesn't matter." She straightened her body in the bed. Slowly, disdainfully, she stretched out her legs and thought, It's not a bit hard to be strong. "It doesn't matter," she said again. "If you've had an insight and then lost it, don't worry about it. You'll remember it in the morning." She put her arm under her head and turned on her side. "Yes," she said. "Yes, of course I'm frightened. Do that. Call me in the morning." They said good night. She hung up the phone and fell asleep.

About seven o'clock the wind died and the snow drifted down over the city, onto streets and roofs and down over her bedroom, which was completely white and very beautiful when she awoke.

Translated by Thomas Te

THE WOLF

THERE had been silence for far too long. She gathered herself for a comment, a polite show of interest that might save them for several more minutes. She turned to her guests and asked in English if Mr. Shimomura wrote for children too. The interpreter listened earnestly, made a slight bow, which Mr. Shimomura repeated. They spoke together softly, quickly, almost whispering, hardly moving their lips. She looked at their hands, which were very small with narrow, light brown fingers—tiny beautiful paws. She felt like a large horse.

“We are sorry,” said the interpreter, also in English. “Mr. Shimomura does not write. He never writes. No, no.” He smiled. They both smiled. He bowed his head gently and apologetically and gazed at her steadily. His eyes were absolutely black.

“Mr. Shimomura draws,” the interpreter added. “Mr. Shimomura would like to see some dangerous animals. Very savage, if you please.”

“I understand,” she said. “Animal drawings for children. But we don’t have many dangerous animals. And those we have live farther north.”

The interpreter nodded, smiling. “Yes, yes,” he said. “That is very amiable. Mr. Shimomura is pleased.”

“We have bears,” she said uncertainly, and suddenly couldn’t remember the English word for wolf. “Like dogs,” she went on. “Large and gray, in the north.”

They looked at her attentively and waited. She tried to howl like a wolf. Her guests smiled politely and continued staring at her.

“There are no dangerous animals in the south,” she repeated sullenly. “Only in the north.”

“Yes, yes,” the interpreter said. They were whispering again. Suddenly she said, “Snakes. We have snakes.” Now she was tired. She raised her voice and said “Snake” one more time, made a creeping wavy gesture with one hand and hissed.

Mr. Shimomura was no longer smiling. He laughed, soundlessly, his head thrown back. “Anaconda,” he said. “Schlange. Very good.” Then turned off the laugh abruptly. The overweight cat jumped down from its chair and walked out into the middle of the floor.

“I,” she said, with some growing panic, “I am quite old, and I don’t actually know much about either children or animals.”

Perhaps she could have asked or felt her way toward the world where he sought and drew his animals. Perhaps she might have discovered something new and important. It was even possible that they were looking for roughly the same thing—the dark, the wild, the shy, and the lost security of being little. She couldn’t know. She lifted the coffee pot and said, “Please?”

The two of them gave a little dancing bow, rising halfway to their feet in a consummate gesture of grateful refusal.

The interpreter said, “Mr. Shimomura thinks that you write beautifully. He has a present for you.”

She undid the silk ribbons. Beneath several layers of brittle rice paper lay a thin wooden box that had been pieced together with the utmost precision. Inside was a fan with a painted picture of a foot-stamping warrior showing his teeth.

“How beautiful!” she said. “Tack. Thank you ever so much, you shouldn’t have! I have always admired these paintings that . . . And the box is exquisite . . .”

“She likes the box,” the interpreter said.

Mr. Shimomura bowed deeply. She used the fan to fan the cat, which laid back its ears and went i

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