after all these years, I find myself trying to think of possible and impossible excuses and explanations, instead of saying honestly:

"I love you. Therefore, of course, I want to get it on with you."

Or:

"I want to get it on with you because I love you."

To whom am I trying to apologise? For whose sake am I thinking up all of this bullshit? Who am I still afraid of? Which commissioners?

And even now...

Now, as then....

At night I light a candle and sit still in the room among its shadows and stare into the flame. Sometimes I listen to music. Sometimes even the music is too much. The relative stillness of the never-still school is enough for me. Now it sleeps. Now you sleep. Now you become all boys to me. Now you become the boy I, myself, once was. A sleeping child. A slumbering Eros. A dreaming and self-reflecting Narcissus. Ah, Kim, your quiet breath in the night. It reaches me though the darkness, it pushes in through the walls of my house, adds fuel to my candle and makes its flame flicker in greeting. You are like the flame — little, full of life, incredibly quick, incomprehensibly fresh and young and ready to burst with possibilities...

I have burned myself on you. So I puff you out. It is impossible. You *cannot* be blown out. Not even the darkness can make your image go away. On the contrary, your image is brighter than in light. You come to meet me. I kiss you and touch you. I make love to you. I am full of longing.

Yes, I am brimming with love and I have no idea what I should do with it. My hands smart with pain. They long to caress and be caressed. My mouth burns. It would taste and be tasted. My lips glow with fever. They would kiss

I cry out to you...

Listen to me, hear me!

AT LAST....

We are alone.

On the annual school outing to Vendsyssel, you and I drift away from the others, in secret and dread. It is a free afternoon: most everyone has gone to the beach, but we have sneaked away along faint foot paths to meet secretly in a deserted spot in the hills, far from the others. We lie down in the grass and look up at the heavens. The sun is warm. A premature, wholly unexpected spring day has exploded with a suddenness which takes our breaths away. It is magnificent and we are alone. Now, yes, now, is the time to tell you. But how? You lie at my side, so near and yet so far.

I raise my head on my elbow and contemplate you.

And in that sandy, hilly field, under a capricious April sun, I begin to talk and talk, as I gaze fixedly on that profile I love but daren’t caress. Your fallow-deer eye glints, your nostrils quiver. And at last I can no longer hold back and more than hint at my feelings for you. I don’t come right out and say what I think and feel. I come as close as I dare. But I sense that you understand me, even though you don’t say so. You remain silent.

When Easter comes we will both go to Copenhagen — I to attend a meeting of the anti-nuclear forces, you to your family. I frantically search for an excuse to get together with you, and find it in jazz....
WE ARRANGED TO MEET at eight pm outside Jazzhus Montmartre in Store Regnegade, and there you are waiting for me by the entrance. I’m in high spirits — elated, actually — by the campaign’s hugely successful meeting in Raadhuspladsen, the town hall square. My father is there, and afterwards we have a lively political discussion over a couple of bottles of Stille beer.

“Hello, Kim,” I say, with a great smile of joy at seeing you again. We shake hands. “Have you been waiting long?”

“Well, a couple of hours,” you grin back, shaking your head. You are obviously relieved I actually showed up. I suspect you arrived there very early.

“Shall we go inside?” I suggest.

The hall is jammed as usual. Cigarette smoke billows up to the ceiling and smarts the eyes. Candles flicker growing out of bottles. Beer bottles clink. Voices drone. But the music carries everything before it, and it is for the music we have come.

We find a pair of seats at some distance from the musicians’ podium. I’m finally able to get some drinks. We toast each other and look around. Montmartre seems to have its regular customers — and then there’s us. I know little about the Copenhagen jazz world. I moved in quite different circles in the past.

You seem very much involved in what you hear and see. I push back my chair a bit from our long table and watch you secretly from the side. You look so sweet in your corduroy coat and white shirt and that pearl-grey tie. The tyranny of the necktie hasn’t quite come to its end: not even jazz fans have liberated themselves from the universal cravat. But here and there a beard is seen — and isn’t hair also getting a bit longer?

I lean forward and half shout into your ear, “What do you think of this place?” With eyes and mouth you tell
me you like it. So we toast again, abandon all further conversation and give ourselves up to the music of Dexter Gordon.

Suddenly I feel a hand on my shoulder; at first I think it’s you. But there you sit half with your back to me, chin propped in your hands, seemingly lost in the music.

“What the devil,” I cry.

It’s an old friend from my political days.

He squats with his hand on my shoulder. We smile and start speaking at the same time. Neither of us can be understood; the words vanish like smoke to the ceiling. I assume he’ll ask me what I’m doing now.

“I teach,” I tell him, and try to explain what our school is like.

“I’ll be damned,” he says. “You can actually put up with all that establishment farting around?”

I shrug.

“And have you got anything written?”

I tell him about my radio script and my new book which will be coming out in the autumn.

He rises to a crouch and smacks me on the shoulder again.

“I saw you as soon as you came in, but I thought you might have company?”

I don’t answer.

“Won’t you join us at our table? I’d like you to meet a colleague of yours...”

He points behind. I turn around and recognise one of the most talked-about young writers of the day, a slightly older acquaintance from the time when I was secretary of the Festival Committee and, later, on the staff of the New Socialist Party. He was one of a group of intellectuals who in those early years were hard-working contributors to the our journal. Suddenly I recall that he always referred to me, sarcastically, as “The Briefcase Man”.

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I steal a glance at you.
So I find myself in a dilemma. During our rather loud conversation you have been sitting silently apart, for all the world completely engrossed in the sounds of Dexter Gordon. You haven’t made it obvious we are together. I haven’t introduced you. Nor will I now. I am undecided. Should I go over and chat with my old friends? In a way I’d like to. This is the kind of group I enjoy. On the other hand, you are here. For obvious reasons I hesitate to drag you into this crowd of acquaintances from my Copenhagen past. How would I explain you? How would you yourself react? And they? Of course they would be polite, friendly — and soon would be ignoring you totally. But wouldn’t they also be suspicious of this somewhat peculiar relationship between teacher and pupil? I simply don’t dare have a confrontation. And at the same time I realise this will be the price I will have to pay over and over again in the future for being together with you.

My old friend stands waiting for my answer. I smile up at him and mumble something about another time. He casts a quick, sidelong glance at you, this boy by my side, smiles non-committally and for the third time gives me a clap on the shoulders.

“We’ll see you, then,” he says and is gone.

In the event, we don’t see him.

Immediately afterwards I suggest we leave, telling you I feel sick. It is quite true. Do you believe me? You don’t, at any rate, protest. Good Lord, what can you do, other than follow me wherever I go? There is no question about your loyalty. Nor any doubt that you would feel left out when such ghosts from my past turn up. And with that ghost has crept in our difference in age — the abyss which separates us.

The whole situation, of course, is impossible.
Yes, but it is the impossible I want.
THE TOWN GLIDES BY. I sit by you in the streetcar. We will soon have to part. But we have agreed to meet next noon at the main Station. I’ll wait for you in the departure hall snack bar. Everything is arranged. I get off at Liberty Monument.

I remain standing at the stop with hand raised watching you ride off on Tram 6 toward Valby. I have to take the Holte line.

But it’s still early. Now if I...
No...
Yes...
That was so long ago.
But no!
My body commands me. Not towards the red clock on the station but to the left.
I wander back towards Raadhuspladsen.
The hustler scene....
But I won’t stop. Not tonight and never again. I’m an able-bodied man now and quite able to cast myself out in the open sea...

If I can use that metaphor for the Pisserenden, The Urinal, filthiest street of Copenhagen.
The Cancan is jammed. Not a place to sit, hardly a place to stand. I take a deep breath and slip past the doorman — or rather the bouncer — and set about squeezing towards the bar on the right. The air is thick with smoke, body sweat, beer, bad breath blended with piss — and the stench of sperm from the urinals down in the corner where the men’s and women’s toilets lie, both constantly occupied but neither by what in ‘normal’ circles would be called real women.

I have always liked dirty bars. Certainly the Cancan fulfils that requirement one hundred percent. The room is low-ceilinged, painted in dark colours, hideous. With its tables and chairs and separate stalls, in its half-empty state,
it resembles the last waiting room on the Styx just before the final ‘All aboard!’ I don’t know what it looks like when it is full. But one can be certain of one thing: the stallion in rut in the photo on the end wall is doomed to perpetual lust and will never enjoy release from his heat — like so many other beings.

I manage to fish up the price of a beer from my pocket and one of the waiters, awake in a flash, responds with an opened bottle across the bar. He comes to life when it is a matter of business. And so I stand with a foaming butch beer in my hand and press my back against one of the pillars while, without moving my head, I examine the scene about me. Everyone else is doing the same thing, except for a little flock of regulars who know the scene and behave accordingly. Otherwise nothing but sad faces looking somehow slightly offended. The atmosphere of a waiting room. The court of death. Absolutely nobody can act as though he’s come here to have a good time — and nobody seems to be having one, either. But, even so, it is more pleasant than The Gentlemen’s Bar — piss-elegant, red-plush and cosy — where some ten years earlier I made my entrance into our ghetto-world, to the strains of Secret Love.

I’ll leave my memories to the past and....

...direct my attention instead to a flock of young men in the corner next to the large window which, for once, hasn’t been smashed in. Hustlers? It’s not obvious. You can’t tell. In any case, they’re hardly professionals. But many young guys these days go downtown Sundays and earn some easy money street-walking their arses. Thanks to the concern of the police, the media and finally parliament over ‘male prostitution’ it has become fashionable. It’s now something of a sport.

We live our lives in danger, under a grim law.
I empty my bottle and get a new one. I’m getting gradually drunk. You have to get drunk to endure such a place. I also feel better, despite the heat, the noise, the smoke. Little by little I manoeuvre myself in the direction of the door where the bouncer is stationed, into the corner by the window. There is a face there, viewed through my beer-bleary eyes, which draws me: a bright, somewhat ruddy but well-cut face — broad mouth, broad cheekbones, blue eyes under eyebrows that are nearly white. The face of a smithy, or some such tradesman. My type for this sort of evening.

“Danish design.”

He is sitting half-way up against the window on the back of the seat. I remain in the corner and eye him. A little later we smile meaningfully at each other and, without knowing how, I suddenly am standing with my hand in his — a large warm paw with strong, supple fingers. I find this enormously pleasant, just what I am seeking.

For I need something. After all these weeks, months, half-years. I cannot live just on love lived out short of completion.

“Whew, it’s warm in here, eh?” I blurt out, realising how dumb it sounds. But it doesn’t matter: all that counts is his answer.

And he makes it.

“Yeah,” he says “it’s damn warm.”

Fantastic. He agrees with me in the bargain!

“And a hell of a lot of people,” I continue, emboldened by my luck.

He squeezes my hand. A good handshake. Solid. I hang onto his smithy’s paw as though my life were at stake. As if I am drowning in this choppy sea of people. Perhaps I am. But he also holds tight, very nicely tight. Yes, he really might be a blacksmith.
“When you sit here you get fuckin’ thirsty,” he says after a brief silence.

I agree and tell him that problem can be solved.

When I take out my wallet and we have been set up with a couple of fresh beers, he empties his in one long swallow. Then he belches in an extremely charming manner and looks down at me with an expression which I can only interpret as benevolently curious.

“This fuckin’ bar is a good place not to be,” he says after another pause, and I have to agree with him a second time.

But so what?

The usual stupid question. The indispensable question. What now? And where?

“Do you know what you...?” he begins, and looks at me probingly with his somewhat drunk but in any case still genuinely blue Danish eyes under those nearly white brows. “...I know a new place.”

“Like this one?”

He nods significantly.

“Where is it?”

“In this neighbourhood,” he says, over the noise, looking down at me. “Only a few blocks from here. Want to come along?”

Anyhow, I don’t want to release my new friend’s hand, the hand of salvation. Let him be my life-saver. Tonight. I look up into that broad, fair proletarian face. My type? Yes, here it is. All of this is totally disconnected from the rest of my existence. All thoughts of the school and you are swept away. This is my secret life. Sheer sensation. The sweet itch. Lechery in full flood. I am terribly excited and prepared to follow this man to the end of the earth — provided the end of the earth is only a few blocks away.

“So, let’s get going!” he says, taking over. I love that. He releases my hand. I try to grasp it again, but we are
out on the street before I am even able to get hold of the outer flap of his coatsleeve.

“Hey,” I exclaim, “who is he?”
Another big, broad lad has popped up at our side.
“Him? He’s my mate. He wants to come along too.”
“Okay, okay,” I babble. “How far to we have to go?”
“Not very far,” my friend answers from in front of me.
“Maybe you don’t know the city very well?”
“It’s been a long time since I’ve been here,” I admit.
“I haven’t kept up with the scene.”
“It’s a bloody good place,” he says, and bursts into a loud laugh — seems a little too loud and a bit unmotivated.
The other lad says nothing.
“Bloody good!”

We have passed the Metropol Cinema and crossed Strøget, the fashionable shopping street. We go into a dimly lit alley. I think fuzzily that pretty soon I’ll have to take a taxi if I want to sleep at my parents’ home. Damn, it wouldn’t be the first time a trip to the city ended this way — just as things get interesting one has to call a halt in order to catch the last train — or else stay over night in town, as I often did in the old days, those magic days. I was very young then. Now I’m not so young — I’m a school teacher and I earn money. Yes, I think, I have money on me. And instinctively I feel for my wallet in the inside pocket of my jacket under my overcoat. Still there, thank God.

I’ve only casually kept track of where we were going. I look at the drowsy lights. I listen to the sounds from Strøget. Few people are out at this late hour.

Suddenly the other lad, who until then hasn’t uttered a word, exclaims:
“I have to piss.”
“Okay,” says the fellow I thought I already knew so well, “we’ll go in here.”
“Wait,” I say. All at once I’m afraid. “I don’t want to go in there. I don’t have to piss.”
“Come along,” he tells me.
“No!” I shout.
“Then we’ll do it here, mate!” he snarls. His voice is no longer friendly in the least. It is threatening.
“But where’s the new...” is all I get out. For I am down on the pavement. The silent lad has tripped me from behind and the other given me a shove. Their hands fumble in my overcoat and jacket. It happens very fast. I try to protect my wallet. No use. One of them has it already. Job complete. He throws it, empty, in my face. Very professional. I roll on the cobblestones and think, ‘The hell with the money — that’s relatively unimportant’. But I am angry at being robbed. Angry at being disappointed. Angry over having been so stupid as to rely on a handshake. So cheap, so fraudulent. The violence against my feelings hurts more than the violence against my body. The homosexual’s lot: it’s so howlingly banal.

Suddenly I feel a kick.

“Stop!” I cry. “You can have the money; don’t hurt me, for God sakes!”

The money is already theirs, but it makes no difference. They kick again. They continue with the kicking. I try to protect my head with my arms and hands.

My eyes!

But they go on and on and on, mutely, brutally. Maliciously. It doesn’t hurt at the time, but I’m afraid. And why are they doing this? It’s all so unnecessary.

A couple of amateurs after all.

“Fucking arsehole!” one of them pants hoarsely, and gives me a final kick. And that does hurt.

“Faggot!”

This is fond farewell of the smithy’s apprentice, or
whatever he is. And then they are gone, running down the street. Darkness swallows them. Along with my money.

I get to my feet slowly, carefully testing my aching limbs. Nothing is broken. I can stand and walk and move everything. But the eye? I feel something warm and sticky and oozing. With a finger I probe around it, let it glide up and around over the eyebrow and down the cheek. I look at my fingertip in the blue-white glow of the street-lamp.

It is red with blood.

Then I look inside my wallet and put it back in my pocket. Decent of them, they'd left me my papers. I start running toward the main railway station. If I am lucky I can still make the last train.

But first I have to find out how badly injured I am. The janitor is busy washing the lavatory floor. I cannot go in. So I walk to a drinking fountain and dab my eye and the skin around it with a handkerchief. The cloth reddens but the bleeding stops. I rush down to the Holte train platform with my return ticket. My head aches, my body hurts. I feel sorry for myself. I curse myself. I run from the train to the bus, and run all the way home from the bus stop.

"Well, hello," says my father, who's sitting up late.

"What's happened? Have you been fighting?"

"Exactly." I answer. "Can you lend me some money?"

"Of course. How much do you need?"

My father thinks my brawl has been over politics. I don't disabuse him of that belief.

TABLEAU!

The next morning I awake with a thundering headache and a gigantic black eye...

Good lord, I have to face the world like this?
My father just grins. My mother doesn’t think it’s especially funny. I ransack the house and find an old pair of sun-glasses and put them on to cover my misery. They only make it worse. Outside, on that Easter Sunday, it is pouring rain. And in a little while I have to meet you.

At the main station I stand in the snack bar. You come up from the platforms, and I go over and greet you.

“What in the world happened!?” you exclaim, frightened.

I take off the sun-glasses.

“Oh, damn!” you cry. “It’s a horrible sight!”

“Wait...” I have to anticipate you. “I’ll explain everything.”

And I do. Or almost everything, for I avoid mentioning what type of bar I’d been in. There are still things I just cannot tell you.

You are wonderfully sweet and sympathetic. You trust me. This is a whole new situation.

And that I like.

“But I really can’t run around in these ridiculous sun-glasses in the rain,” I protest. “Everybody’s looking at me.”

“You must have an eye-patch,” you decide. “Come on, let’s find a drugstore. My brother got a black eye once, and he went around with one of those things...”

“For how long?” I am full of misgivings.

“Oh, only about ten or fourteen days,” you say consolingly.

But it is Easter, and almost everything in that rain-wet city is closed and locked up. At last, however, we find a drugstore down by the canals.

“Why don’t you try a leech?” asks the kind druggist.

“Isn’t a beefsteak better?” I ask in return.

“Too late for that now,” he says with regret. “Steak must be laid on soon after, uh, the accident.”
"Well, I'd like a beefsteak right now," you announce when we are once again out on the street.

"Me, too. Let's find a restaurant. But, wait, you've got to tell me who I look like."

"Nelson, or Christian IV — take your pick," answers the quick-witted Kim.

A LITTLE LATER, over the steaks, I realise I can't show up in school looking as I do. There is absolutely nothing, not even all the ridiculous things that can go on in the bathroom, quite so basically comical as a black eye. It just won't do. Especially not on a younger teacher in a special school in the provinces.

"I'll tell you what," I say. "You go back to school. I'll crawl off to my sister in the country to nurse my poor eye. I'll get her to phone and say I'm down with the flu or something."

You immediately understand. I check the train schedules. We part on the platform. You will be the first back to Funen after our Easter break.

"We have seen a black eye before," says my brother-in-law, and grins broadly.

And so everything is arranged.

During the next ten days I wander about vegetating in the wilds of north-west Zealand as my eye heals. I write letter after letter to you. I send you books. You write back. This is our first real correspondence: every day I wait impatiently for the post to arrive.

"Everyone thinks you have been very sick," you inform me. "No one has suggested anything different. Come back soon. I miss you. Your affectionate Kim."

But you still address me by my last name.

We'll have to change that.

Yes, I resolve, now is the time to talk about it.
“KIM, THERE IS SOMETHING I have to tell you,” I say one evening shortly after my return to school. I hardly know how to begin, but...

Now, will you sit down again?

Thanks.

Kim, how can I tell you? How can I get it out?

Oh, God, I’m at my wit’s end!

Maybe you really ought to start off to bed. It’s getting on. What time is it? That late already? Do you think the other students have gone up?

Well, I’m the one who has to make the bed-check tonight.

But, Kim...

No, I can’t. I’ve got to wait. Just go, Kim. That’s really the best. Yes, go!

“We’ll talk about it in the morning, okay? You come and we’ll read as usual during the lunch break...”

“Kim,” I say the next day, “do you remember last year when you were helping on the farm and you came and visited me on Easter?”

“Yes,” you say and are silent.

“I really meant what I told you that night.” Then I, too, am silent.

You don’t answer. There is nothing to answer to. But something has to happen. We cannot go on as we have. The electrically charged silence between us is unbearable. I perceive it as physical pain.

“Do you understand what I’m saying?” I ask.

You still don’t answer.

“I’m telling you I meant what I told you then. And I mean it still.”

“I can’t remember what you said.”

“Of course you can.”

You shake your head.
"You can if you want to." I listen, full of fear, to how bitter my voice is becoming.
I don't mean it to sound that way.
"I'm not sure I want to," you answer sulkily.
No, I think, that's probably true.
And I?
Do I know what I want?
Yes, only too well.
But I'm afraid of you.
So I pull myself together and say:
"We've talked about this before, haven't we, Kim? In any case we've talked around it. I brought it up at Vendsyssel. We referred to it when we were together over Easter in Copenhagen. We've talked and talked..."
"You have talked," you burst out impetuously.
"Okay, I have talked. And I'll continue to talk until I've got an answer. No, keep standing by the window, just like that — don't turn away. It's easier to say these things when you aren't looking at me."
So I begin again:
"I wouldn't dream of asking you to do something against your will. Are you listening? I don't want to do anything you don't want. Obviously. But... No, that sounds utterly stupid. We understand one another so well, don't we?"
You nod, yes.
"But damnit all, Kim, I've just gotten so completely, horribly fond of you. And that shouldn't be a crime..."
But that's exactly what it is, I think.
I talk and talk. I look out upon the great sloping field through my window. I pace back and forth in my room. I light my pipe. I drink tea. I talk, talk. I seduce you with words. I spin a web of words around you.
I say, "I love you. I can't help it. I love you and I don't know why. I love you. I don't know what I'm going to
do. But I do love you. You’re a boy. I’m a man. Because of that I shouldn’t love you.

“But I do love you.

“Hell, there are masses of people who feel as I do. But in itself that’s a pretty poor excuse. Even if there were no others, even if I were the only person in this world who felt the way I feel about you, I’d still not betray my love for you.

“Kim, I love you. I’ve never, never in my life felt about any other person the way I feel about you. Oh, Kim, you’re the only one I’ve ever had these feelings for. I want the very best for you, the most beautiful of everything. If only the two of us can stay together...”

Stay together. What do I really mean? What do I have in mind? He who is infatuated is a fool. I am a fool. Never in my life have I uttered so many banal and foolish words.

And you?

You are silent. Your silence doesn’t matter. It is your nearness that’s important. Yet I can never get near enough. I am moving onto dangerous ground. I imagine, craftily, that it’s your soul I love. But that’s a lie! It’s far more than that. I want your body, too.

“I love you,” I say again and again. “I love you, Kim, and I don’t know what to do about it.”

You don’t answer me. I don’t think you have looked at me once. No, I myself asked you not to. So now, twenty years later, I can’t see your eyes in my memory. I see your back. I see you quite clearly standing there in front of that big window with the view of the fields. Are there clouds? Is there sun that afternoon? I remember only your back. As usual, you are playing absent-mindedly with something or other on my desk. Perhaps you are also propped up against the swivel chair. Maybe you have a knee on its fluted seat to carry your weight on one leg. I remember the edge of your bright cheek, the light down
on the nape of your neck. Your shoulders. My hands burning to take you by those shoulders, press you against me, kiss your neck’s nape, your throat...

"Kim," I cry, "I love you!"

So I risk everything. It’s now or never. Live or die. Nothing in the world is of greater consequence to me now than that you — a fifteen-year-old boy — say yes to becoming my lover.

Nothing!

I cannot give up. I cannot compromise. I cannot lie to you or to myself. I must sacrifice all my so-called dignity, my laughable authority, all...

I fall down on my knees.

You don’t answer right away. I ask you to think over what I’ve said. And rush out of the house and bicycle away. When finally I come home a little note is lying on my desk:

I have thought over what you told me. I think I understand pretty well what you mean. I’m also very fond of you. And I do want what you said.

Your friend for life —

Kim

Good God!

I kiss your letter. I wet it with tears. I dance about, my heart overflowing with gratitude for a good fortune I hardly dare trust.

BUT LOVE HAS ITS PRICE...

The next evening while you’re sitting on the floor in front of my chair I bend down to lift you up by your armpits to give you a good night kiss — my first, on the
brow, for we have not yet gone any farther — and I feel my back crack. At the same time a pain shoots through my whole body.

But I kiss you lightly — a butterfly kiss — and laugh and forget the pain.

You are to tell me later that, after this first kiss of ours, you went up to your room, climbed in bed and made love to your hand thinking about me.

Thank you. I think that’s sweet.

But the next morning I can hardly get out of bed.

I crawl down to the dining hall, and, after breakfast, over to the classroom where I manage, seated, to make it through the first teaching period. But then our shop instructor has to help me up to my house. There is no question of my coming down for lunch.

The doctor is telephoned.

“You strained yourself lifting,” he diagnoses — and doesn’t know how truly he speaks.

I have, indeed, strained myself lifting — the dearest burden in the world.

I have to laugh.

He gives me an injection.

I laugh...

Carefully.

For it hurts, damnably. I have to lie flat and not move. But already at recess you look in on me — and during the noon break, and every other chance you get. I lie stretched out on my bed of pain — the green sofa — and let myself be waited upon. You run errands for me. I really need the co-op, now. So you come and occupy my room with me. We listen to the radio. We read. We play records. And we never mention what has passed between us. But it is in the air. It fills the space of the room around us.

A warm, calm happiness grows within me.

Now I can wait.
Yes, I can wait. The certainty of your devotion inspires me with patience. For the last year and a half I have nearly burst, with all my soul craving to embrace you, love you, make love to you, but now there is time — quite apart from the fact that my temporary disability makes all moves in that direction impossible. I lie on my green bed of pain and look at you.

That is enough.

Yes, I can wait, for now I know it will happen, and continue to happen.

That weekend we’re together almost all our waking hours. You bring the food up to me from the kitchen, not to mention the bottle of schnapps from the co-op which I desperately need as analgesic for my pain. And, last but not least, you bring you, the half-jubilant ape I certainly cannot do without.

Oh, how I am tortured and martyred!

Outside: the wild storms of spring. Inside: enveloping comfort.

“Well, here you lie suffering stoically,” says our principal with a sly grin when he drops in on me Saturday afternoon. Ben Webster is giving tongue to his yearnings with How long has this been going on? and the level of schnapps in my bottle slowly sinks.

“Will you have a dram?” I ask in my voice of pain, trying hard to play my new rôle of patient.

“Thanks very much.”

You give up your seat. Our principal throws himself down in my armchair. He lights a cheroot while you fetch a glass out of the kitchen cupboard and pour it like a trained little house-boy. It could have been awkward, but it isn’t. It seems, in fact, quite natural.

Long live my beloved lumbago — or whatever it’s called. It’s the world’s best, solid gold excuse.