I have the afternoon free and have excused myself from supper. It isn’t very often that my father comes by. The plan is that we will later go up to Kerteminde for dinner at Thornke’s hotel where my father is staying over night.

But you’re here, too.

I want you to meet my father. And deep in my heart I also want my father to meet you. But he hardly notices you — to begin with, at any rate. He chats and tells stories. He’s good at that. I’ve filled you in beforehand about my father’s stock of tales from all over the world. And, at my cue, he begins to tell them, using you as his politely attentive but mute audience. I’ve heard the stories countless times before. It doesn’t occur to me that my father might have grown weary of telling them.

He is retired now. So he has time to travel around and look in on his offspring. I like my father, as a matter of fact. I’m glad to see him. And we’ve never had difficulty talking with each other, my father and I. We’ve talked politics; we’re good at that. In our agreement that society is rotten to the core, there’s always something or someone we can run down. We confirm each other’s sceptical views of the world. As for our utopian visions, our dreams, our yearnings, we remain silent — our agreement doesn’t extent that far.

“It’s oil,” says my father. “It’s oil that steers the world. After forty years on the seas, I know what I’m talking about.”

My father is always going on about oil and the multi-national capital interests behind it. I nod in assent, confirming him now in his belief in the power of oil. To be perfectly honest, it seems to me he exaggerates a bit...

At this time.

I really enjoy my father’s company, but I don’t know him. It could hardly have been otherwise with him away most of the time I was growing up. We wrote letters, many
letters. I was trained to do that. But, of course, one writes letters for one’s own sake, and the letters I wrote to my father on my years of travel were a sort of duplicate of my diary from London, Paris, Budapest, Moscow... They were well-written and totally impersonal. They dealt with what I’d seen and sensed. They told nothing personal about myself. For I knew perfectly well what my father thought about people like me. I wasn’t very old before I understood there were some things you shouldn’t discuss when my father was present. That didn’t particularly bother me. There were so many other things we didn’t talk about in our home.

But now here is my father sitting in my little house at school, old and grey and wasted after a long illness.

At first it goes well enough. We drink sherry, the co-op’s best. You, too, have a glass or two. Later in the afternoon when the bottle is empty I send my clever student down to the co-op for a replacement. It’s only later I realise how much my father relaxes now that you’re gone. I’ve told him in the meantime that I’m giving you extra tutoring so you can advance to gymnasium. That doesn’t interest him in the least.

And why should it?
And that’s when I make my blunder.
When you have to slip away for supper at six I tell you to come right back afterwards.

“Why did you say that?” asks my father.

“Say what?”

“Ask him to return?”

I answer that it must be very interesting for such a young person to hear what an old sea-farer like my father has to tell.

“Does the lad really have to lounge around here all the time? It’s you I’ve come to see!”

“He is such a nice boy,” I say soothingly.
“He still doesn’t have to perpetually hang about,” repeats my father sharply.

No, I think, you don’t have to. But that’s precisely what you are doing. I realise I don’t feel like visiting with my father if you’re not with us too, that my father only interests me if I can look at him through your young eyes. And at the same time I realise that what has bit by bit become natural to me isn’t to others. A student with his teacher who has his father visiting him: all right, let it go on for an hour or two and then out you go! Off, now, and do your homework! But a boy who all day long is allowed to sit and listen without saying a word, and whom, in the bargain, I invite to return, that is too much. It looks suspicious. It isn’t natural.

Did my father ever invite his cabin-boy in when I visited him on shipboard?

No — unfortunately!

And I can’t just say to my father, or to anyone else in the world,

“This is Kim. I love him. That’s why he’s here!”

“TELL ME, in your own words, something about the sagas.”

“They were men,” you say.

I laugh.

“The sagas?”

“No, him. Njal and all those others.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“They didn’t just talk. They did things.”

You look up at me with a pair of very serious blue-grey eyes. Is there a sort of challenge there?

“Well, yes,” I say lightly. “At any rate that’s the way the stories are told. We don’t get to know very much about those people’s feelings.”
"They were men of action," you say stubbornly.
These long autumn evenings. We're always together now. I have no free time at all.
And that's fine, of course.
But I don't get much writing done. My book has come out. I'm thinking about the next one, but for the moment it has to remain in my mind for, although by now I can teach almost by rote, most of the rest of my waking hours I spend studying with you. We're going all out to get you into gymnasium so you can go on with your education; right now you're cramming to enter the tenth grade at my teacher friends' school in Odense. You study Latin with the neighbourhood priest, mathematics with our principal and foreign languages, Danish and some history with me. There are many large gaps and we're busy filling them in before July, when you will move into town and take up residence in your own welfare-financed room.
We work very hard that autumn; still we find time both to love and to chat.
By now we're quite good at both.
And in three-quarters of a year I'll be free of my teaching obligations. I shall go to Hungary for research on my new book. And afterwards... yes, afterwards, I'll conquer the world...
Together with you!
In any case, that's what I hope.
That's what I long for and dream about.
During those autumn months I also show you the poems I had written when I was fifteen, sixteen, seventeen. There are many poems and they are very poor. Lyrical junk food, as the editor of a literary journal once wrote when, in a fit of megalomania, I had sent some to him.
But nevertheless...
At the time lyrics flowed from me like nocturnal emissions and I read my poems aloud to myself and was
moved. It doesn’t occur to me to betray the young, albeit poor, lyric poet I then was. It was derivative poetry on life and death and loneliness and the war in Korea. There was a lot of tree bark and wood in them. They teemed with birds greater than the wind, birds that could find no place to rest their wings. They swarmed with Korean children killed with napalm, blind coxswains, deaf skippers, the globe in flames and water in my mouth.

And now when I show you my poems, and drawings and whatever else I created when I was fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, it’s as if the difference in our ages disappears and we’re coevals, equals. We can grasp and love each other, yes make love with each other, in a new and totally different, congenial way.

It’s the work, the thinking, the joint everyday endeavour that form the fertile soil in which our love can grow.

I teach you how to break the back of a book in the middle and carve it from the covers inward toward the middle. I teach you how to drink sherry — although still not dry sherry. I teach you it’s necessary to participate actively in politics — without seeing myself in a position to live up to this demand. But we don’t forget the outside world. We transform my house into a stage and play dramas of life and death. We give incendiary speeches to each other. We laugh a lot, too. And, alone, we can be bloody vicious, quite shameless in our sarcasm and satire. Here at last we find an outlet for the energy pent up in us while we play out our mute clown rôles of others. And now I teach you how to read poetry. You learn fast, and by heart. How your face blazes with deep indignation, moving your hand with almost Russian fervour, while you declaim in your still light, slightly hoarse Danish voice Mayakovsky’s harsh poem to his colleague Sergei Esenin upon his suicide:

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You have,
as they call it,
gone away.

Void...
out in the stars you flee.
Nothing more,
no advances,
grotty pubs, cards.

Matter of fact
No,

Esenin,  
I shall not slander.

With a lump in the throat,
I see
you grasping
With a bloody hand
the rope
before you let
the bag of bones
swing
in its noose.

Wait,
hold up!
Are you crazy?

Will you really
let death whiten your cheek?

You
who more than any other
Always
had a ready
answer.

I love the way you cast the book from you and, lashing out with your arms, shout, “I’m a poet!” I love the way you toss yourself on the sofa, hold out your arms towards
me and call, "Come here!" I love the way you convulse under me because you're so ticklish I can hardly touch your skin without your bursting into howls of laughter. I love the natural way you ask, "Why don't you get rid of all those nasty clothes?" I love the way, afterwards, you hug me before you dress, while I grumble about how slow you always are. I love the way you lean over to tie the laces of your shoes, which steadily grow bigger and bigger. I love the way you shower me with tiny hard kisses when I have just shaved, and the way you rub the palms of your hands together and say, "Oh, I'm absolutely starved!" You're always starved. I love the way, during the course of a few seconds, you wolf down the food I've spent hours preparing for you, and the way the chocolate bars I can never resist buying for you in the co-op disappear. I love the way you sit bent over the table under the lamp in your room down in the village while I stop for a moment outside in order to register your image on my retina — the real purpose of my evening walk. I love the way you ask if I think your new cap is smart: I don't think it is, actually, but I nevertheless agree with you and answer yes; and the way you spend hours fussing with your hair before the mirror so it will cover your small forehead. I love the way in which you...

In short, I love the way you're my beloved.

And during that happy autumn you don't need to be present in a purely physical way. Just the awareness that you're somewhere around in my vicinity, always within reach, is enough. Perhaps the most magical moments of all are when you aren't actually in sight but will soon arrive. Then, in anticipation, I can imagine how wonderful we will have it together. Then I can abandon myself to day-dreams, half yearning, half reality, that sweet melancholy twilight-world — or rather dawn-world — between fiction and fact: landscapes of infinite beauty and extent,
horizons that continually roll back revealing space beyond space, opening, expanding before us. I look at the clouds through my large window. I follow their flight across the sky while the trees labour under the wind and the cove beyond the black fields is streaming with seafoam: they chase each other, they flee. I follow them, travel with them into this infinity, this eternity, this ever-flowing river the source of which is my heart and your heart — our hearts...

What bliss!

And what terrible banality!

Although today I can admit that I never really understood that fear of the banal, the shrinking from it, shared by all the sages and arbiters of taste of the time — a fear and shrinking I, too suffered from, brought up in sad puritanism as I was.

But it should be understood...

I have neither in life nor in art been able to find anyone or anything I could identify with.

Where could I, in the early 1960s, find it in my own profession, in literature? Everywhere there was only sickness and death. Everywhere despondency and fatalism. Tragedy is built into every story that touches on what in those days I call my problem but really is only a problem because it is made into a problem — by me, too. Frost spreads on the window panes. Death lurks in Venice. The heart is in exile. The friendships are too special to last. Everything ends at the land’s end, Finisterre. No joy, no laughter. The German writer sees his protagonists’ ecstasy over a beautiful boy as a sign of disease, a fall. The English writer lets his infatuated protagonist take his own life out of fear of the world’s verdict. The French author lets a very young boy swallow poison after the exposure of a tender love affair with a slightly older schoolmate. And the American writer has his youth end his life in the waves of the Atlantic Ocean because he can’t cope with being
an exception and so could never be honest and sincere with those dearest to him. How awful it all is! Where in literature, where in art, was there the slightest hint that love between a man and a boy could be a blessing, a source of joy and inspiration for both partners — as I, no you and I, are experiencing it?

Actually, Gide dared but I don’t know that at the time. And there are others — many of them — but they are still all inaccessible to me.

A closed land.

A taboo maintained by our loveless culture’s rulers and commissars.

Only on the stage does a Danish playwright in those years have the courage to portray a gay young man in a way sympathetic to a reluctant audience. But in *The Bright Northern Night* his love remains unrequited.

Of course...

I almost said.

And so from all sides I am informed that I’m one of the unfortunates, sick, handicapped, abnormal, perverse — one of those people dealt with in false and misunderstood tolerance by professionals who write books that ask Why are they that way?

Or gather statistics, carry out sociological investigations, make radio and TV interviews, films, write sensationalistic articles, participate in parliamentary debates...

*A sexual minority* — What do they want?

What the devil has that to do with what is happening to me — in me, with me — when you suddenly appear in my life and the heavens split and the ground shakes and a cloudburst slakes my thirsting soul in the wilderness?

What before was ugly becomes beautiful.

What before seemed shameful now fills me with joy.

What before I denied I now must affirm.
“CALM DOWN, JENS” you say when finally, after the Christmas holiday, we’ve managed to meet in the station restaurant in Odense. “Don’t cry!”

“I’m sorry,” I begin. Then I can’t go on. It’s too violent, too intense.

The sudden absence.

“You have to forgive me, but I just can’t help it. I bloody well can’t do without you, Kim. It’s ridiculous; I know it’s ridiculous.”

“But I am here,” you say.

“Yes, Kim, I know that very well,” I answer, still hiccuping and snuffling as the tears run down my cheeks. “But you can imagine what it’s like. At noon today... We always sat at the table in my house, getting ready to eat. Today I saw you the whole time. You were there and you weren’t. Not only that, I felt your knee under the table. It was pressed against mine as it had been all last year when we sat together. Do you realise how long we have sat beside each other at that table? A year and a half, Kim! And so today, when suddenly, for the first time, you weren’t there...”

“I’ll come out to you Saturday,” you say, and attempt to cheer me up.

I nod and try to pull myself together. It dawns on me now that your whole situation is completely different from mine. Of course you don’t feel our separation the way I do. You’ve suddenly been thrown into something new and exciting. You’re at the critical beginning of a new period in your life. I’m left behind, back where I’ve always been.

You can’t possibly feel the privation I do.

“Yes, you’ll come on Saturday,” I say and smile through my tears of self-pity. “And we’ll write each other, won’t we? I’ve brought some envelopes for you. See, I’ve return-addressed them differently, so they won’t start to wonder at school about all those identical communications
from Odense — all right, I know that’s ridiculous, but we can’t be cautious enough.”

“I’ll be very careful,” you say. “And you know what?”
“No,” I look into your face that is now approaching mine across the table.
“I.L.Y.” you whisper. (I love you.)
“Thanks, Latinist,” I sniff.
“And now drink your beer,” you say.

I CALM DOWN AGAIN. After all, it’s the future that matters. Our common future. But how far can I see? How far dare I see?

Throughout the spring I prepare for my visit to Hungary. I will leave right after school lets out — and that will be the end of my guest rôle as teacher. From then on I’ll be a serious writer. You give me courage. And you will join me in Hungary — for a while, at any rate. We’ve long ago decided that.

But the very fact that you’re no longer in my immediate vicinity at school proves that nothing is guaranteed, nothing is static, everything evolves. We’re all growing. You in particular are growing. For the present all I can do is dream and yearn and make plans.

I put up a large map of Hungary on my wall — and long for you every hour of the day and night. I live for your short, hectic visits which are always over far too soon. My thoughts and feelings focus upon you. As teacher I fall back on old tried-and-true procedures. In your absence you dominate my existence far more than when I had you nearby.

I live, we live, in our many letters.

We write each other every other day. I camouflage the envelopes. We invent a sort of code — I don’t remember how we decided to do so. Lovers have never had difficulty
devising their own special languages. With us the word ‘latin’ becomes a synonym for love.

In my letters I call you ‘Latinist.’

No one who intercepted our letters or snooped into them would be in the slightest doubt for even a moment about their real nature. They smoulder with love, they swell with emotion. They stink, so to speak, of the happiness of union and infatuation. They’re beautiful letters. They no longer exist. Actually one has survived. Obviously out of vanity, I’d made a copy. We burn all the others a year later in a cabin in Hemsedal in Norway. Later I regret it. Today I’m not quite sure...

I remember their contents but not their exact words.

Except for that appellation ‘latinist’.

EVERY SATURDAY AFTERNOON you arrive on the bus. Nobody at the school knows: you sneak in under cover of winter darkness. Sometimes, for appearance sake, I have to go down and eat supper in the dining hall, while you hide alone in my house. Sometimes we lock the door and draw the unbleached linen curtains in front of the big window and pretended the house is empty.

But the house is far from empty.

The house is full of love.

Before you even get your coat off I kiss you. You set your briefcase on the floor. It’s heavy with all your new books. And you, yourself, are heavy with lots of new words. Your cheeks are cool. Your lips slowly warm.

You visit faithfully, but sometimes I have to tell you not to come. That’s when I have weekend duty — fortunately by now only every fourth week. Otherwise we’re together Saturdays and Sundays — and when we aren’t together we write every other day.

I prepare our meals on the cooker in the kitchenette in my entry, or I bring something from the school kitchen.
Meanwhile you sit and read or write or listen to the radio. You sleep on the small green sofa in the sitting-room or on a mattress on the floor in my bedroom, or in my bed under Picasso’s tender brown picture of the nude boy with the horse.

Sunday mornings you run naked around the house.

That spring we wallow in jazz and modern poetry. You write and paint and imitate me everywhere, even in my way of speaking. I’ve succeeded. The future looks bright. But there’s anxiety too. Occasionally, with good reason, I’m sacred out of my wits when a car suddenly drives into the school yard. Any moment we might be discovered. You could make some blunder in Odense, or letters could be intercepted and opened — there are so many opportunities for disaster. We’re still living under the old, grim law, and you won’t be seventeen until July.

In my house we’re conspirators against the world. I’m very happy, and always very afraid.

Why can’t I remember whether I even considered what all of this might mean to you?

MY

I write that one word and the poem is finished.

Maybe you’re right: I can’t write poetry. Even so, I put no full stop at the end. I let the word stand. My mood is blue. I take a book from the shelf, open it at random, seize upon a word, a sentence, another writer’s poem, and let the whole thing fall...

The sun is shining. It’s horrible.

But you’re here.

I love these pictures. I walk among them, all the time. It is half-past-two on this Shrovetide Sunday and the sun is shining so brutally, and a great tit has settled on a bough right before my window, and in a little while I must pull myself together, take off the sweater (which is yours), change shirts and put my mask on. And then down to the traditional Shrovetide observances. Can I endure it?

The time is five minutes after two-thirty. What are you doing? Are you writing? Are you reading? Are you taking a walk?

There may be some truth in Erik Knudsen’s wise words: It can’t be endured if one doesn’t endure. We’ll try. So smile. (That’s to myself.) I’m turning into a ridiculous old sentimentalist, a dusty custodian of my museum (are the pictures any good?) full of words and yearnings and a little beer and a some akvavit but still not enough — I must go on a penitential pilgrimage to the co-op supplicating a new supply. Oh, oh, suddenly I remember last year. A sherry-blurred picture: jazz concert from Broadcast House, I myself tipsy, we had to go down, and then, by God, you won the Shrovetide games or something. Ridiculous? Perhaps. Now the time is ten minutes past two-thirty and darned if a whole mass of old students from last year haven’t arrived.

We are lucky enough!
And you are also here.
But I’m only partly here.
Now I have to take that sweater off!

I must write it down:
The most beautiful, the best, the most crucial thing for me is that you exist.

But words are so dead.
I want to cry a little. I mustn’t. That sweater! They’ve already started to go in for the Shrovetide muffins. The
sun is still brutally shining. The time is five minutes to three. I’ll be back in a moment. Wait for me...

My

Yes, it was doomed. Now it’s Monday. I thought I could have written an epic to you yesterday. It was impossible. It also seemed impossible simply to get the letter posted. I could have given it to one of yesterday’s visitors, but I wouldn’t do that. Now I’m in the same situation as you were last week. I know you’re expecting a letter today, Monday. You won’t get it until tomorrow. Oh, Kim, my Latinist, yesterday was hopeless. My house was full of people all afternoon and evening. Fortunately I was so full of what was in my bottles of beer I could actually endure the crowd. Those beers proved indispensable!

Now more time has passed. We have eaten. People are changing for the procession. A thousand thanks for your letter. It meant so much to feel you. By the way, some of them ask (yes, they are still here, I’m afraid!) why you haven’t come up for our banquet. Obviously they didn’t know where you were. Well, I must post this. Tomorrow is a normal day again — thank God. So, till Saturday. I close in Latin: Vale bene — and all the rest.

Yours...

AT LAST YOU COME...

I’ve been waiting and waiting. All afternoon I’ve been waiting. Now it’s almost twilight. Our arrangement was clear enough: you would arrive on the bus about three o’clock. As usual. As you always do. Why, then, aren’t you here? I sit at the window in front of the typewriter and grow more and more hysterical.
I’m still not used to waiting for you.

But finally...

I hear your steps on the gravel in front. I see your capped head and your shoulders approaching. But I cannot yet show the relief and joy I feel. I’m still bitter and full of self-pity. As I open the door I bark:

“Why in the world...”

Even before you get your duffel coat off and set down the heavy briefcase, you spot the glass by my typewriter.

“How have you been sitting here drinking?”

You go to the table, smelling and sniffing. There are drops of rain in your hair. The light from the fields outside is still reflecting in your eyes.

“Of course not. It’s just grape- tonic.”

I want to get rid of the glass. I go on the offensive.

“Why in the world are you so late?”

I could bite off my tongue. That isn’t what I want to say at all. I don’t wish to reproach you for anything. I just want an explanation. No, not even that. I want to tell you how glad I am to see you at last.

But you don’t answer my question. Before I can move my hand, you bend over the table and stick your nose in my glass.

“Grape- tonic!” you sheer. “Grape- tonic and akvavit. You’re sitting here getting soured in the middle of the fucking afternoon.”

From here on everything goes wrong.

“I couldn’t stand the waiting for you,” I say, and again feel the tears of uncertainty rise. Boozy tears, to be sure, but still...

“I don’t feel like hanging around here with you half- drunk. It’s a fucking bore.”

You sound both angry and sad.

“So, why didn’t you come when you were supposed to?”

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But my counter-attack gets nowhere.
"Because..." you say.
"Because what?"
"None of your Goddamned business."
"Please, Kim, stop it!"
I hear how frightened I sound.
"I'll be damned if I will," you snarl. "I don't have to answer to you for what I do.
"But we'd agreed..."
"Well, I'm here, aren't I?"
You turn your back to me while you pull off your gloves. Your back is defiant and terribly young. I don't occur to me that you, too, could be having a rough time.
"Oh, damnit, Kim, you don't know what it felt like waiting for you. It's been a nightmare. I can't take much more of it."
"Well, neither can I," you tell the wall in front of you.
"All this whining! I'm sick to death of it!"
I get up, glass in hand.
"Let's try to have a good time, shall we?"
"Leave the akvavit alone!" you answer harshly. Your back is still turned.
"Okay, okay," I mutter and squeeze the greasy glass with my fingers. How naive you are, I think. But how can you be otherwise? You know nothing about drinking. Leave the bottle alone — that's exactly what I can't do. At this stage of my afternoon high I must go on drinking if I am to create a reasonably pleasant atmosphere here. And that's what I'm supposed to do, right? We're going to have a good time — a nice time — together. That's how it always is. Weekend after weekend...
The oasis in this weary desert trek.
I edge past you without touching you. For the first time our bodies radiate real enmity toward each other. It's a new and hideous sensation. It hurts, physically. My arms ache
to embrace you, to soften you, to love you. But I don’t dare. For the first time since we began making love to each other I don’t dare touch you for fear of being rejected.

At least not before I have a bracer.

“So, come on, take your coat off,” I say as evenly as possible from the kitchenette. In a flash I bend down, get the cork out of the hidden bottle and pour a shot of liquor into the already heavily fortified grape soda. With a little luck you won’t discover what I’d done, and pretty soon everything will be fine.

“You know what?”

You turn towards me.

“No, Kim,” I answer, contented, removing the glass from my lips. I am cheered up by the liquor and my success as a secret drinker.

You stare at me and say:

“I think I’m leaving.”

“What do you mean?”

“What I said. I’m leaving.”

“You don’t mean that.”

“Oh, yes I do!” you shout in my face. “I’m not coming all the way out here to be with a drunken bum who just sits around spewing vomit! I’ve had enough of your bullshit.”

Now I stare at you.

“Do you know...” I say slowly and extremely quietly, while I smilingly lift my glass to my mouth and turn it between my fingers so that my lips barely touch its sticky edge. “Do you know how beautiful you are when you get mad?”

Finally our eyes meet. We look into each other. Or does each of us see only himself? Something happens, in any case.

It is pure desperation.
“I’m leaving,” you say, and start pulling your gloves on again. I don’t answer you. I drink. I’m silent.
“Did you hear that? I said I was leaving.”
I sit down at the table. You are still working on your gloves.
Suddenly I explode:
“All right, then, go, damnit!”
“I will.”
I drink. I am silent. I look out of the window seeing nothing but the clouds moving across the sky. The light is fading, but it is still day. You’re still fumbling with your gloves.
“Goodbye,” you say.
I don’t answer.
“Goodbye,” you say again.
I still don’t answer you.
You bend down to pick up your briefcase. You’ve finally got your gloves on, it seems.
“Goodbye,” I say.
“Yes,” you say, “goodbye, then.”
“Go to hell!” I shout.
I see your back disappear out the door and down the steps from the terrace. I see your capped head go by and turn the corner. Then you are gone. I get up. Through the other window above the couch I can see you stalking away on your long legs. You swing your briefcase wildly. The nape of your neck is white beneath the cap. Damn it. You really meant it? There is no bus at this hour. You turn right. Down the lane towards the highway. I suppose you’ll try to hitch-hike. It’s Saturday afternoon. Well, maybe you’ll be lucky...
God be with you!
I empty my glass and go to get the bottle hidden in the cupboard. I pour. I drink. I glare out the window at the big dumb field swelling towards the sky. I follow the move-
ments of the clouds and consider that I could always get some writing done. Spend the weekend alone. When had I last had a weekend to myself? Not in the past year, certainly. Then I hear voices outside the house. Laughter. Running feet. They vanish again. Thank God there are almost no students left at school. It is quiet. I can work.

Jesus — what the hell am I thinking?

This is all wrong. We quarrelled. This is terrible. We don’t usually fight, at least not in this spiteful way. What was that look in your face? There must be something very wrong. It can’t be just my akvavit.

What am I doing?

I must be insane!

In no time I’m out of the house, pumping hard on the pedals of my old bike. Quick, quick, quick it goes — past our principal’s house — did they see us? Then around the corner and up the hill past the grove and the pond and down again past the County Council house with the water pump and the kids with the perpetually runny noses and the perpetually yapping dog — and uphill again, tough, hard, till I finally reach, standing on the pedals, the sunken lane and, to the right, the long descent toward the highway. Now I can coast.

I catch my breath and yell:

“Kim, Kim!”

You have gone far. I can see you almost all the way down to the bottom of the hill. You are walking as though you have to catch something.

“Kim!” I yell again.

Speed and wind make my eyes overflow. It’s not just alcohol making me weep now.


“Kim,” I say, in as conciliatory and ingratiating a voice as I can manage. “Let’s stop this nonsense.”