Life is absurd:

Here I sit caught up in school life which so closely mirrors society around us. And like everyone else, I’m a product of that society. Yet ever since I was a boy I’ve revolted against it. But no one in this coffee and lilac scented gym, no one except you, can imagine that only a few years earlier I’ve demonstrated in the streets of Copenhagen. Now I play the game.

I play on the student body as though it were a keyboard — and the keys, our students, submit to me.

And yet, I think, I can set some things in motion.

How can I, within the anachronistic framework of the school system, fit the pieces together: pedagogy, my revolutionary consciousness, the yearning for change, that vision from my earliest youth: socialism in Denmark within twenty years?

I content myself with making a grimace.

My revolt limits itself to childishly small sins of omission. On those rare occasions when our principal is absent, I omit the morning prayers, for example.

I wonder if our Lord has the last laugh on me.

Why am I content to play the rôle of a resigned fool?

Because...

Because you appeared.

Because I found love.

Because my love for you has also opened my eyes to the double standard of small community life.

Because I now know I’m only a guest.

Because I now know that there’s really no place here for a person like me.

Because I now know this is only a short respite.

Just as our school exploits my labour, I exploit the school in order to shelter my love — and survive.

I deceive it.
From the moment I fell in love with you I became a traitor to this microcosm of the outside world.

And it's a good question whether any sort of passion wouldn't be considered treason against the norms of society, and thus against those of the school.

There is no place here for lust.

All the bubbling and effervescing of sensuality is overlooked, hushed up or swept under the carpet.

We never talk about those things, or if we do it's in terms so general they mean nothing.

We adhere to conventional, and miserable, public morals.

Well, did I really expect anything else?

If I want to preserve and protect my love for you I, of necessity, must play the game invented by others and follow its rules. Without realising it, they are the ones who set the limits to your development, and mine. It is they who force our love inside the thin walls of my little house. It is they who transform it in my mind into an impregnable fort. I personally have no desire to live in a fortress under siege.

And then I have to realise that the only chance I have left is to run away while I still have time. Yes...

Go, then, freely
Each his way
Trusting God's grace!
Happiness and delight
Spring from usefulness,
As God has willed.

We sing and take leave of each other. But not you and I. We still have half a year before you will move on to the care of my teacher friends in Odense. Your principal shakes my hand in farewell. Amiably, gratefully.

And, for the moment, it's summer...
EARLIER IN THE YEAR I suggested to our principal that it might be nice if we could take you on our school trip to Poland.

He agreed. "Kim deserves it," he said. "And we can economise by you and me sharing accommodations."

Naturally, you were delighted.

The day before we leave my mother comes over to Funen to vacation in my house. I introduce you as just one of my students.

How absurd not to be able to say, "He is the human being I love!"

And how I look forward to showing you about the country which, after Hungary, has played the most important rôle in my political evolution! I've travelled all over it. I still have friends there. Like Hungary, Poland is in my blood.

Yet the trip is not a success.

Not for me, at any rate. Two years before it was simple enough: I was promoter, co-leader — not to mention interpreter. This time it's very different.

I'm travelling with my young lover.

It is through your eyes alone that I see everything, through your mind I experience it. To me, the others might as well not exist — and yet they're there all the same.

I'm inhibited.

I become inattentive. I grow unsociable and antisocial. Once I'm even hostile and rude in front of my fellow travellers. The whole time I have only one obsessive desire: to be as near you as possible, which is a problem in a bus full of lively and noisy youngsters.

But you take the seat right in back of me and, as a little message that you're still there, from time to time you surreptitiously sneak a finger forward to touch my side.

In Poznán we gather as a flock in front of the city hall and await the stroke of noon when two Billy goats come
out of the clock tower and butt each other. And there I get into a testy verbal slinging match with our principal.

A teacher fight in public.
Ludicrous and trivial.
Unfortunate.
Neither of us wants that.
I have to translate, and feel, not for the first time, that what I come out with sounds altogether foolish.
I’m irritated over the difficulty I have playing the rôle of teacher-guide.
When what I am, in fact, is a lover.
And in a group the lover is a fool. He’s out of place there, especially when he must hide the fact that he’s in love.

One morning in Warsaw, when we are scheduled for a city tour, you and I get up early and cheat on the others in order to be alone together for a few minutes. We put as much distance as we can between ourselves and the hotel. We meet under the shade of the great trees lining one of the boulevards. The day is warm. Water trucks nightly wash and cool down the streets, but already, early in the morning, the coolness has evaporated into the hot shimmering air. The people of Warsaw are on the way to work in crowded trams and on foot. Fruit drink vendors are out with their little white carts. We walk back and forth under the trees, sit down occasionally on the benches, moving together discreetly, as if by accident.

When we finally have to return, we part to make our separate entrances to the dining hall so it will seem quite by chance that we were both away from our flock at the same time. What ingenuity and invention we have to exercise not to attract attention! It’s more difficult for you, because your fellow students are always dragging you along with them. I can find more believable pretexts to
go my own way. Still, during the whole trip I feel hunted and nervous.

When we are with the others I make it a rule never to look directly at you or talk with you.

But that, too, might seem rather strange...

Like all lovers, we constantly long to be alone together. Like all lovers who find themselves in a crowd, we seek to be alone together there — and in vain.

We finally succeed in slipping away one afternoon for a couple of hours. I want to show you the real Warsaw I knew. Walking the streets I look at the young men and say, “You could easily be taken for a Polish boy.”

You feel flattered.

And justifiably.

We find a popular café not far from Nowy Swiat. We start talking with the people. You try a vodka. I down a whole lot of vodka.

When we came back to the hotel we’re rather late, and more than a little drunk.

I’m full of anguish.

In Krakow — of all Polish cities I love Krakow the best — every hope I have of being alone with you is dashed.

In Zakopane, it’s not until the second night, after a trip to the mountains, that we succeed in slipping away. My conscience is the same colour as the black Polish porter which comes in plump bottles with corks that pull out with a pop.

I want to show you the places I’ve been. The houses where I lived. The odours, sounds, colours which make me remember. I want to show it all to you, and tell you about it. But we have to be careful not to run into the others in this tourist nest of hotels, restaurants and cafés. Your fellow students can’t understand why you don’t want to rush out with them and have fun.
At last we find the kind of night-club — ugly, large, noisy — that’s guaranteed to be so frightening that neither student nor teacher would venture in.

There we’re left in peace.

I drink steadily.

I sit and dream of what it was like six years ago. Your eyes get sleepier and sleepier — mountain air and the drinks are taking their toll.

At last I must put an end to the outing.

Frightfully late.

And we nearly have a disaster that night...

In my insanity, I want to touch you. For eight days, by God, we’ve gone about without so much as exchanging a kiss, and now I boldly drag you down to the riverside behind the hotel. There in the dark we’re stopped by a policeman with an Alsatian dog. It isn’t until I explain to him who we are and where we’re staying that we’re allowed to go our way.

At the hotel I pull you into the first men’s room we pass and begin to grope you. Just then the door flies open. It could be one of our party. It isn’t. It’s a Pole who mumbles something or other in shock and bounds out of there and away, looking back over his shoulder as he goes...

So that’s the end.

At Auschwitz... No, I can’t write or speak any more about Auschwitz. This visit is my fourth.

At Auschwitz one must be silent.

At Katowice, however, I get up early, for it’s your birthday and I’ve carried a present for you in my suitcase all the way from Funen, nicely wrapped up and inscribed. I want to give it to you now, but you’re not in your room. So I start searching for you. I ask everyone I run into if they’ve seen you, but no one knows where you are. It’s a large building. Finally I end up in the basement, in the shower area.
And there you stand, naked and soaping down in one of the shower stalls. Your body is half-turned before me. I stand staring at the back and arse I’ve so longed to embrace and caress throughout our trip. Water splashes all about us. Laughter and shouts from the other stalls. The water steams, gurgles, fizzes. A little later you and I are alone in the shower room. I call your name. You don’t hear me. You’ve turned on the spigot again and let the warm water stream down over your lengthening body. You reach up into the air with your arms, turn around and with lifted head adore the luxuriant flood while your legs dance in place.

You’re rejoicing in yourself on this, your sixteenth birthday.

Then you turn off the water.

I know a cold final shower is not for you; in that respect you’re a sissy. You grope blindly for the towel which hangs on a hook outside the stall. As you pull it to you and bend forward to dry yourself between the legs with short, brisk strokes, I go up to you and touch your arm. You jump, raise your head and look straight into my laughing eyes.

“Happy birthday, Kim!”

I show you the package.

You’re still rather startled at having been taken by surprise in the middle of your bath.

“Thanks,” you say. “Thanks a lot.”

“Well, I found you at last.” I set your gift down on the bench beside your clothes. “Now I have to go upstairs and sort out the hotel bill.”

You step forward. Water drips from your hair and face and glistens on your torso. You toss the towel away, spring to the middle of the floor and throw your arms around me.

“Thanks a million, Jens!”

“Are your crazy?!?” I exclaim in horror and tear myself
loose. But you manage to place a big, fat, wet kiss on my mouth.

Then you grin.

"Look," you say in your still light but gradually thickening adolescent voice, with obvious pride. "Your little Kim is getting really big."

And I look down at your body.

And blush.

They say the sexual urge in young men reaches its peak at the age of seventeen. If that's true, my sixteen-year-old Kim Steffensen from Valby is ahead of schedule.

I flee, with your wanton laughter ringing in my ears, as fast as I can out of the shower room, run up the stairs to resume my duties as trip leader.

But throughout the homeward journey I hear voices.

I sit in that old rattling bus and hear them — the others — talking about us. Actually I can't really make out what they say, but I'm sure it's about us. I listen. I hear words. Names. Our names. Yours and mine.

Do they know everything? Have they spied on us? Have they tailed us on our secret sojourns? I listen and listen. I become more and more certain of what they're saying. It's slander, malicious slander.

No, it's the truth!

And now they laugh. A hideous laughter. I can feel their enmity seeping through the bus towards me in the back seat like an evil-smelling fart. Their gloating malice sifts into my body through every pore, poisoning it. My thoughts circle: the same names again and again: you, me, Kim, Eisenhardt, Kim and Eisenhardt, those two!

Their laughter makes the bus shake even harder.

I have to warn you.

When the bus finally stops in a town in a forest so we can get a bite to eat, I signal you away from the others.

"They know," I whisper.
"What do you mean?" You are quite bewildered.
"They know everything."
"Everything about what?"
"About us." I'm almost weeping.
"Nonsense!" you say with complete assurance. "You're seeing ghosts, you're hearing voices. You're worn out, Jens."
"Listen to how they laugh."
"Well? So what?"
"They're laughing at us!"

In Celle I give everyone the slip — you included, you the traitor who refuses to back me up in my war against our enemies. With my usual sixth sense for smelling out pubs, I quickly find a bierstube where I toss down a pick-me-up and chase it with good German beer. That helps. It helps a bit. So I stagger back amid the stage scenery and props of this gingerbread medieval town and collapse on a bench in front of the yellow castle where poor Caroline Mathilde wept over her lover's tragic death. Here I calm down. I return to the bus, bold, arrogant, and wade into the enemy's camp. And they don't look the least surprised when I crack a few bad jokes and get them laughing.

There is no slander-riddled malice in that laughter.

The malice is in myself. The poison from the poisoned world around us has slowly, over the years, seeped into my body.

The poison is anguish.
And from time to time it erupts.

"IT WORKED," I shout from the terrace, even before I see you inside the room.
"Good," you answer. "What did she say?"
"Nobody's going to interrupt us now. She's out there sunning herself on the lawn behind the dining hall with some of the new girls."

I'm talking about our Home Economics teacher. She has guard duty this weekend. It's the end of September; our new ten-months class has already been in session for a couple of weeks. But not all the students have gone home this Saturday.

The weather is beautiful.

"I told her I was going for a bicycle ride so I'd be out if anybody called. And if someone still comes by, all we have to do is lay low and be quiet and let them think we're not here."

You grin.

"I suppose one has a right to live one's private life in peace," I say, locking the door and pulling the unbleached linen curtains over the large window. "And now we're alone and we can do anything we want."

I look at you. You look at me.

We stare at each other for a long, long time.

Well, it isn't often we have such a chance to spend a whole afternoon alone together.

"Yes?" you say.

"Yes?" I say.

"What do you think?"

"Yes, what do you think?"

"Oh, Kim, you idiot!"

You grin.

I grin.

You say, "We'll haul the mattress down on the floor as usual, right?"

Afterwards you say, "What do you like most about me?"

"Everything," I answer.

"Come on, Jens, tell me."
“Mmmm, let me see now,” I say slowly, as though hunting for the right words, letting a finger-tip gently glide down your back.

“Out with it.”

“Your arse, I think.”

“That’s naughty. What about my hair?”

“It’s neater than it was before,” I answer. “I like it best when it’s a bit long like this, but not as long as those... what do they call those boys from Liverpool?”

“Beatles,” you say.

“Well, then... No, stay still...”

“And because it hides my low brow,” you say.

“I love your low brow.”

“Then kiss it.”

“Yes,” I say, obeying, “and I love your ears and I love your nose and I love your front tooth with a chip in it, and I love your throat and I love your collar-bone and I love your small hard nipples and I love your shell-like navel, and I love your...”

“Ouch! Stop it, get out of there!” you howl.

“You like that. You know you like that.”

“Yes, go on, go on. I want to try everything!”

I awake with your elbow in my eye.

Why in hell can’t we have a double bed? Why must we put up with that miserable school mattress on my bedroom floor?

You snore contentedly through your nose with your mouth open, taking up all the room lying on your back.

God, how I love you, and God how delightful it is to lie like two spoons together and sleep this way, and yet...

I free myself of your arm, get up from the mattress and go into my living room. It’s filled with late summer golden twilight gentled as it filters through the bleached linen curtains. I light a cigarette, walk to the kitchen and fetch
a beer from the cupboard. Like everything else in my little wooden house when the sun’s out, the beer is warm. I put the bottle in the bathroom sink and run cold water over it. When the label comes lose the temperature will be just right. As back-up I put a couple of more bottles in the sink.

I sit in my armchair and look in at you through the open doorway. You’ve kicked off the quilt and lie naked on the mattress, your body dimly, almost bluishly, gleaming in the milk-white light. The bedroom window lies in the shadow of the school building: only in the earliest hours after dawn is the sun able to shine through the elderberry bush outside and the linen curtains.

I luxuriate in the stillness and let you sleep. No student noises; even the cats under my house hold their peace today. I listen to your breathing. You sleep deeply and soundly, under Picasso’s boy with the horse. I can’t see him through the door, but I know that boy at least as well as I know you. A Spanish or perhaps a French boy. A dream boy. A myth about a boy. I recall one of Paul Eluard’s lines:

_The word boy like a little island._

And, watching you sleep, I confide in you:

I wouldn’t, my darling, claim the two of us are the best lovers in the world. You are too immature, childlike for that. Not to mention your damnable ticklishness! And I, in return, am far too gentle. I occurs to me now that maybe you wish I was less so. But is that all? No, I don’t think so, but I’m still convinced we’re not the greatest lovers in the world. Yet, for the time being, at any rate, we’re right for each other.

The new and wonderful thing about you is that after I make love to you I never feel shame or loathing.

Before... before our love, before you came into my life... I often felt it as a degradation; when I had sex with people I didn’t love it seemed almost a betrayal of my own body.
Such physical conjugation doesn’t mean much at the time — and nothing afterwards. It’s humiliating when you don’t really care for your partner.

I freely admit I felt disgust. I stank. With lust sated, depression settled in.

The little death.

All I wanted to do was slink away.

For what is there to say to a virtual stranger you have just balled? What is left but a pair of limp cocks which in all their absurdity seem ugly and ridiculous?

Loneliness, that’s all that remains.

But I never feel that way with you. And it doesn’t matter whether we have just had a good screw or a bad screw.

I feel just the opposite.

It’s as if we constantly renew ourselves; as if we’re continuously shedding our old skin and budding out, so that everything becomes new and beautiful, and all inhibitions vanish, and all suggestions of loathsomeness disappear.

Nothing about you is alien to me.

Nothing about you is hostile to me.

Nothing about you disgusts me.

And it doesn’t matter what state your large curved prick is in at the moment; it is always pretty to me because I love you. And I’m not speaking about your sexual organ as such.

I mean you!

When we lie on the mattress on the floor in the bedroom in my little house and fool around with each other, we form, all things considered, an odd chaos of arms, legs, fingers, toes, backs, throats, mouths, noses, eyes, hair, sweat, saliva, sperm; a friendly struggle, a tumult. If someone surprised us, or observed us secretly, we would look rather ridiculous, maybe hideous, abominable. Yes, repulsive. But, thank God, nobody walks in on us — I
really have remembered to lock the door! — and it is to be hoped that nobody is secretly observing us — I really have drawn the curtains! — and we ourselves don’t feel our act of love to be laughable, ugly, abominable, repulsive. It’s a fire that flares up and burns down; it’s a blossom that unfolds and then withers; it’s a few eternal moments of lingering in an earthly paradise. And oblivion, affection, warmth, childlike play and bliss.

My soul, what more do you want?
When I say I love your living body I mean that I love all of you, you as a totality.

I love everything outside and inside of you.

Everything you do seems to me worth loving; I could never imagine it being done in another way. As now, when you sleep and I sit there and ask, How can a human body be so incredibly beautiful?

You sleep...

And I wonder what you’re dreaming.

Is it of something or someone I don’t know about? Do you dream of happenings without me, places I’ve never been to? I look at you. You lie on the mattress, so near and so remote. You are inscrutable. I think I know you, yet you’re an undiscovered universe. When you dream, come to think of it, you become a stranger. I sit here making myself jealous over your dreams.

For a second I feel like getting up and bending down to you, shaking you awake so you can share your dreams with me, tell me about them. All, all you must tell me. I have to know everything about you. All, all, all!

I want to creep down onto you, believing I could then follow you into your dreamland. I could visit places only you know. I could share your ultimate secrets.

It seems so possible.

But I don’t get up. No, I don’t wake you. Perhaps I’m still a bit afraid.
Can this happiness continue?
Yes. So I stay where I am and contemplate you.
Pleasant melancholy.

During the course of that long summer — I think of it as our lucky summer — we talk a great deal about our childhoods. Like all lovers, we feel the urge to tell each other about ourselves. But your childhood is so close to you, it’s still so molten. You burn your fingers on it. So you turn your back on it and believe, in a moment of exhilaration, that it’s behind you forever. How wrong you are. How cruelly wrong. I haven’t the heart to tell you that. You’re still too immature to appreciate your own childhood. You still have its scent. You only want to free yourself from it, to rinse from yourself its smell of milk and sleep and chastity. You still fully and firmly believe that growing up is completely different from being a child.

You’re so sweet.

For example, after one of our very first intimacies, I put the obligatory question to you, “Haven’t you ever done this before?”

“Done what?” you ask.

“Gone to bed with someone.”

“No,” you answer, and look modestly up at the ceiling.

“Well, there was this one girl...”

“A girl?” I exclaim in horror and raise myself on an elbow so as to scrutinise you carefully. O, Eros Uranos, that has just been my secret but never articulated fear: suddenly one day you would reveal yourself as fundamentally directed toward females!

“’We weren’t very old. Just little kids. We didn’t do anything right — like this. But then there was a boy, Brian...”

“Brian?” I repeat, a bit relieved. “Well, that sounds better. Tell me about him.”

And you do.
I remember how ardently I dreamed as a child and teenager of meeting a boy or a man I could love. I dreamed so much I actually let myself be the seduced. But it was just a matter of sex, not of love. I remember how I wrote poems. How I lost myself in reveries. How I fell in love with the wrong people and how I wept and suffered under the impossibility of my yearnings. Now I know those dreams, those experiences, those vague infatuations, some stronger than others, were not wasted. That they were a sort of accumulated hoard of affection to be coined later when I fell truly and deeply in love with you. All that time I’d been practising, so to speak. I’d been apprenticed to myself. And my boy-dreams of boys, my searching, yearning, my attacks of anxiety, my disappointments and defeats, my good and bad experiences and adventures — all were building up, stone by stone, the staircase in the tower I now ascend in my outreach toward you...

My darling!

I admire your loveliness despite the fact that I’d never been taught to admire the physical beauty of my own sex. Nobody taught us that. Quite the contrary, every such expression was ridiculed. And when we were told about earlier cultures with other customs, the truth was suppressed, or our teachers apologised for these ancient peoples and explained that their behaviour was alien and unnatural — and most regrettable.

Why are we not yet allowed to love the boy in each other? It is the boy in you I love, and not anything else.

You are not a substitute for a girl or a women, as some people prefer to believe.

You are not a surrogate person for me.

You don’t fill the place of a son or a brother or a friend or a comrade.

It’s all so very simple that most people became mildly confused when I dare tell them:
You are simply you.
You are the other in my life.
The only one.
The Kim.

Not some image of some other person, not a substitute for any other being in the whole world!

Nevertheless when we are together with other people I have to act as if you hardly even exist. Although I am there you aren’t. I cannot get up from my chair and kiss you on the nose because suddenly you look very funny. I can’t stroke your tousled hair. I can neither pat you on the cheek nor hold your hand. And I cannot shout to the world with the lover’s blind enthusiasm, “Isn’t he beautiful?!?” Not to speak of patting you on the bottom or giving you one of those glances that say everything without words the way other lovers can — men, women, children — without further thought. I must always be on my guard. I always have to force myself to be content with a comradely clap on the shoulder and with my comradely teasing teacher’s tone. Yes, just distantly affectionate...

But I’m not your damned comrade.

I’m your lover.

The affection is important. And the lechery, the sensuality is important. And not the least important is what we call love. And so many other things are important. Money, for example. And a place to be. And to know who you are. And, of course, your work. And to get along or not to get along together in bed and at all odd hours of the twenty-four.

But all things considered...

Each of these things is terribly important, just as for every other couple of every other sort. But for us there’s always that pressure. For us anxiety always lurks somewhere. The pressure finds a haven on the other side of those unbleached linen curtains, beyond the thin walls, the
locked door. In our village street I cannot hold the hand of my darling. I can’t glow with the same instantaneous happiness as the boy and the girl sitting next to me on the Odense bus, or kiss my darling in the back row of the Kerteminde movie theatre — not with the same peace of mind, at any rate, not with the same naturalness. And if one day I steel myself to dare do such a thing, for me, with my background and upbringing, it would come off as a protest, a conscious provocation, not as something one simply does.

Of course, we are happy, you and I, right now, here. But we are happy in defiance. We are happy because we damned well demand to be happy. Because we’ve chosen to be happy. And when I think of how our love has been able to blossom and grow in the small space of freedom we’ve been able to make for ourselves, without anxiety, I get quite angry over the perfect absurdity that we cannot show it to the world, which is what I long to do. I’ve been raised to be honest, faithful, to trust other people. Nevertheless by necessity I have to lie, cheat and deceive.

The dichotomy is painful. One can grow embittered. But one can also go beyond that and become so filled with rage that you do something about it.

I haven’t yet come that far. It hasn’t even occurred to me. I still can’t see the connection between my private and political lives. My indignation extends no farther than making a defence. No offensives. What I crave is to be able to shout my love from the rooftops. I’m filled with this enormous longing to confirm before others the great and beautiful experience I’m caught up in. I want to show off the object of my love. I want to tell them that now, right now, I’m experiencing something unique and preciously beautiful. Yes, I want my love for you, and your love for me, to materialise for the whole world to see.

It is too soon...
YOU AWAKE AND CALL OUT:

"Why is it so dark in here? Why isn’t the light on?"
"I’ve just been sitting here and dreaming," I answer.
You’re silent. I hear you yawn and stretch. I feel you slowly coming into consciousness, realising where you are. I have gradually got to know your way of waking up. And I hope you feel secure.
You call again.
"I’m right here," I answer.
"I’m hungry," you say. "And I have to take a shit."
"One thing at a time," I laugh. You spring up from the mattress and come into view standing in the doorway, heavy with sleep, hair tousled. Then, with teeny steps, squeezing your buttocks together, holding the tip of your pee-pee down with a couple of fingers, you toddle forth.
"Kim has to shit," you repeat. "Kim has to go potty!"
Those bodily intimacies. Everything about you I love. Even the thought of your shit. There’s nothing about your body I don’t like. I love the silky hair in your ass, the sprouting hair in your armpits, the snot in your nose, the wax in your ears, the cheese between your toes — yes, even your dandruff is pleasing to me. No, here I exaggerate, for you’re painfully clean. That isn’t something I’ve taught you; you brought it from home. But just as I can enjoy the secretions and odours of my own body, so I enjoy yours.
"Aren’t you coming in here?" you shout. "I’m bored."
"Get ready first," I answer.
"I am ready!"
"Want me to come in and wipe you?"
"You can flush it."
"Thanks very much."
I get up and go into the hall which gives onto the bathroom. You’ve finished, I see. As usual you’re standing before the mirror fooling around with your hair. You thrust your chin close up to the glass to inspect it; if there’s any
beginning of a beard you cannot find it. Not even a blackhead, for that matter. Your skin is smooth and clear. But maybe you're searching for something else. How would I know? You make a grimace. I pull out another beer from the wash basin. I know from experience you will be a long time dealing with your reflection.

"Tell me," you say a moment later, turning your head towards me, "do you think I'm nice looking?"

"No," I answer and take a swing of beer.

"You mean it?"

"No," I say.

You turn back to the mirror, so I'm now looking at your profile.

"My nose is too big," you say meditatively. "And my mouth is too big."

"Your ears are cute," I put in.

Your cute ears hear that and you continue, "And my brow..."

"...is too low."

"Yes," you say zealously and bare your teeth with a self-critical grimace. "That's why I comb my hair down."

"It becomes you," I say.

"Do you think so?"

You turn to me again. I meet your eyes. You return to the mirror.

It's when I lower the bottle again from my mouth and stare at your reflection that I see you're sticking your tongue out at me.

You wrinkle your nose and pull the corners of your mouth down.

"Aren't you sort of stupid?" you say.

"DOES THE LAD REALLY have to lounge around here all the time? It's you I've come to see!"

My father is visiting.