

To Cook a Bear

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Kengis, on the Sweden-
Finland Border, 1852

I

*Sitting in the forest,
composing a line
Faithful, my maiden
singing so fine,
To penetrate your heart
is my strongest desire:
for the sharp pain of love
to burn you, like fire.*

I.

I WAKE to a vast silence. The World is waiting to be formed. Darkness and sky surround me. I am lying with my eyes turned up to the sky like gaping wells, but there's nothing there, not even air. In the silence, my chest begins to shudder and shake. The jolts become more and more powerful, something growing in there is threatening its escape. My ribs are prised apart like the spindles of a bannister. There is nothing I can do. I simply must subjugate myself to this terrifying power, like an errant child crawling on the floor as the angry master of the house stands over him. Not knowing where the next blow will land. I am that child. And I am that father.

Before the world has had time to properly form, I hurry out into the dawn. A basket on my back, the handmade axe in my hand. I stop a little way away from the low barn, taking cover at the forest edge. I pretend to be adjusting my clothes in case someone should happen to see me and start to wonder. I tie the same bootlace over and over again; I pretend to shake invisible lice from my hat onto the ants' nest below. Throughout, I keep one eye trained on the farmyard. The first smoke of the morning puffs from the cabin's stove, revealing that the occupants have left their beds.

Then she appears. She is carrying empty pails that swing to and fro as she walks. Her headscarf is a brilliant white chink in the gloom; her face a bright ring, with clear eyes and dark brow. I can almost feel the smoothness of her cheeks and those thin, fragile lips as they form the soft little words she is singing so quietly. The beast is cheered, lowing with expectation and heavy morning udders, when she opens the door to the barn and slips inside. It all happens so quickly, far too quickly. I strain to sharpen my senses, so that I might preserve this image, might recall it time and again. Yet it is not enough, I need to see her tomorrow. Her swinging hips behind the apron, the soft curve of her bosom, her hand as it grasps the catch on the barn door. I creep closer, almost running across the yard, as a thief might, but on reaching the door I restrain myself back. Then I let my hand embrace the door handle. My grazed, sinewy hand on the grip her little

soft hand has just left. Those fingers, now squeezing the cow's thick teats, the milk whipping against the side of the pail wedged between her knees. I briefly pull the handle, as if I was about to step inside, but then quickly turn around and scurry off, afraid that someone might have seen me. For the rest of the day, I preserve it in my hand – the lingering warmth of her skin.

2.

AT MEALTIMES, I always wait until last. I hide myself away in a nook while the Pastor's wife heaves the heavy porridge pot onto the table. The steaming cauldron is as black as death on the outside, as though plucked from the Devil's own inferno. Inside though, the porridge is light and golden, somewhat granular and creamy as it sticks to the spoon. Brita Kajsa stirs it using the broad wooden spatula, digging down to the bottom and then up again, tearing the thin film that has formed on the top, releasing the scent of hay and fine flour into every corner of the cabin. The children and the servants are sitting, waiting, I can see their pale faces – a silent wall of hunger. With a stern look on her face she grabs each bowl and gives large dollops to the older ones, smaller scoops to the younger, to servants and those who had happened to call in. When she has done so, heads bow and fingers spread flat on the table top. The Pastor waits until everyone is still before bowing his own head and giving fervent thanks for their daily bread. They then eat in silence. The only sounds come from the chewing mouths and the licking of spoons. The oldest want a second helping, which they are given. Bread is broken as skilled fingers pick at cold, boiled pike and then arrange the bones into neat rows, like shiny new nails on the tabletop. When they are almost finished, the lady of the house happens to glance over at the nook in which I'm sitting.

“You come and eat too.”

“Don't worry.”

“Come along now, sit down. Make room for Jussi, children.”

“I can wait.”

I see the man of the house also turning around. His eyes are glassy, I can see the torment within, and his struggle to conceal it. With a little nod, he has me pad over to the table. I hold out

my traditional wooden *Guksi* mug, the one I whittled myself up in Karesuando and that has stayed with me throughout. At first white, like infant skin, with time – and sun, salt, and being rinsed thousands of times – it has darkened. I feel the heft as the Pastor’s wife empties her spoon, and clatters at the sides of the pot to scrape together another scoop, but by this point I am already sitting down again, cross-legged in my little spot on the floor. I make short work of the gloopy, malty porridge, which has cooled to the same temperature as my mouth. I feel it glide down my throat and being clasped by the muscles in my stomach. There, it becomes power, warmth, helping me to live. Much as a dog eats, greedily and jealously.

“Come and take more,” she beckons.

She knows full well that I will not. I eat only once. I take what I have been given, never more.

The mug is empty. I push my thumb around the inside, then lick it clean. I slurp and lick all over until it is spotless. It then slips gently into my pocket. It is my *Guksi* that gives me food, attracting to itself whatever there may be around that is edible. Many times I have been close to collapsing with hunger and exhaustion. But whenever I have pulled out my *Guksi* it has been filled with a fish head. Or reindeer blood. Or frozen berries from the lower slopes. Just like that. And so I have chewed and swallowed its contents and my powers have returned. Enough to see me through. That is all I hope for; that is how I have come this far. It is also why I sat on the floor. I would never barge in and demand anything, snatching like a raven or snarling like a wolverine. I prefer to duck away. If no one sees me, I stay in the shadows. The lady of the house though, sees me. I ask for nothing, yet she feeds me nonetheless. Her manner is amiably terse, and shows the same regard for all creatures, be they cows or dogs. All living things must live. That sort of sums it up.

I might disappear at any moment. That’s the nature of a wanderer. Here one minute, gone the next. I get to my feet, grab my pack and go. That’s all there is to it. If you’re poor, you can live that way. Everything I own, I carry with me. The clothes on my back, knife in my belt. The fire striker and my *Guksi*, the horn spoon, my little bag of salt. All in all, it weighs just about nothing. I am light and nimble on my feet; before anyone misses me I’ll be over in the next valley, leaving no tracks. No more than an animal might. Where my footsteps flatten the grass and the moss, it quickly rebounds. Whenever I light a fire, I do it where fires have burned before, so my ash falls

onto the ash of others – and becomes invisible. I defecate among the trees - first I pull up a clump of earth and then afterwards, replace it. The next wanderer might put his foot on exactly that spot and walk on none the wiser, in fact only the fox would be alerted, by the faint human scent. In winter I pull my skis lightly over the top of the snow, flying a yard above the ground, and when spring comes, my pole-marks melt away. Man can live like that, without causing disruption or destruction. Without really existing. By being just like the forest, the summer leaves and the autumn litterfall, being like midwinter snow and the countless buds burst open by the spring sunshine. When finally they disappear, no trace remains.

3.

MY MASTER IS ANGUISHED. I see his lips cramping, sucking and straining around words that do not want to be born. His enemies are pushing ever closer, not a day goes by that new blows and ridicule are not rained down upon him. He has only his pen with which to defend himself. To their swords and pokers, he raises his quill, but the words will not come. And each time I want to strike myself, pinch myself hard, to get him underway. Whatever it might take to let the light into him. He could have been my father. That is indeed the way I regard him, but when once I intimated that he reacted with rage. I realised that my master's cheek was hot, and it was turned away from me. I slump to the rag rug like a dog. I wait faithfully, can lie there with my nose in my paw for hours and hours, always ready to follow him at any moment.

His brow shows the traces of years of hard thinking. It's dirty, from tobacco residue or perhaps soot from the lamps. His hair is long, and it hangs in greasy locks. Sometimes he pushes them out of the way, as he does small branches in a forest. Alone, he cuts a path through shadows and overgrown bogs where no one has gone before. But then again, he isn't completely alone. I accompany him in silence, my paws and my nose tracing his footprints, following the tarred leather of his boots, the rustle of the hay inside them, the damp wool of his trouser legs. He forces himself further into the unknown but I am always there. My stomach is empty, but I don't grumble. Like a shadow, I follow him, sticking firmly to his heels.

Once, on one of our walks, we stopped to rest by a mountain spring. As we quenched our thirsts, he observed me inquisitively from the side.

“How does one become a good man?” he finally asked.

I managed no answer.

“How does one become good, Jussi?” he persisted. “What is it to be a good person?”

“I don’t know,” I stuttered.

My master went on staring at me, radiating a bright light, a heat.

“Just look at the two of us, Jussi. Look at you and me. Which one of us is good, would you say?”

“It’s my master.”

“Don’t call me master when we’re out in the forest.”

“I mean...Pastor.”

“And why is that?”

“Because the Pastor is our shepherd. You give us God’s word, you can bring the Lord’s forgiveness.”

“That is my occupation. Can a mere occupation make a man good? Are there not evil priests?”

“No, no, I cannot imagine such a thing.”

“Drunkard priests. Priests who lie down with whores. Who beat their wives half senseless. I have met such men, believe you me.”

I did not reply. I sat and stared, wide-eyed, at the smouldering log we made sure to keep glowing to hold the swarms of mosquitos at bay.

“Take a look at yourself, Jussi. No gluttony. No drink.”

“But that’s because I am poor.”

“You do not boast. If something is offered, you are the last to go up, and if someone gives you praise you bat it away.”

“I do not, Pastor, I simply...”

“Often, they do not even notice your presence. I have to turn around to make sure that you are there. You are so quiet that you disappear altogether, so how could you possibly be evil?”

“But the Pastor does far more good works.”

“Does that come from God, Jussi? Think about that. Just think about it. Perhaps it is the devil of ambition, whispering in my ear? Tempting me with pageantry and adulation. When I die, I hope to be remembered as one of the greats. You Jussi, on the other hand, will be expunged, like a shadow that never was.”

“I am happy with my lot.”

“Is that the truth?”

“Uh huh.”

“That is what makes you good. You are the finest, friendliest soul I have met.”

“No, Pastor...”

“Oh but you are, Jussi. But wait. Listen here. Does that make you a good person?”

“That’s not how I look at things.”

“No, perhaps you simply follow your nature. Deep down, you and I are very different in our ways. And that is why I make comparisons so often. Which of us is on the right path, what sort of life should one live? I do a lot of good, that much is true. But I cause damage too: I make enemies, I hurt my opponents, and trample on them. While you will always turn the other cheek.”

He saw that I wanted to interrupt, and raised his hand.

“Wait, Jussi. Does that make you good? Is this what the Creator intended?”

For a long time, I sat watching the horse fly wandering up his trouser leg, staring at its shimmering green compound eyes. It was vainly attempting to bite through the cloth.

“I taught you to read, Jussi. You borrow my books, you strive for self improvement. I see that you are thinking, but to what end? If someone stands up to you, you back down – you just grab your knapsack and wander off. You flee, northwards, to the great hills. Is that how we should face the foolishness of this world? Think about it, Jussi. Are you doing the right thing, by never fighting your corner?”

“I, worthless worm and wanderer.”

The Pastor could not help but smile when I quoted from his favourite psalm.

“You are an observer, Jussi. I have noticed that. You study the world around you, isn’t that right?”

“Yes, but...”

“You want to know how the world works. But is your own house in order? That is my question to you, Jussi. What do you do to combat the evil in the world?”

I could not answer him. My throat thickened, I felt unjustly accused, and had a strong urge to rush away from there, leaving him behind. My quick legs would soon put me out of his reach. He noticed my anguish. He leaned towards me and placed his fist on my arm. That is how I was

kept there. He tied a twine around my wing, as though I were an enraged flapping sparrow.

It was the Pastor who taught me to see. That the world around us can be changed simply through the way one looks upon it. As I grew up, I was forever rambling through mountain valleys and birch woods, crossing pine forests and sloshing over springy mires. That was my landscape, I knew it inside out, the barren, northern land with its rocky riverbanks and meandering animal paths.

And yet I had barely seen anything at all.

I remember when the Pastor took me with him on one of his *excursions*. My pack was full of food and pens, and wads of thick grey rag paper, and we covered a lot of ground. As evening arrived, we set up camp by a thicket, surrounded by the patchwork of bog land. Both of us were tired, I got a fire going and set about preparing our camp. He broke round flatbreads and cut dried meat into thin strips as we sat there on the spruce spray, regaining our strength. The mosquitoes buzzed and bit. The Pastor offered me pitch oil, but instead I ripped off a handful of needles from a stem right next to me, crushed them in my hands and rubbed the pulp onto my wrists. It smelt spicy, and the insects backed off.

“Marsh Labrador tea,” he said.

“Eh?”

“The plant you applied. *Ledum palustre*.”

“Ledum...?” I mumbled.

He leapt to his feet with an look of excitement in his eyes.

“Follow me!”

We left our packs up at the camp. The pine forest lay on a slope, and before long the dry ground made way for sodden, springy mire. I could see his eagerness, how his footsteps rushed and his neck crooked as he looked excitedly in every direction.

“I have wanted to visit this herb garden for so long,” he said. “And now, finally, I am standing here with all these riches before me.”

I looked. A mire. Expansive and sodden.

“What do you see, Jussi?”

“Nothing.”

He half turned around, and gave a little smile.

“Nothing? What about all this?”

“Grass.”

“No, Jussi. This isn’t grass. This is sedge.”

“Oh, right, sedge. Well, then I see sedge.”

He took a deep breath and turned towards the wetland. I realised that we were going to be heading that way. This was early July, and the waters were still high. We wore clothes that covered us from head to toe, and wrapped scarves around our necks to try and hold at bay the flesh-eating insects that were hatching in every pond.

“From here, I see at least ten species, Jussi. And I’m just talking about the sedges. And then willow, that mysterious genus, look how many species there are here. Do you see them?”

“No.”

“And look, over there! We will have a closer look at those tomorrow – look how they glow!”

“Is Pastor talking about the flowers?”

“Orchids, Jussi. Orchids, here, in our barren north. Look there, right in front of you!”

I looked downwards. A little stem poking up, right next to my foot – I had very nearly trampled it.

“Look carefully Jussi, bend down. An *Orchis*. The flower is irregular, a monocot with six petals and a lip.”

The stem was full of these dark pink flowers. He held the stalk tenderly, I had to kneel down in the wet to get a proper look.

“Closer, Jussi, closer. And now sniff.”

I placed my nostrils right next to the flowers and breathed in. The faintest of honeyed sweetness flashed past and then disappeared.

“Did you smell it? Did you smell anything?”

“Yes but...”

“I imagine that is how God smells.”

Where before I had seen only trees, grass and moss, I now found a wealth a thousand times greater. Whichever way I looked, new discoveries awaited. And everything could be named, sorted into God’s immense lexicon. Discovering how diverse each little plant could be was a miracle. Discovering, with the help of a magnifying glass, that the stem was covered in tiny silver

hairs, that a leaf edge was serrated, wavy or scalloped, and that these characteristics were not random but that each represented a distinct species.

The Pastor explained how all plants are organised into families and genera. How the monocots had parallel leaf veins, like grasses or lilies. The dicots, on the other hand, had a central spine from which the smaller veins spread - birch leaves, for example. He explained why certain plants were decorated with the most colourful flower heads such as the water lily's crown or the torch-like bloom of the rosebay willowherb. Those were the ones pollinated by insects. Others had flowers that were barely visible, such as those of the alder, or the grey or greenish grass flowers that spread clouds of pollen with only the help of the wind. Flowers with four petals were named *Cruciferae*, there were broom-like *Umbelliferae*, as well as basket-shaped ones and the legumes, which have a structure almost like a butterfly. The Pastor would occasionally stop in awe at the sight of a blooming mire, and complain that life was too short, too fleeting to embrace all of this. He would drop to his knees and pull out his magnifying glass to study whatever barely finger-tall stem he had discovered down there.

It was my master who taught me the secret of memory. Knowledge is best retained when it is acquired through the eyes. Upon coming across a plant that one has not seen before, care should be taken to walk around it, to see it from all sides. After that, the next stage is to carefully examine every tiny element of the leaf, the axil, the shape of the stalk, the sepals and the petals, the colour of the pollen – absolutely everything is to be carefully examined. Doing so cements the image in one's mind. Finding the same plant again, even ten years later, brings the delight of recognition. Much more of a challenge was the naming, all that Latin felt like a terrible chore. Once I'd been told that the foaming Meadowsweet was called *Filipendula ulmaria*, I attempted repeating it dozens, no hundreds of times, but it would still disappear from my memory within the hour.

After several long walks with him, my way of looking at things had changed altogether. The plants and the trees had become my friends, individuals I got to know as living beings. "Oh, I see you're enjoying the sunshine. And there's your brother and sister." I felt that joy of recognition when summer arrived, I looked forward to meeting each herb and learned when I might expect to see them in flower. The fact that the plants had become so familiar meant that my eye was quick to spot any deviation. Deep in a sodden pine forest I might come across something new and unfamiliar. Once upon a time I would have trampled it without a second

thought. Now though, I stopped and pointed. The Pastor nodded approvingly.

“*Corallorhiza trifida*,” he said. Yellow Coralroot. It is by no means commonplace up here in the north. Good, Jussi, good.

His words of encouragement warmed my cheeks and I quickly bent down to examine it. I recognised the typical orchid structure; the labellum’s unique form, and I began my chanting:

Corallorhiza trifida, Corallorhiza trifida...

Before long, she too would be my friend.

4.

ONE EVENING the Pastor and I were standing in his study, pressing our newest finds. We had come across them in a wetland not far from Kengis, a few unremarkable sedge stalks had set Pastor twitching like a huntsman's dog. I had carefully transported the specimen in his vasculum, with the root carefully exposed and then wrapped in soft cloth, and now I helped him swap the damp rag paper for dry, to best preserve the plants. Between us we wound the plant press tight, turning the wheel until the ropes creaked, then securing the wooden catches to hold it closed.

While we were busy with the press, we heard the front door open and a stranger's voice calling for the Pastor. Soon afterwards, a knock on the door and the Pastor's daughter Selma peering gingerly around the door.

"Father?"

Pastor dried himself and collected the tobacco flakes that I had just shaved from the knot.

"Coming."

At that moment the door to the study flew wide open and a stocky youngster stumbled in. There was something odd about him, an absence in his eyes, something unsettling. I noticed warning signs within myself being alerted, and I soon knew why. The man was afraid.

He stammered, "*Kirkkoherra*," - Finnish for pastor. "The Pastor must come with me."

The Pastor looked calmly at the visitor. Nothing in his face betrayed any annoyance at having been disturbed. Yet I knew very well that when in his study, he expects to be left in peace to go about his work. Now this man was standing there, sweat dripping from his nose and his shirt sodden, as if he had run quite some distance. He gestured stiffly with his arms to underline the urgency, as if he were hitting something.

“What has happened?”

“She is... we don't know... she was in the woods, with the cows.”

“Who are you talking about?”

“Our maid, Hilda... Hilda Fredriksdotter Alatalo.”

Hearing the name made me to listen even more intently. I knew of this woman. She was a domestic at one of the nearby farms, and I had often seen her in church with the other servants. A plump, pale girl with a button nose, whose movements somehow seemed a little slow. She always held a handkerchief in her hand, just like an old lady. When moved by the spirit, she would dry her eyes and pat her nose with it.

“Yes?”

“The girl... she is gone. The priest must come at once.”

The Pastor gave me a weary look. The hour was already late, and we were tired after a long day's walking. It was summer though, and the light would continue through the night. The youngster noticed our hesitation and stamped on the spot, looking for all the world as if he wanted to grab hold of the Pastor and drag him away.

“We're coming,” said the Pastor. “Jussi, can you give him something to drink.”

I hurried out to the main room and passed the water ladle to our sweaty guest. He drank like a horse.

It was late by the time we arrived at their farm. The man who had summoned us was Albin, the family's oldest son. He ran thirty metres ahead of us all the way, occasionally stopping for us to catch up before running off again once we'd done so. The Pastor and I maintained a calm, even pace, being well used to such terrain. When we reached the farmyard, the residents poured out to meet us – they must've been keeping watch in the windows. The farmer and his wife emerged, trailed by a knot of children with sleep-tousled hair. The farmer and his son did not see fit to offer us anything, instead they immediately began heading down a path leading into the forest. We followed them through the thicket. The farmer's name was Heikki Alalehto, and he told us, falteringly and incoherently, how Hilda the maid had taken the cows into the woods as usual that morning. When evening came, she had not returned for the milking. Most of the herd had made their own lolling way down to the barn, but there was no sign of the maid.

“The girl might be off looking for a missing cow?” The Pastor ventured.

Heikki agreed that this was indeed a possibility. But never before had the girl been missing

for so long.

Every now and then they called the girl's name. Their voices echoed back from some distant rock face. The Pastor and I walked in silence, and I noticed him hone in on a seemingly unfamiliar *Gramineae*, before hurriedly plucking it from the ground and placing it in his pack.

Deep in the forest, we reached a simple campsite. There were a few burnt sticks lying where a campfire had been.

"This is where she stops to rest,"

Heikki was about to stomp over to the fireplace when the Pastor grabbed his arm. For quite some time, the Pastor stood surveying the scene in silence. His stare moved from the fire to the spruce spray she had sat on. A little milk churn lay on its side, the lid had come loose and a splash of sour milk had spilled onto the moss, so white that it seemed almost luminescent. The Pastor cocked his head towards mine.

"What do you see here, Jussi?" he said quietly.

"Well, that... Hilda sat down here for a rest. Made a fire. And then knocked over the milk churn."

"Do you know that it was her who did that?"

"No... I suppose not."

"Use your eyes. Tell me what happened here Jussi." His voice was muted yet full of intensity. With an impatient gesture he pushed his fringe, which seemed determined to hang down in front of his eyes, away from his brow. I strained to register every detail, and tried to conjure up a picture of the maid.

"Hilda sat here and took a break by the fire. It should've been around about the middle of the day, when the sun was highest. That's usually when hunger arrives. But suddenly something happens that causes her to run away. Well, she may not have run, but that's how I imagine it. That's how it feels. And then perhaps... well, she got lost. Could not find her way back. That's how it might have happened. At least that's what I think."

"Based solely on what you see," the master reiterated, biting his bottom lip. "Stick to the facts, what is it we are looking at?"

He was dissatisfied, I could tell. I tried to divine something more from the scene before me.

"Her headscarf is still hanging in a bush. So she didn't have time to grab it before she set off. That means she must have been in a hurry."

“Good, Jussi.”

Heikki stood there stamping, obviously irritated. He wanted us to stop talking and to start looking, but Pastor made it clear that we had to wait. His eyes were almost closed, sort of squinting.

“The scarf is hanging there to dry,” he said. “So it should indeed have been the middle of the day, so warm that she was sweating. Despite the heat, she still made a fire, to keep the mosquitos away. It was burning when she left, but it has now petered out. You can see that the wood in the centre has burned away, and that the light ash has blown over the brush in an easterly direction. There’s no wind now, but there was an easterly breeze this afternoon. That means it must have been hours since she disappeared. Was she alone?”

“Er... I think so. No, I mean I am sure.”

“Why is that?”

“If she had had a visitor, she would have put on the headscarf like the honourable girl she is.”

“That is possible. She was, in any case, chewing on a piece of bread when something happened. The churn was upended and she dropped the bread into the moss.”

“Dropped... but there’s no bread here?”

The Pastor pointed at a dead log right next to us.

“Do you see, on that branch? Thin, white flakes. Sour milk that has dried up. Small birds must have trampled around in the milk and returned to the branch time and time again. So there ought to have been something edible – presumably a piece of bread – next to the spill.

“Of course!” I exclaimed, greatly impressed.

“The girl rushed away. You can see the footprints in the moss. The length of those strides means she was running.”

Only then did I notice the barely discernable depressions he was pointing towards.

“But there are... there are larger tracks there too?”

“Good, Jussi. Tracks from something larger than her. And heavier – you’ll notice that the prints are deeper.

Heikki, who had until then had stood there listening to us, suddenly wailed out. Before the Pastor had the chance to stop him, he rushed over to a tree trunk, pointing manically. The bark displayed recent damage. Heikki ran his fingertips over the deep gouges.

“*Karhu!*” he said, with terror in his eyes.

“A bear!” My terrified voice echoed his.

The Pastor studied the claw marks carefully.

“We’ll have to organise a search party,” he said. “Someone will have to take a message to Sheriff Brahe. I am afraid something terrible might have happened to the poor girl.”

Heikki nodded, clearly shaken, his terrified eyes darting around in the summer night. He ran back the way he’d come, down to the farmhouse. The Pastor, however, stayed where he was. I watched as he carefully lifted the churn and inspected it thoroughly. He then put his finger into the spilled sour milk and stirred, spreading it out, then got hold of something long and almost invisible. I could tell that it was a strand of hair. He wiped it clean, rolled it in a piece of cloth and put it in his pocket. Her basket, which was unlaced and propped against a mound, was examined with the same rigour. Without saying anything, he returned to the claw marks on the tree. We began to follow the trail of footprints. I noticed the Pastor bend down and pick something up, and we carried on. The prints were well obvious and well defined for about fifty paces before the ground got higher and firmer. The tracks became more difficult to follow, and before long we had lost them altogether.

We made our way back to Heikki’s farm, increasingly anxious about what might have happened. I kept calling out Hilda’s name as I surveyed the surroundings with a great sense of foreboding. Suddenly even the dwarf willow scrub felt threatening. Something large could be hiding in there. At any second, it could leap out and sink its teeth into my neck. I could see the Pastor’s lips moving, perhaps talking to himself, perhaps communicating with a higher power. I, meanwhile, had picked up a thick branch and was swinging it through the air in front of me. Every now and then I slammed it against a tree trunk, then listened to its muffled echo as it rolled through the hanging shrouds of summer fog.