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1

The young man walked west along Skothúsvegur Street, stopped on the bridge over the Pond and, leaning over the railing, saw the doll in the water.

The bridge formed an elegant, low arch where the Pond narrowed and extended southward into Hljómskálagarður Park. The man stood at the crown of the arch, and as it was evening, there was little traffic on the road. A single car slowed down as it passed over the arch and then disappeared from view, its noisy engine breaking the stillness on the bridge. He thought he saw someone cross Sóleyjargata Street, and another person wearing a trench coat and hat walked by him without looking up. The young man leaned on the railing and looked over the Pond towards the Iðnó Culture House, the city centre and, further still, to where Mount Esja rose in the twilight, solid and immovable. Over the mountain, the moon shone like a fairy tale from a distant world, and when he looked down, he saw the doll, half submerged.

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He immediately found something poetic about it, inspiring various musings typical to a young writer like him. From his jacket pocket, he pulled a small notepad and fountain pen that he always carried with him and began jotting down a few words about lost innocence, the impermanence of childhood, and the water that was both a source of life and a destructive force. The notepad, which was bound in black leather and inscribed with the date 1961 in gold numerals, was full of the observations of a young man who was slowly but surely treading the path of a writer and took that role seriously. He had already put together a volume of poetry but hadn't had the courage to show it to a publisher. He feared criticism and rejection more than anything else and spent a good deal of time polishing each poem to perfection, constantly making small changes or adding details, as he was doing now with this new poem of his on the transience of life.

He guessed that a girl who had been walking next to the Pond had dropped her doll in the water and hadn't been able to recover it. This thought, too, he jotted down. He tried to put the stillness of the evening into words. The city lights that were reflected on the water's surface. He looked towards the islet in the middle of the Pond, which the Arctic terns occupied every spring. *Now those birds were as silent as the night that laid its veil over the city*, he wrote in his notepad. Then he crossed out the words 'the night'. Wrote 'dusk' in their place. Crossed out 'its veil'. Wrote 'night' again. Tried 'its curtain' in place of 'its veil', but felt that that didn't work either.

He stuck the pen and notepad back in his jacket pocket and was about to continue on his way when it crossed his mind to fish the doll up out of the water and lay it against the bridge's railing in case the poor girl came there in search of her toy. He walked to the

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end of the bridge, scrambled down to the Pond's bank and tried reaching for the doll, but it was too far beneath the bridge. He went back up to the street and looked around for something that he could use to catch hold of the doll, a stick or tree branch, but saw nothing useful.

He abandoned his plan and walked up Skothúsvegur Street towards Hólavallagarður Cemetery. He found particular inspiration for his poems in cemeteries. He'd gone a short distance when he found the stick he'd been looking for, grabbed it, returned to the bridge and went down to the bank beneath it. He managed to hook the doll with the stick, but discovered that it was stuck. He poked at and hit the doll with the end of the stick, and was about to give up a second time when the doll came loose and floated away from him under the bridge. He watched it for a moment before dashing back up to the street, crossing it and scrambling down the Pond's bank on the other side, where he fished the doll out of the water as it floated by.

The doll was old and a bit tatty, had eyelids that flicked open and shut, and was wearing a flimsy dress. Its mouth was half open and a little whistle came from it when he pressed the doll's stomach. Its hair was frazzled and in some places there were holes in the scalp where it was missing. He pressed the doll's stomach again and water leaked from its eyes, as if the doll were crying.

The young man stood there looking south along the Pond, and now caught a glimpse of something else half submerged in the water. At first he thought he was mistaken, but when he looked closer, he let go of the doll and jumped into the water. It reached up to his armpits and he waded through the mud at the Pond's bottom without noticing how cold the water was, and before he

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knew it, he'd grabbed the flotsam and managed to pull it towards him. His suspicions were confirmed.

He waded back to the bank, absolutely stunned to realise that he'd found the body of a girl who had fallen into the Pond and drowned.

2

Eygló felt awkward and uncomfortable at the birthday party, without really knowing why. There were lots of children and adults there in the large, two-storey detached house. All of the girls in her class had come, along with three of the boys, although boys weren't usually invited to girls' birthday parties. The birthday girl's fun and energetic aunts had organised all sorts of entertaining activities and games for the kids, including hide-and-seek, board games and tag in the garden, which was enormous. The kids downed fizzy drinks and popcorn and sugary birthday cakes decorated with sweets, and they even got to watch a movie, because the birthday girl's parents had a projector and copies of American animated films.

All of it should have been enough for Eygló to have fun like the others, but something was holding her back. Maybe it was the environment. She'd never been in such a fancy house before and had a hard time tearing her eyes away from all the wonders within

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it. Large paintings hung on the walls and there was a gleaming black grand piano in one corner of the drawing room. All of the furniture seemed brand new. The white sofa looked unused, as if it were still on display in the furniture store. The carpet on the drawing-room floor was white as well, and so thick and incredibly soft that her feet sank into it. The home also had a television set with beautifully curved glass and buttons that seemed to be from an alien world. Eygló had never seen such a device before, and when she ran her hand over the glass, the birthday girl's father came to the door and said in a kindly tone that she mustn't touch the screen. Eygló was alone in the room, spared from the birthday party.

Her mind wandered back to her own home: the small, dark flat with the leaky tap in the kitchen and the basement window that was so high in the wall she couldn't see out of it without climbing onto a chair. There was no soft carpet on the floor, just worn linoleum. Her mother worked all day in a fish factory, and there was usually nothing besides fish for dinner. She didn't know exactly what her father did. She did know that he was drunk sometimes, and her mother scolded him for it. She didn't like seeing it because her father was a kind-hearted man and her parents were generally affectionate to one another. And he was always good to his daughter and helped her with her homework and read her stories before disappearing for maybe a few days, without her mother knowing where he was.

The birthday girl, who was turning twelve today, was no special friend of hers. Eygló was at the party only because all the girls in their class had been invited. Actually, she shouldn't even have been in the same class as these kids, seeing as how their families were all better off and poor kids like her were usually put in worse

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classes. Her teacher had quickly recognised the girl's aptitude for learning and saw to it that she was put in the best class, where conditions for education were better and the teacher's energy went more into teaching than maintaining discipline. The kids were quite accepting of her. Only two boys had pinched their noses and asked why her clothes smelled so bad. 'It's probably the smell of mildew from my basement,' she'd said.

Maybe she felt like she didn't belong there, surrounded by all that wealth. She had decided to skip the games for a bit and instead walked through the house, from the bedrooms to the sitting and drawing rooms, the kitchen and laundry room, admiring everything she saw. Her mother had told her to have fun and get to know the kids, and Eygló knew she said that because she was worried that her daughter was too much of a loner, feeling happier when she was by herself. Said that she inherited it from her father. But it wasn't as if Eygló didn't have many friends. She was sharper than most others her age and knew how to talk to the kids in her new class, and made sure they gave her her due. The other kids recognised that she had something about her and sought her company, rather than the opposite.

Eygló had been wandering around the house for a while when she found herself again in the beautiful room with the soft carpet and the white furniture, and saw a girl she hadn't noticed before at the party. She was around the same age as Eygló and even more poorly dressed, compared to the other kids.

'Hello,' said Eygló, catching a glimpse of her own reflection in the rounded television screen.

The girl seemed depressed, as if something had happened to her. She was wearing a well-worn dress, knee-high socks and summer shoes with buckles.

‘Is everything OK?’ asked Eycló.

The girl didn’t answer her.

‘What’s your name?’ asked Eycló.

‘I’ve lost her,’ whispered the girl as she walked towards Eycló and past her without stopping, then onward out of the room. Eycló watched the girl disappear out of the drawing-room door, then looked down at the carpet and saw something she never forgot, because it was all so new and exotic to her. When the girl walked past, her reflection didn’t appear in the television screen and she had left behind no footprints in the thick carpet, as if she were completely weightless.

3

The couple's anxiety was plain to see as they recounted their difficulties. The man's mobile phone rang twice, but he didn't answer either time, just checked the numbers and went on detailing the troubles they'd been having. Konrád understood their concerns but wasn't sure if he could do anything to help. He was loosely familiar with them, but had never met them before. His wife, Erna, had known the woman for years, without Konrád ever involving himself in their acquaintanceship. The man had called him out of the blue and asked if there was any chance they could meet. The couple's granddaughter had sometimes been problematic, and they wanted to know if Konrád could give them any advice on dealing with her. They knew that Konrád had worked for years as a police detective, and even though he was retired, the two of them were convinced that he was an expert in the types of things their grandchild was entangled in, but which were like a closed book to them. Konrád was reluctant to meet them, but gave

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in to the man's urgent plea. He remembered Erna speaking well of the woman, saying that she was always genial, and vaguely recalled that the couple had lost their daughter in a car accident and raised her child.

Wanting to be completely honest, they admitted to Konrád that they were talking to him rather than the police because they hoped to keep this matter away from the media. The wife had been prominent in politics, although some time had passed since then, and they feared that the tabloid press would have a field day with this story if their connection with the girl got out. Often, it was as if the police could barely keep anything confidential. But Konrád mustn't misunderstand them. If, in his opinion, they should turn to the police for help, they would do so without hesitation.

'The truth is,' said the man, 'that we haven't heard from her for a few days now. Either her phone is dead or she doesn't have it with her; she's not answering it, in any case. Of course, it's happened before that she hasn't picked up for a while, but never this long, and besides –'

'We recently learned from her that she'd been acting as some sort of mule or whatever it's called,' said the woman, looking at her husband. 'She wasn't caught in customs or anything like that and said that she'd only made one trip for some people she didn't want to name, but that could just be a lie. We don't trust anything she says any more. Nothing. Except . . . this is something new . . . this about her being a mule.'

The woman's expression revealed her frustration, but also her genuine concern for the girl. Maybe she blamed herself for the girl's situation. Maybe she'd had no time for her when her political career was at its peak. Maybe the grandchild could never replace the daughter she'd lost.

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‘Do you think she’s left the country?’ asked Konrád.

‘She might have her passport with her,’ said the woman. ‘We can’t find it in her room. That’s one of the things we wanted to ask you to look into for us. If you wouldn’t mind. We’re getting no answers from the airlines.’

‘I think it’s best that you talk to the police,’ said Konrád. ‘I –’

‘We don’t even know who we should talk to there. She doesn’t know what she’s doing any more and has started smuggling in drugs and we really don’t want her to be arrested and thrown in jail,’ said the woman. ‘We know she’s using drugs. First it was alcohol. Now it’s other stuff. We simply can’t manage her. She’s so hard to deal with. She’s so terribly difficult.’

‘Does she travel a lot?’

‘No, not particularly. At most, a weekend trip with her boyfriend.’

‘We thought you might be able to talk to him,’ the man said. ‘He’s never been here and we haven’t met him, but it occurred to us that it might be her boyfriend who’s using her.’

‘Have they been together a long time?’

‘We first heard about him a few months ago,’ said the woman.

‘But does she still live with you?’ asked Konrád.

‘Supposedly,’ the woman said, taking out a photo of the girl and handing it to him. ‘We can pay you for your trouble. It’s just so awful to think of her out there somewhere with those junkies and be unable to do anything to help her. Of course, it’s up to her what she does, she’s twenty and we have little say over her, but . . .’

‘Even if I managed to find her, she would just disappear again,’ said Konrád, looking at the photo.

‘I know, but we want to try . . . we want to know if she’s OK. Whether anything can be done for her.’

Konrád understood their concerns very well. While working on

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the force, he'd met parents who were in the same situation. Parents who had tried to do their best but witnessed their child sink deeper and deeper into the world of drinking and drugs without being able to stop it. It could be such an ordeal for the families. Many gave up following repeated unsuccessful attempts to help their kids. Sometimes, however, they managed to lead the wayward child out of that terrible rut and steer him or her towards a better life.

'Did she admit to you that she'd been smuggling in drugs?' Konrád asked, slipping the photo into his jacket pocket.

'She didn't need to,' said the man.

'That's why we're so worried,' said the woman. 'She may have got herself tangled in something she can't handle.'

She looked desperately at Konrád.

'I found her in the loo. Three days ago. She'd just returned from Denmark and must have been in a rush because she forgot to lock the door. I didn't even know she was in there when I opened the door, and found her dropping those things into the toilet bowl. Little condoms that she . . . that she'd hidden in her vagina . . . it was shocking to see it.'

'We haven't seen her since,' said the man.

4

Every time Konrád drove along Sæbraut Road, he couldn't help but glance towards Skúlagata Street, where the slaughterhouse of the South Iceland Abattoir had once stood, with its black iron gate barring its courtyard. It was an involuntary reaction, almost a quirk that he had a hard time shaking off. Now there were high-rise flats along both sides of the street, which Konrád found ugly. In his mind, the new high-rises destroyed the well-established, beautiful area called the Shadow District, which was a part of old Reykjavík. Konrád had been brought up there, long before the city planners threw up the high-rises, and he resented how his old neighbourhood was treated. He couldn't understand why human stupidity had chosen that place and made it the ugliest spot in the city.

A planning failure, however, wasn't the reason why he looked to where the slaughterhouse had been. It was there at the gate that his father had died in 1963, fifty-three years ago, fatally stabbed by

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an unknown assailant. Ever since Konrád retired, that incident had come back to haunt him ever more insistently. One evening not long ago, he'd gone and stood for a while in the place where his father was found lying in the street with two lethal stab wounds. He hadn't done that in many years. The police report on the stabbing remarked on how much blood had flowed out onto the pavement.

Konrád parked his car behind police headquarters on Hverfisgata Street and went in to see a man he knew who was in the Drugs Squad. He told him about the concerns of the couple who had got in touch with him, without mentioning the condoms in the toilet bowl. The couple had said that the girl had called her boyfriend Lassi, but was tight-lipped when they pressed her for more information. 'Just a friend of mine,' she had said, putting a quick end to the conversation. They didn't know how to contact him. Didn't know what he did. Didn't really know his name.

'The boy she's with could be named Lars or Lárus or something like that; Lassi is just a nickname, probably,' said Konrád. 'I was wondering if there might be anything on him in your files. The girl's name is Daníela. Called Danní.'

'Why are you interested in these people?' asked the policeman, who was middle-aged, unusually slender, and had a scraggly beard and hair down to his shoulders. He liked heavy-metal music and had once played in a band.

'Acquaintances,' said Konrád. 'The girl has run away. Is into drugs and alcohol, according to them. They asked me to look into it.'

'So, what, are you some sort of private eye now?'

'Yes, exactly,' said Konrád. He'd been expecting such a comment. 'Would you mind checking on this for me?'

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The policeman's chair creaked as he turned to his computer and started typing in Daníela's name, saying at the same time that he really shouldn't be doing this, and in fact wasn't permitted to. Konrád said that he was aware of that, and thanked him for the favour. Nothing came up on the screen. If the Drugs Squad or Directorate of Customs had had any dealings with her, that information would have been recorded in the database. On the other hand, three Lassis did come up: one, named Lárus, was the same age as the girl. He'd been given suspended sentences for theft and done time for drug smuggling.

'If she's with him, she's in trouble,' said the metalhead. 'He's a complete moron.'

'We'll see,' said Konrád, jotting down the names. 'The couple are worried about their granddaughter. That's all I know.'

'Will you tell me if you uncover anything meaty?' said the rocker, just for formality's sake. Konrád knew that he was overwhelmed with assignments and wasn't being serious.

'Of course,' Konrád answered, with just as much conviction.

He didn't intend to spend much time on the girl, who probably wasn't lost, but only avoiding her grandparents. She was quite far gone if what they said about the incident in the loo was true, and Konrád doubted that she would get right back onto the straight and narrow even if she did come home now. It was mainly in memory of Erna that he even let it cross his mind to make inquiries about her; these people were her friends. If he didn't find her on his first attempt, he would speak to the grandparents and repeat his advice to them to talk to the police, even if it meant staining the family's honour. He knew that no matter how things went, he would have to report the drugs.

While pondering these things as he walked back to his car,

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Konrád came across an old friend from work. Her name was Marta and she came up to him and asked what he was doing there. She was the most rough-and-ready woman that Konrád had ever met, big, tall and mouthy, and she lived alone after unsuccessful relationships with women who left her for one reason or another. She had started in CID under Konrád's guidance and they soon became good friends. He knew no better police detective than her.

'Hello, Marta,' said Konrád. 'You're as cheery as ever.'

'Shouldn't you be playing golf or some such shit? Has Leó been pestering you?'

'No. What's up with him?'

'He's such a pain in the arse. He's had a few things to say about you. About your days together on the force. Insinuating things. You know how he is. Started drinking again and thinks that no one can see it. Poor bugger.'

'Didn't he just get out of rehab?'

'Well, that was last year. It did nothing for him. What do you do all day? Aren't you bored out of your mind?'

'I may end up that way, I suppose,' said Konrád.

'Yeah, but I still envy you,' Marta said, waving him goodbye. 'Damn, I'm going to have it nice when I quit this crap job.'

Konrád smiled to himself. She'd often made similar remarks, but he knew she didn't mean a word of it. He'd sometimes pointed out to Marta that she'd never be able to hold on to a woman because she was already married to the police.

He drove off with the addresses of the three Lassis from the database and started with the one he thought most likely to be accommodating the girl. His name was Lárus Hinriksson, a typical habitual offender since adolescence, with various types of convictions for drugs and petty crime behind him and constantly

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in trouble. His address was in Breiðholt, which was on Konrád's way home. It was a late-autumn evening, at dusk. The cold north wind signalled the approaching winter.

He found the right block of flats, parked the car and stepped out of it. Rooms in the basement were rented out, and Lassi lived in one of them, according to the information found by the metal-head at police headquarters. A row of garages stood in front of the building. The entrance was locked and Konrád rang one of the doorbells, but no one answered. He rang another one, to no response again, but when he rang the third one, someone buzzed the door open without saying anything. Konrád entered the stairwell and started descending the steps to the basement. A man appeared on the landing of one of the floors above and asked who had been ringing the bell. Konrád kept quiet and waited for the man to return to his flat.

In the basement was a dark hallway with locked storage spaces for the residents, along with two rooms. Konrád knocked on the door of one of the rooms and listened, but no one answered. He tested the doorknob. The room was locked. He repeated this at the other room, and when he turned the doorknob, the door opened. Walking into a messy, foul-smelling den, he saw that he was too late.

A grimy folding bed stood against the wall and the floor was littered with leftover food and other rubbish, among which lay a girl of around twenty years old, wearing jeans and a T-shirt that revealed her bare arms. A needle and syringe hung from the elbow joint of one arm. Konrád knelt down next to the girl and felt for a heartbeat, but there was none. As far as he could tell, her death wasn't recent. She was lying on her side with her eyes closed, as if she were asleep.

As he got to his feet, he swore under his breath and took the photo from his pocket, to check whether this was the same girl the couple were worried about. His mobile phone broke the silence. The name Eygló appeared on the screen and he immediately recognised the caller's voice, despite not having heard it for some time.

'I need to see you,' said Eygló.

'Any special reason?'

'We need to talk.'

'Yes, but I'm a bit bu—'

'Preferably tonight, Konrád. Can you come to my place?'

'All right,' he said. 'It might be a little late.'

'Doesn't matter, just come.'

Konrád said goodbye and called Marta's mobile. She answered after a few rings.

'Yes, what?' she said bossily.

'You should get up here to Breiðholt, quick as you can,' he said, 'and bring a team from Forensics with you.'

5

About half an hour later, the place was crawling with policemen. The Forensics team closed off the entrance to the block of flats and the stairs to the basement, the basement hallway and the room where the girl lay. No one was allowed down there apart from a doctor, who pronounced the girl dead. Marta waited patiently with other members of CID for the Forensics technicians to finish their work. An ambulance had arrived to transport the body to the morgue of the National Hospital. All the evidence pointed to the death having been an accidental overdose. Forensics wanted to rule out all other possibilities.

Konrád told Marta about the meeting he'd had earlier that day with the girl's grandparents and their worries about her drug and alcohol use and clear involvement in drug smuggling. They'd been reluctant to take their concerns to the police for personal reasons, probably hoping that they could talk some sense into her themselves. She had responded by disappearing. Konrád had got Lassi's

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address from the Drugs Squad and decided to pay him a visit on his way home, with this result.

‘Friends?’ said Marta as they stood there in the stairwell, watching the Forensics team work. The block’s residents were slowly starting to return home from work and were soon allowed to go up to their flats, carrying bulging bags of groceries and towing their kids, who, no less than their parents, stared open-mouthed at all the goings-on. Detectives walked up the stairs, knocked on people’s doors, and asked about the tenants in the basement. The room’s owner lived on the first floor and appeared to be away.

‘The woman was a friend of Erna’s,’ said Konrád. ‘I don’t know them as well as she did. Hardly at all, actually.’

‘Would you rather talk to them?’ said Marta. ‘Tell them about this?’

‘No,’ said Konrád pensively. ‘I think it’s right that you do; it’s procedure.’

‘It won’t be fun telling them the news.’

‘It won’t be the first time they’ve had to hear such a thing.’

‘Oh?’

‘They lost their daughter in a car accident many years ago,’ said Konrád. ‘The girl’s mum. Break the news gently.’

‘Jesus and Joseph,’ he heard Marta sigh.

He gave a police officer a detailed report of his involvement in the case and the tenuous thread of events that led to his opening the door to the basement room. He didn’t recognise the officer, who was extremely pedantic in his questioning, leading to it taking a fair amount of time, with Konrád waiting impatiently to be able to get out of there. He wanted to disconnect himself from the case as quickly as he could and leave it to the police, and he regretted having entangled himself in those people’s lives and the girl’s

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death. He had great sympathy for the couple but wasn't the right man to alleviate their suffering.

Finally, he said goodbye to Marta and was driving away from the block when he remembered his phone call with Eygló. She had sounded rather down, which was unlike her. They hadn't known each other for very long, having only met a few times to discuss Konrád's father after Konrád became more curious about his fate. His and Eygló's fathers had met during the war years and held séances that were thought rather dubious before their scam eventually came to light.

Engilbert, Eygló's father, took it quite to heart and cut all connections with Konrád's father. The years passed. A few months after Konrád's father was murdered, Engilbert fell into the sea and his body was found washed up on the shore at Sundahöfn harbour. It was uncertain whether his death was accidental or if he had committed suicide. Konrád had contacted Eygló recently. He didn't have much to go on, only some old newspaper clippings of his father's, but had the hunch that he and Engilbert had taken up their old wartime occupation during the war years of duping people out of their money through sham séances. Eygló considered the notion preposterous.

Eygló had never invited Konrád to meet her at her place; they'd only spoken on the phone or met in cafes, usually at his request. Eygló was reluctant to meet him and preferred not to talk about her father, besides having an obvious dislike for Konrád's father, whom she blamed for Engilbert's melancholy and cruel fate. Yet she was a little more at ease now than she'd been at their first meeting and he noticed a change in her attitude towards him, as if she found it good to be able finally to talk to someone about her father.

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Konrád pulled up to a small terraced house in the Fossvogur neighbourhood. He saw a faint light in its living-room window, and the silhouette of a person in it: probably Eygló, waiting for him. He walked up a few steps to the door, which opened as he approached, and Eygló invited him in. He was met by a faint smell of incense, and from the living room came a soft sound of music, so low that it could barely be heard. Konrád had never seen Eygló dressed in anything but black and it was the same now: a black skirt and black blouse, with a silver cross hanging at her neck. She was in her sixties, black-haired and petite, looking ten years younger than she really was. She had delicate features, with searching eyes that didn't miss a thing. He thought she probably coloured her hair, and had tried to imagine how she would look without her doing so. Erna had never coloured her hair, but just allowed nature to do its own thing.

‘Excuse my impatience, but I felt I needed to see you immediately,’ Eygló said, showing him into the living room. ‘Where have you been?’ she asked, trying to be discreet as she sniffed the air. ‘Have you just come from the recycling centre?’

He suspected that what she smelled was the odour from Lassi's basement room, which had hung on his clothing. He knew that at one point, she, like her father, had worked as a medium, and he wondered if a good sense of smell was useful in that job. All the senses were, probably, he thought, in one way or another.

Konrád saw no reason to keep his whereabouts secret and told Eygló about the couple, the girl and the girl's fate, adding that she had called just as he was standing over her body.

‘I'm sorry,’ she said, taken aback. ‘I called at the worst time.’

‘No, it was fine,’ Konrád reassured her.

‘So she overdosed, the poor girl?’

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‘So it seems. The police will be giving it a closer look. What was it you wanted to discuss?’

Eygló clutched the silver cross hanging from her neck. She did so reflexively, as if it calmed her when she needed it.

‘There are two things, actually,’ she said, so softly that Konrád had to lean forward to catch her words. ‘The first is something I heard last night, and couldn’t believe. The other is about a girl I remember from when I was twelve years old and . . .’

She looked at Konrád.

‘I haven’t held a séance in many years.’

6

One by one, the guests left the terraced house in Fossvogur until only Eygló and the old woman were left. Eygló felt tired and empty, as she always used to do after helping people catch a glimpse of the afterlife. Having no more energy after saying goodbye to the participants, she sat back down in her chair at the round table where the séance had taken place. The old woman was still sitting there, dignified, slender and almost completely blind and deaf, with two long plaits hanging down her back, wearing sunglasses to protect her eyes and hearing aids in both ears. She looked more like an old Indian chief waiting to be picked up and taken back to her reservation. Her son, who was going to give her a lift back to the nursing home, had been delayed.

Eygló had known the old woman for ages, but hadn't seen her for many years. It had been a very long time, too, since she had held a séance at her home, but it all came back to her quite quickly. The participants were comprised of those who had consulted her

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over the years, some of them again and again, asking if she could put them in touch with the deceased. They were old clients of Eygló's from when she held séances regularly, even at homes where someone was plagued by a serious illness, and she would try her best to alleviate their suffering. From the time before she stopped holding them, for the most part, and then finally quit altogether. She had exercised her gift of clairvoyance very little for years now.

Eygló had called each client and invited them to a séance at her home. A total of six people gathered there in Fossvogur, four women and two men. None declined her invitation. They sat down at the table and everything was as before, except that they had all aged considerably. Nothing that could be called remarkable happened. One participant had become a widower since Eygló's previous days of séances, and sought answers about his wife. He got none. The mother of a woman in the group came forth. Eygló said that she sensed her presence in the living room, and that it was linked with a serious illness. The woman confirmed this. 'Is it your husband?' Eygló asked, without knowing why. The woman nodded again. 'The illness is quite advanced,' said Eygló. 'He's in palliative care,' said the woman. 'Do you know if anything can be done for him?' The presence faded. 'She wants you to trust the doctors,' said Eygló.

After around half an hour of these sorts of questions and answers, Eygló apologised to her guests; she hadn't done this for a long time and had quickly grown tired. They were understanding, and talked among themselves for a little while before getting ready to go. Everyone except for the old woman, who waited for her son.

Her name was Málfríður, and she had been an active member of the Icelandic Psychical Research Society in the sixties and seventies. She was married to a well-known medical medium and

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acted as his assistant, in charge of organising séances and consultations of those who were eager to benefit from her husband's gift and believed that he could contact the deceased. She herself had no doubts about the existence of the afterlife and often spoke of the ethereal world, where human souls gathered after parting from their bodies. A steady stream of people came to see her husband, seeking answers about or from the great beyond, and the old woman had witnessed incidents that were impossible to explain to anyone who didn't believe in the supernatural. Eygló remembered the long conversations she'd had with Málfríður when she was younger and just discovering her gift, which she didn't understand, but wanted to learn more about and harness if she was able. She had turned to the Psychic Research Society for guidance, and Málfríður helped her not to fear those faculties of hers, but rather live with them as an inseparable part of herself and accept the fact that she was a little different from others.

'Isn't he coming, the boy?' the old woman asked, referring to her son, who himself was rather old.

'He probably thought it would last longer,' replied Eygló apologetically. 'Maybe I could have gone longer.'

'Don't worry about it,' said Málfríður. 'You did well. You always did. You have a soothing presence. Same as your father.'

The old woman leaned forward.

'Why did you organise this séance?'

'What do you mean?'

'Why did you bring us together?' said Málfríður. 'Why have you become interested in séances again?'

'I wanted to see how it would go after all these years,' said Eygló hesitantly. She had expected such a question, but hadn't made up her mind about how she would answer it.

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