time. It’s right now that I should be the mature and experienced lover. But I fail — or I’m in no state to give myself time to succeed. Images, thoughts, feelings fly through my head. I see both of us, you and me, a boy and a man, a pupil and a teacher, in a bed in a hotel room in Aarhus. I remember it’s Sunday morning. I know it’s raining outside. I feel the porter’s eyes on me. And it’s clear I’m about to commit a criminal act.

No doubt about that.

And I begin to move, gently, cautiously, so it won’t hurt. I certainly wouldn’t harm you. But your skin is so young and new and tender and my hands so big, rough and old. I let them explore you. You don’t resist. Your eyes are closed. You hardly stir. You’re in another place, deep under me. No, you are close, close, close. I inhale the odours of your head, your sweat, your hair. I feel your prick against my belly: maybe it’s only a morning erection, a piss-hardon. No matter. The hardness of your cock is a symbol of our love — my lust is echoed. My wish has come true. It has to be like this. I want it this way. And suddenly I can no longer hold back. The lust tenses and tightens, it aches in my loins and thighs, muscles contract, sinews are stretched snapping tight, first in my feet but immediately afterwards in my throat and arms as well. Tears come to my eyes. A groaning rattle makes its way up through my throat. And in a pyrotechnic explosion of rut, dread, dream, lightness, darkness, nothingness, I come in a far too hasty, far too early but powerfully and painfully convulsive spray between your thighs and on your abdomen, and I sink exhausted upon you. I smell you anew: different, now, stronger, now. I feel your sticky sweat.

And I love you for it.

Instead of the cruelty of the little, lonely death, there is now hope of togetherness and life.
It wasn't really a good act of love. From a technical point of view it was downright bad. A wretched morning make-out, where only one partner, thanks to his un-governable selfishness, got his release and a certain modicum of momentary pleasure. A flop, the consequence of which, taken at its worst, might be a quick descent for both of us down into hell's hottest pit — or, in any case for me, a walk through the prison gates.

No, I have to admit it's been no huge success. But it happened, and, after all, it was only a first time. Like a well-meant but awkward and too sloppy kiss, I think, and in spite of everything a loving kiss.

You are so sweet.

So quiet, almost unconcerned. So damned natural and soothing and brotherly to me in whom headlong reaction now sets in: sweat on the brow and over my whole body, impelling me, all too soon, to jump off the bed and into my clothes. My belly turns. Fear starts lapping within it. I'm overcome with claustrophobia.

I have to get out. I have to get away.

"Kim," I say breathlessly, "I'm going on down ahead of you and will settle the bill. I'll wait for you over by the station."

I the cowardly jackal!
And you actually put up with it!
The porter with the eyes collects my payment for the two single rooms. I carefully place the receipt in my wallet — as if I could get the amount refunded! — lift my briefcase from the floor between my feet, nod an aloof farewell and leave with a clear conviction that the X-ray eyes of this uniformed clerk of Society will be on my back forever.

When I have propped up my spirits with an ice-cold beer in the train station, I step out of the mouldy waiting room onto the street. And there you come hurrying out of
the hotel and over the station square. Your dark blue duffel coat is open, your travel bag hangs from your hand. I step from between the pillars on the stairs and lift my hand in signal. You wave back, smile and come on toward me.

"I took a bath," you say, and shake your dark, still-wet hair.

"Good idea," I reply. "I should have done that, too. Come on, let's go in and have some breakfast. Your train leaves in three-quarter of an hour."

"I wish I didn't have to go there!" you sigh.

"You must," I say. "That's the real reason for your trip, isn't it?"

You look at me.

"Is it?" you ask.

And we both laugh.

I WAIT FOR YOU. I can hardly do otherwise. I sit in my house and listen to the darkness. I sit motionless in front of the typewriter under the lamp on my work table and simply wait. But you don't come on the bus we had agreed you'd take. I become more and more worried. The students have long since gone to bed. The lights have gone out all over the school. I jump up every time there's even the faintest sound in the darkness. What in hell can be keeping you? At last I hear quick footfalls on the gravel walk, then on the steps and the terrace. The door opens...

"Excuse me — I had to come by way of Nyborg and transfer. But here I am at last!"

You let the travel bag fall with a thump on the floor. And there in the middle of the room we embrace, really embrace, for the first time. We've both had a chance to think over what happened. We've both discovered how much we missed and needed each other. It's been twelve hours since we parted on the station platform in Aarhus. Twelve hours too long to be apart. We stand quite still and
sense each other through our clothing. We’ve never been as close as now.

Your hair and face are wet from the rain. Your cheeks are chilly. Your lips are hot. We kiss each other on the mouth. I rest my head on your shoulder and in a long, soothing moment let my tears blend with the sweet raindrops of spring on your duffel-coat...

We tear ourselves apart.

"Up to bed with you!" I say merrily, and you spring out the door. I remain sitting in front of the typewriter under the lamp on my work table and think our embrace of reunion was worth the whole trip.

WELL, NOW YOU RESPOND...

Just after breakfast you come running up to my house. That gives us fifteen minutes before morning hymns and the first class of the day. Doesn’t anybody notice anything? No, we’re crafty, the two of us. We have so much that must be done. At lunch break we study English and German. In the hour after dinner, and the half-hour before lights-out, we chat and love. You always, always come running up to my house. In my ears your footfalls sound like young, strong hooves.

You have been awakened; you are blossoming. Eros colours our life together. Each day is filled with intimacies, teasing, horniness, warmth. But also of waiting and moments of irritation, lacunae, and not least by fear of discovery.

I’m constantly amazed that nobody notices anything.
But we are good actors, you and I.
You learn quickly.
You come bounding up the stairs to the terrace, open the door and shout my name. You have begun to call me by my first name when we are alone. It gets around,
though. Your tongue must have slipped and somebody caught on. It couldn’t go unnoticed. We get a bit of ribbing. A few boys even follow your example — good naturally. That’s nice, in a way, but it’s a frightening reminder. We live on an island. Do others sense something after all? Have I put a noose around my neck?

How could they not see that you occupy a favoured position?

Meanwhile, plans for your future have helped us. Everybody knows you want to go on with your education. So it’s only natural: you’re coming to me so often so I can coach you.

Yes, we’re cunning. We’re wily, we’re conspirators. We’re unscrupulous.

We’re in love.

We transform my house into a fortress, a castle keep against the world. The wooden walls become thick ramparts, the stone steps up to my terrace a drawbridge, the terrace itself is a bulwark, a defensive redoubt, the door a portcullis, the unbleached linen curtains at my large window an impenetrable mesh of bars.

We simply must believe we’re secure in our castle of love.

I rush to lock the door after you, pull you through the room, past my beloved Braque’s two elegant fish and into my bedroom where Picasso’s boy with the horse observes us moodily but without disapproval from his position over the head of my bed. I let my hands find their way inside your coat — not the velvet coat but the other one of dark blue, the coat you wear every day — and in under your sweater — not the light blue one, for you have outgrown that, but a new red sweater or a thinner one of grey wool. I take you about the waist, enjoy the feeling of slimness, smoothness, elasticity, hug you to myself, lay my ear to your heart, rub my nose against your throat, inhale your
scent of boy. You rest your forehead on my shoulder, your arms on my neck. Damnit, you’re getting to be taller than I am! Soon I’ll have to stand on tiptoe to kiss you.

Provided I can get you to take the pipe out of your mouth when we make love!

We grin. We fool around.

You’re frightfully ticklish.

Love is comic.

“I suppose you thought I didn’t know how to kiss?”’ you say shamelessly after I’ve fully parted your lips and forced my way to your palate with my tongue.

“You always seemed so innocent,’” I mumble, “so pure and chaste and terribly naive.”

You laugh.

“Then you don’t know my past.”

“Do you have one?”

“I sure do!” you boast, and have no inkling of how jealous you are making me.

And here, in this safe, warm, reciprocal hug, I love you most of all. Here in this moment of intense nearness, before desire overwhelms us, before lust makes us frantic, my feelings for you are the strongest. In this friendly, brotherly nearness of body, in the not-quite-glowing yet melting embrace, during these gentle but edged, soft-hard, small, flexible movements of our two masculine bodies I love you the most. Perhaps it’s because you haven’t yet really knocked your head against the outside world. Perhaps because I feel that, through you, I might somehow embrace and accept that world which, deep in my heart, I love. Perhaps it’s because in these preliminary caresses we haven’t yet overstepped the arbitrary limits which would, in the world’s biased and absurdly disapproving eyes, turn our relationship into something exceptional, which, on my part, I still label abnormal, but which I wouldn’t dream of so labelling in you.
For in my heart I yearn to be accepted as I am. As we are. I dream that the world might accept our happiness. I want the eyes of all outsiders to sparkle as cleanly and brightly as our own do at the prospect of our love. Good God, all lovers want to gambol in the broadest light of day — nothing new in that: I’m as vain as the next man.

But the grace of peace cannot last. Tenderness gives way to hunger, hectic motions and hasty, furtive caresses. We’re always in a hurry. We must listen for approaching footsteps, voices calling us, knuckles that rap, hands on the door-knob. There’s always danger. Did we remember to turn the lock? Have we drawn the curtains tight? We flee to one another in fear whenever the cats under my house begin to howl and fight. I stamp peevishly on the floor — damnit, shut up! And then that moment of pure panic when one day around noon I straighten up from having just touched your nose with a kiss to find our principal’s wife standing in the door. Did she see? Apparently not. But danger is everywhere. Always fear in my breast. A feeling of loss. Uneasiness. Anxiety.

And we hurry. We grow agitated. We have to be quick. My thigh tightens against yours. Our lower halves meet. We excite each other. We pant into each other’s ears. Our fingers unlock, move lower.

And with all those movements, by now familiar to both of us, we find ourselves drawing away from each other.

We should be left in peace.
But it happens every day.

And every day there’s school. And the school takes its toll.

I gradually realise that my thinking about our school has altered. My relationship with you has changed my mind about many things. It’s impossible now for me to see our school as the same institution and authority you must. My loyalty is divided. I am more and more split. I drift into
discord between two worlds. My love for you makes me a potential traitor to my place of work and my colleagues. If my love for you, and especially the actions which result from it, come to light, I’ll be perceived as a molester by all the friendly people about me. But I’m not a molester. I’m an amorous fool. Blind, foolish, yes — but inside strong, and full of joy and goodness. In fact, I’ve become a better teacher, a more cheerful colleague. I write better. I rise every morning filled with fresh, new energy. I whistle in joy on my way down to breakfast. I meet the dull and sleepy faces at the table with a cheerful ‘Good morning’. I smile at the girls in the kitchen. I laugh uproariously at our pathetic pastor who, as usual, comes in fifteen minutes late to his weekly morning class. I pretend to flirt with the clever, uncommunicative girl with the blue smock in the co-op; I listen patiently to her boss’s chatter. I exude good will on visits to my friends. I send sparkingly happy letters to my family. And in my free hours I race off to Kerteminde on my old bike to go shopping. I buy gifts for my darling: chocolates, cigarettes, records, books — heaps of books. I prosper as I have never prospered in all my thirty years.

Yes, when you, this new other person, this wondrous boy, burst into my life and, so to speak, conquered it, I was ready to surrender myself and heap upon you all my pent-up feelings. I overflowed with affection. I regained that peculiar strength I had, off and on, as a boy and never since: that giddy, bright, entirely pure sensation that I can rule the whole world. The sun shines because I want it to shine, the rain falls because I order it to, the clouds grow heavy because I, in sweet melancholy, desire them thus, so that darkness can be scattered by a clearer light than ever.

It seems as if, for a while at least, nature and I, in my infatuation, have become one. I am intoxicated.
How arrogant the lover is!
He challenges the gods.
He forgets all about hubris.

The moment I bend over you, the moment our eyes sink into each other’s and our vision gives way to colours deeper than the sea, darker than the earth, stronger than the sun, I know — oh, thou, my so-young beloved — that, despite all, it can be done, we can live, plant, reap, go on. I am in you and you are in me. Inviolate, a moment, an eternity.

Well, don’t you ever irritate me?
I don’t think so, not yet.

You suck like a sponge. All that I do or say seems marvellous. You are wax in my hands, but, in return, my heart is wax in yours. We do things together. We make plans together. We dream dreams together. And that’s probably the most important element of our relationship in this, its first or second phase: working together, every day — time...

"We have enough time," I think rashly. "We have an eternity of time before us."

It wouldn’t be true to say you’re the first I’ve fallen in love with. There had been others before you, but those infatuations were superficial and transitory. They had no depth. I gave them no chance to develop. And so they didn’t hurt when they came to an end. Now, looking back, it seems I simply didn’t dare fall in love. You, on the other hand, came to me at just the right moment, when I needed it. You were the first one I fell in love with in this universal, all-embracing way. I express myself badly, of course — banalities and clichés lie in wait. But let me say it briefly as best I can:

My falling in love with you has grown as lightning into a huge and warm absorbing love that permeates my whole existence and has radically changed my life. It isn’t just

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an affair. It’s an earthquake. And I discover unsuspected powers within me. I find courage to struggle. I find strength to hold out. I get energy and resistance, will to endure humiliation, disappointment, defeat.

The ecstasy transforms itself into a passionate love that goes on and on...

But it’s also a love which makes demands.

Yes, I need to be loved by you, not just love you. I have to know you have as much need of me as I of you. I have to be as necessary for you as you are for me. I want you to blaze and burn for me just as I blaze and burn for you. I want you to be as strong a support for me as I am for you. I want you to feel as good and beautiful because of me as I do because of you.

I want our love to become a cherished, inalienable gift we can always give each other.

THEN COMES THE REACTION....

“Good lord, what’s the matter?” you ask.

“I’m afraid, really afraid.”

“Afraid of what, Jens?”

“That they might find out about us.”

“I’ll never tell. Never!”

You are so serious and so vehement I can’t help but be touched.

“Oh, I know, I know,” I say quickly. “It isn’t that at all.”

“What is it, then?”

“How can they not see?” I exclaim. “I mean, you run in and out of this house every day of the week. You’re here almost all the time.”

“Should I stop coming so often?” you ask, quite without suspicion.
"No, no, for God’s sake!" I answer passionately. "I can’t live without you, not for a single moment. I — I can’t stand it when you’re not here. But, Kim — don’t you realise they can see what’s happening?"

You consider this a moment, and then you say,
"I don’t think they can."

"Perhaps it’s just me, seeing ghosts. Go ahead, smile, but I do see them. I see them everywhere. On the other hand, what we have together is so completely unimaginable that maybe they simply haven’t the imagination to conceive of it. Maybe people are blind to what they don’t care to see, or am I over-simplifying?"

"Lucky for us anyhow," you drily observe.
"Yes," I say hesitantly, "right now, certainly."

IT IS ABOUT THIS TIME that your principal, on one of his visits, speaks about another boy in the welfare programme:

"We simply had to send him away," he says. "We couldn’t keep him."

"Yes, thank heavens we’ve been spared getting that type here."

"Where did you put him?" I ask.
"In a boys’ home for special treatment," your principal answers.

"Can that sort really be treated?" asks our principal’s wife.

"I doubt it," says your principal. "But we could hardly have him going around seducing all the other youngsters, could we?"

"They’re poor, sick people," says our principal with a sigh. "We had such a case in my home town, an old bachelor..."

He turns to me.
"Do you remember my telling you about him?"
I nod.
"Yes. If only they'd leave the young alone," says our principal. "But a lot of them simply can't. Just look at this unpleasant affair in Odense!"

"Oh, there've been warnings about that on radio and television," says our principal's wife and rises to pour more coffee.

"In that case it was one of the youths who was the problem," says our principal. "And it was boys his own age he couldn't keep his hands off of."

Our principal's wife pours more coffee. "Have a biscuit, Mr. Eisenhardt," she says, and hands me the crystal bowl with vanilla-garland, Finnish bread and God knows what all. I succeed in holding the bowl without my hands trembling. I put a biscuit in my mouth, chew it, swallow it and stand quite still.

A little later we're talking about something else.

IF THEY CATCH on to us, I'm lost.
At best I would have to leave the school.
At worst...
You would be packed off to a "home" — in your dossier you would forever be branded as a pervert. All I have to do is recall what your principal said about the homosexual boy: "We simply had to send him away. We couldn't keep him."

I once met a young fellow who told me how at the age of thirteen or fourteen he'd been torn out of his family and sent to a boy's home because he'd 'messed around', as he put it, with some friends his own age in the neighbourhood and in his school.

And that was just the place where you'd end up!
I'm afraid. On and off I'm terribly afraid. It gets so bad I think I should give you up. That I must give you up. That I should take steps to leave.
"What in heaven's name can I do with that boy?" I think.

I am thirty years old. I will write. I will create. I never committed myself to stay long at this jumped-up little school in the provinces. I have ambitions. I have big plans. Lots of projects. Stories, novels, plays...

Today, twenty years later, I can see I am persuading myself that this affair was not going to ruin my life. I feel I have to face the fact that I cannot hold on to you forever. In ten years I will have changed my mind completely, but now you are only fifteen years old. Now it seems I simply have to live one day at a time...

So I resign in advance and adopt a kind of moderation completely foreign to my nature. But it is generally assumed at the time that people like me can not be, ought not to be, are simply not allowed to be happy.

It is unnatural.

And all this self-pity — so richly supported by what bits of literature comes my way, and among the half-dead old crows I've encountered during my passages through the ghetto world — appeals in some way to the melancholic side of my temperament, a taste for decadence and lavender.

Or did...
Before my infatuation.
Before my love.
Before you.

"HIM! THAT GERMAN FRIEND OF YOURS..."

You've come bounding up at top speed over the terrace, barged through my door, which now stands open and rattling in your wake.

"Shut it behind you!" I shout from the bedroom. I'm pulling the smooth, crackling laundry wrappers off my newly starched, properly ironed and clean-smelling white
shirts. You brought them back from Kerteminde yesterday, and so I've received an unexpected visit.

"Did you hear me?"

"I can hardly help it when you holler like that," I answer, and step out into the living-room with a shirt over my arm.

You stamp on the floor. "I'll be damned if I like him!"

"I assume you mean Wolfgang."

"Yes," you hiss. "Your German friend — Wolfgang or Amadeus or whatever he calls himself."

"He's very smart," I say quietly and return to the bedroom to put my shirt away.

"Smart!" you exclaim, scandalized. "He's an arsehole, that's what he is!"

"Well, did you know..." I begin, but you furiously interrupt me:

"He rushes up here to Denmark in his super-advantaged sportcar, comes through that door and roars 'Guten Tag, guten Tag...'."

I laugh. "What else would you expect him to say?"

"...to you," you continue, much more exasperated, "and without so much as a look in my direction..."

"Well, it was me he'd come to visit."

"He is one big piece of shit, is what he is. Did you notice how he looked right through me, as if... as if..."

"As if you were only a little schoolboy," I complete for you. "But that's really what you are."

"I am not!" you shout and hammer a fist upon the wall so that my beloved Braque's two fish waggle their tails and the big window-pane rattles.

"Calm down," I say, and look at you in all your your anger. "What is he supposed to believe? Here I am teaching in a school for youths and I'm with you reading extra German..."

"We were reading English!"
“Okay, English, then. In any case, here I am sitting with a student...”
“A student!” you repeat, scandalized all over again. “It was me you were reading with!”
“Sweet friend, you’re still my pupil.”
“So can’t he at least have the common courtesy to say hello to a pupil of yours?”
“He just didn’t notice you.”
“Disgusting creature!” you say.
“Easy, Kim.”
“Damned Nazi swine!”
“No, in any case, you can’t accuse him of that. He was hardly born when Hitler came to power and only twelve when the Nazi Reich was in ruins.”
You suck in your cheeks and tighten your lips.
“Moreover, he’s been one of the leaders of the S.S.D...”
You turn your head away from me. “What’s that?”
“Socialist Students. Wolfgang studied at the Free University in Berlin.”
“Oh,” you say.
“Furthermore, I got to know him during a youth congress in Moscow.”
“Oh,” you repeat.
“To be precise, I met him the afternoon of August sixth, the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. In the morning I had been on a boat trip for young writers — Jan Myrdal was there too, as I recall. But I can’t remember much of anything else. Za zdarovje!”
“What does that mean?”
“Prost — cheers.” I fall silent for a moment, remembering, in fact, quite a bit, and then I laugh. “I woke up in the back seat of a car in front of the hotel where we had our international press centre. God knows how I got there. But I had my blue admission card and I could go in. That card opened a lot of doors...”
“So were you some kind of V.I.P?” you ask, a bit more interested.
“I was a youth-leader careerist, a young careerist. I worked on the international festival committee — but that’s another story. Up in the bar I wanted the windows closed: that Hiroshima meeting made a hell of a lot of noise. Mir i drusba! Mir i drusba! But my request was denied.”
“Request for what?”
“That they close the windows. Well, I complained — rather loudly, I suppose. In any case, Wolfgang immediately came over to my table...”
“As if it was any of his business!”
“Actually, he thought I was a fellow-German. And for a whole lot of reasons the West Germans in particular are very sensitive about behaving correctly to the Russians.”
“They should feel the same way about behaving correctly to the Danes.”
“In any case, I rose to the occasion: I couldn’t let myself be told by a bloody Prussian how to act in Moscow, could I?”
“Of course not,” you say with conviction.
“So a little while later we all ended up drinking champagne at Wolfgang’s table.”
“Champagne?” you exclaim in open-eyed wonder.
“Crimean effervescent hock,” I explain. “Russian champagne. Quite delicious when one drinks it ice-cold. You can buy it in restaurants everywhere in Moscow.”
“It sounds wonderful,” you say.
“And it was.”
You knit your brows. “Even so, he’s a shit.”
“Forget about him.”
“If that isn’t just typical!”
“Typical of what?”
“You grown-ups.”
“Nonsense.”
"You piss on us. You treat us any way you damn well please. You only see us when you feel like seeing us."
"Tell me, are you mad?"
"Yes, I am!"
"But not at me, I hope?"
"No. Maybe a little."
"Well, my widdle fwiend..." I say, lapsing into the awful baby-talk certain adults inflict on small children.
You laugh, then grow serious again. "It's only when we're alone that you're not as bad as the rest. When there are other people around I might just as well not exist, as far as everybody's concerned. Like him, that dumb kraut."
"You exist for me," I object.
"And you looked right through me, then."
"Now that's not fair."
"Grown people are stuck-up shits."
"Not all of them," I protest.
"Well, I'm not going to stand there and let people treat me that way," you declare, and with such pride that it makes me, in turn, proud of the love I feel for you.
"No, you won't," I say.
"And that goes for all of your old buddies from Berlin and Moscow and who knows where else — like those we met in Montmartre, do you remember?"
"That was my fault," I answer in shame.
"Because I, too, can be jealous!" you say with a sudden big smile.
"Now, that's very nice to hear!" I mean it, too. "Let's get some English read..."
"Deutsch," you say. "It's Deutsch today. You know that, meiner Herr!"
"Mein Herr."
"What?"
"It's mein Herr, not meiner Herr."
"Scheisse!"
"AN EXPERIENCE..."

Our principal pauses briefly so the sound can sink and remain for a while darkly glowing in our minds.

"An experience in living..."

Each oblate sound in this last word is rounded off with a luminous, holy glow. Then comes the expected switch back to the voice of the experienced schoolmaster.

"That is what we have sought to give you!"

In our principal’s voice, still touched with a faint north Jutish accent, this completely meaningless statement resonates like a fanfare. It has splendour, richness — whatever else may have been its intent, it comes across as the goal of all our strivings, a triumphant manifesto...

I cringe with embarrassment. Our principal continues:

"When Christen Kold was once asked what he wanted a school for older students to be, he answered, ‘I will stir them up so they will never stand still again’.

Another a pause. Time for us to think.

"And so in the last ten months we here have sought, through play and work, to give you young people an experience in living..."

There it comes again. Well, certainly you, Kim, are up to your ears in the experience of living!

I’m not being entirely fair to our principal. He’s certainly not the worst of the pedagogues of the time in his use of orotund outpourings: it takes a special occasion to coax them out.

And one of those occasions is certainly today, at the commencement ceremony for our first ten-month session.

"Of course we have also tried to give you a measure of technical and factual information during this school year," says our principal, "and, hopefully, you have also learned a number of practical skills. One day you will surely participate fruitfully in our community. But I hope, then, that all of you will realise that there is a difference
between existing and living. I hope you will have absorbed the full significance of community, that the happiness of the individual is so inextricably dependent upon the happiness of others..."

Once again a theatrical pause, this time so our principal can coax his upper denture into place with a discreet nudge of the tongue-tip.

"Yes," he says at last, and with a benevolent smile on his furrowed farmer’s face which rises above a bright red shirt-collar and green necktie, "yes, you all are clearly aware that it is the sun which nourishes all life, but it will not hurt you, once in a while, to think about what nourishes the soul.

"For, as our poet has said,

"'Strange as my heath is the man’s craving,

'He does not live by bread alone;

'Glut him with gold; before you know it,

'His heart trembles sighing after — stone.

"And, so, let's have some coffee."

The mumbling and scraping of chairs rises to the ceiling in the public school’s gym — we are still waiting on the building permit — where all the students, parents, members of the school board and, of course, we teachers, sit at long tables decked with paper table-cloths, muffins, pretzels, layer cakes and, last but not least, sweet cookies, fruit of our Home Economics teacher’s last great endeavour in the school kitchen. There is the smell of freshly-brewed coffee and lilacs. The windows behind the upper bars open on the June day. Afternoon sun slants in and dances merrily upon our reverend pastor’s balding pate. Our principal’s wife feverishly tidies up the papers over by the piano. Our principal looks vigilantly out over the crowd, now nodding to a garrulous parent. The mood of festival and melancholy idyll. The hour of departure approaches. Bags have been packed. Lumps have gathered in throats. Our kitchen
maids, otherwise so cheerful, go round and serve with dull eyes and sob-choked smiles, often drying their noses on an apron corner.

Your principal is here, too.

You sit with him, obliquely in front of me at another table. You hand him the cream pitcher and sugar bowl. You smile pointedly and benevolently. You’re the good boy, the smart student. You know the rules of the game. You’re the alert and attentive young man at the side of Authority, your legal guardian and, most importantly, the man who holds the purse strings.

You have far outgrown the little joker of that first winter, the boy with the quicksilver bottom, as your principal used to say. You’re no longer the Copenhagen punk, the Kim Steffensen from Valby with the ugly ducktail and your shirttail hanging out over your pants, the comic, the clown, the Thankster standing slantwise in the glass door forever calling my last name when I cross the schoolyard...

You’re the exceptional boy, now. One of the rare instances when the welfare people actually took one of their charges under their wing, and so have given you the chance you wanted for an education suited to your abilities.

My intrigues have born fruit. My plans for you have succeeded. I can look back with satisfaction — and jointly we can look forward to more time together. And long ago I’ve decided to stay through the next season at school to be as near to you as possible.

I glance in your direction but dare not smile at you. Your principal intercepts the glance and gives me an amiable nod. I nod back, shuddering inwardly, but we are in agreement, you, your principal and I. He has several times expressed his gratitude for the interest I’ve taken in you.

You never look in my direction.

Wise of you.