

## EEVA DREAMS OF FALLING

By Janey Bennett

Eeva readjusted the seat of the small rental car. This wasn't the landscape she expected. The map on the right seat showed a series of broad loops, which translated into these sweeping curves through the summer-green Swedish countryside. Neat farms nestled among the expansive green fields. The beauty of the place surprised her: she only remembered unfriendly bare trees and old snow.

She drove toward *Angafröjd*, Meadow Delight, the fancy name given to an old farmhouse, now restored and used as the centerpiece for the retreat center of a large corporation. She wasn't sure ... the young man at the Tourist Information Office had said this corporate jewel had once been the farm of the Arnebergs but he could be wrong. She was not going to trust easy answers on this journey.

He'd found the name in a microfiche of the old hand-written ledger of land titles. He said people often came around and asked for help finding their ancestors' homes. He smiled kindly at her.

Not ancestors this time, sonny. The ancestral home of my demons. She smiled back politely.

Eeva lived in Helsinki. She had not been in Sweden since she was seven. The war was over then and she went home.

For herself, she would never have come back here. She thought she had spared Tuuli from being one of the echo children who inherited their parents' war experiences, who bore the wounds of their war-scarred elders. She'd tried so hard NOT to do that to her daughter.

Obviously, she'd failed.

Last month, she was with Tuuli and her young family at the summer place. They lay on the grassy shore of the lake. Liisa and baby Tomi were chasing fish in the shallow waters (no danger to the fish), dragonflies hovered, and the rest of the world was at midsummer peace.

Tuuli cleared her throat, a sure sign that she was about to say something she'd been thinking about for some time. Eeva looked over at her. She loved looking at her daughter. Tuuli's dark blond hair was tucked into a very old wide-brimmed straw hat—Eeva thought it might have been one she'd left behind here, long ago—and her strong, lean legs extended from beneath a soft cotton skirt. She was tanned, she was healthy, she looked well-loved.

Eeva was pleased for her.

Tuuli cleared her throat again, shifted position toward her mother and said, "Aiti, there's at least a thousand things I wish I'd asked Isä before he died."

"Like what?" Eeva said. She turned toward her daughter.

"Things about his childhood. Why he was so quiet."

"The war, I think."

"And you? Was it the war that made you the way you are?"

Eeva sat up. "Just *how* am I?" She knew she sounded brittle, and gave a little laugh to cover it.

Tuuli shrugged uncomfortably. "I don't want to say something that will hurt you."

Eeva repeated, with greater force. "How AM I?"

Tuuli drew a circle in the sand between her knees and, without looking at her mother, said, "You carry a wound—and I have it too. It's—I don't know—it's shame, I think."

“Shame?” Eeva looked intently at her daughter.

“I asked Isä once about the feeling of family shame I had and he didn’t know where it came from. He said I must ask you.”

“You waited long enough. Two years since he died.”

Tuuli looked at her mother now. “It takes a long time to build up the nerve to ask you things like this.”

“Am I that formidable?”

“Oh, Aiti.” Tuuli looked forlorn. Still, she proceeded. “You seem both fierce and fragile, and I’m afraid one of us will break.”

“I don’t break, Tuuli.” Eeva stroked her upper arms, as if she were cold.

“Then, tell me: ever since I was small I’ve sensed that there was something in our family to be ashamed of. But I’ve thought about this as hard as I can, and to my knowledge, we never did any crimes. We weren’t drunks or thieves. Nor were your parents nor Isä’s. Was there someone else? Some criminal in the family? What was I sensing?”

Eeva closed her eyes, seeing the sunlight red through her eyelids. She heard crickets and all the tiny sounds of summer—nothing had changed—but in that moment she knew that she hadn’t succeeded in sparing Tuuli, and that she couldn’t hide from the time in Sweden any longer.

Tuuli continued, “I’m asking only because I still feel uneasy, and I don’t want to pass this shame on to my children. I’m trying to be clear about what debts I owe. To pay them down. You know, emotional debts.” Tuuli looked worried that she’d gone too far.

Not yet. Eeva waited for her to go on.

Tuuli brushed out the circle in the sand, dusted off her hands, and continued, “I’m guessing it had to do with the war, because you have never talked about your wartime life. I understand that: but can you tell me now? It felt like there was always something unsafe, some feeling that we’d been bad.”

Eeva looked stricken. “Unsafe we can manage. Bad is hard.”

“Who in the family did something?”

“I did.”

“What? Aiti, you’re scaring me. What did you do?”

“I killed a boy in Sweden. I don’t remember it at all.”

“How old were you?”

“Four years old.”

“Were you charged? A trial? Are there court records?”

“I don’t think so. The adults all judged me, but there was no “trial.” I was labeled a dangerous child, a killer. I took on the judgment.

“When Russia declared war on Finland, they said they would exterminate all the Finns. Or that’s what the Finnish government believed. They may have been right. So they sent the children away.

“I went to Sweden, to live with a family with a son older than me. He always used to chase me and beat me up. I’m told I pushed him onto thin ice and he fell in and died. . . That’s all.”

“And what?”

Eeva repeated, “That’s all I know.”

“Aiti! Did *you* believe you killed him?”

“How should I have known what to believe? I don’t remember it. And when I came back to Finland three years later, it was never spoken of. Ever.”

“Where were you for those three years?”

“In a group home in Gavle. Don’t look like that. I survived.”

“But you thought you’d been bad.”

“Maybe I *was* bad. I don’t remember the event. Just their judgment.”

“Hypnosis! Or analysis. Did you ever talk to someone, a psychiatrist or someone, about trying to figure out the memories?”

Eeva just gave her a look. She needn't ask that again.

In the warm afternoon sunlight, Tuuli's babes slept, sprawled across the faded striped spread on the spare bed in the livingroom. Food and the lake had lulled them, and as Eeva and Tuuli washed up, Eeva said, “Tuuli, this has nothing to do with you. You must not take on my shame.”

“I already have. I grew up with it.”

“No!” The children stirred in their sleep. Eeva repeated herself, softly, “No, this is not right.”

“Whatever this is was part of who you are, and I absorbed it, too. But if I can understand what it was, maybe I can release it where it is in me, and not pass it on to them.”

Eeva paused, frozen with her dishtowel in hand, staring out the window. Across the lake, the light on the trees had cooled.

The telephone rang, a loud jarring sound. Eeva came back to where she stood. The children moved in their sleep as Tuuli ran for the receiver.

“Paivaa...” After a moment, she laughed. “No, it was either you or a wrong number. No one else calls here except Aiti and she's right here. What's wrong? ... Oh, no ... And he can only see you tomorrow morning? What a selfish ...oops, what a lovely client. Well, if it must be, it must, then...Of course, I'm disappointed. Of course.... I'll tell them you'll be here tomorrow at suppertime. ... Will you call them to say goodnight? ....I miss you, too. ...Love you. Hei, hei.”

Eeva watched her daughter replace the receiver on the old telephone.

“Are you all right with that?”

“Eh?”

“Do you think Joonas is really meeting a client tomorrow morning?”

“You mean, do I trust him? Of course I trust him. If I didn’t trust him, I’d leave.”

Eeva looked puzzled.

Tuuli said, “That’s it! That’s what’s missing from you, Aiti. Trust.”

“Well, I admit I don’t trust Joonas. I worry that he isn’t good enough for you.”

“Did I ask you to worry for me? You don’t trust my judgment. I think you don’t trust anyone. When you withhold trust, you separate yourself from the rest of us.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Here’s what I bring to my life: I take the risk to love all these people in my family,” she gestured at the sleeping children, then turned back to her mother. “...you included.”

Tuuli rested a hand on her mother’s shoulder. Eeva stiffened. Tuuli’s hand stayed there.. “It’s a risk because if you love, you have something to lose. As much as I can, I try to love dangerously, because I saw you love cautiously. No, I was right! It wasn’t love that was missing. It was trust you couldn’t give us.”

Eeva’s face closed down. She went to where the children slept and quietly pulled her small suitcase out from under the bed. She closed the clasps, then stood, holding it. “Tuuli, I think I’ve shared as much as I can. I want to go back to the city, right now. Will you drive me to the bus, please?”

Tuuli looked at the clock. “The next bus isn’t until tomorrow morning, Aiti. At eleven o’clock. I’ll take you then. We don’t have to speak of this any more if you are uncomfortable.”

“I’m not uncomfortable.” Eeva slowly slid the suitcase back under the bed. “Go on...”

At the sound of the suitcase, Liisa sat up. She seemed still asleep, lost, then she got her bearings and crawled across the bed to the window. Tuuli lay down near her and wrapped her in an embrace. Liisa burrowed into her mother’s neck and peeked cautiously over Tuuli’s shoulder at Eeva.

Tuuli said, “Aiti, I knew you loved me, but there was something held back, and maybe everyone has that—some preservation of self so we don’t drown in love’s ocean—but what you’ve just told me, about the boy’s death and the blame you got, makes me understand that you were protecting yourself. I’m not sure I could overcome that, either.” Tuuli sat up, still holding Liisa. She said, “Aiti, if I went with you to Sweden, could we track them down and put this to rest?”

“Too long ago. And if we don’t wake these children up soon, they’ll never be sleepy at bedtime.”

Eeva sat next to the window on the bus, half-way back, and no one sat near her. The others sat up front, near the driver, watching for their stop, speaking in low voices, or scattered further back, sitting alone. She didn’t have to glare to make the others stay away, but if someone approached her zone of the bus, she looked firmly out the window and adjusted her shoulders. They sat elsewhere.

She was thinking about echo children. More than that, she thought about her own echo child. She had shut away her terrible past so completely that she couldn’t touch it at all. If she didn’t have to face it, how could its effect slip around her back and land in her daughter’s soul?

But it had. It clearly had. What did Tuuli say? Some feeling that we’d been bad.

Eeva wished she could have died without having to go back to that time, but she was cursed with long life and here it was, facing her down.

All right, she thought. I’ll go meet it head-on. I’ll go to their house, if it still stands. I’ll go look at the barn and the pond and maybe I’ll remember something of what happened...enough to know if I killed him or not.

No. Even Tuuli is not worth this.

Yes she is.

Maybe I won't find the house. What was their name? Can't remember.

Tuuli needs this.

All RIGHT. (All this self-talk went on as the new-green fields of grain slipped by the bus and, in the distance, clusters of farm buildings moved past at a slower speed.)

Arneberg. Their name.

Good. What first name?

Leave me alone.

Keep on reaching.

I can't.

She fell asleep and the scenery changed into the outskirts of Helsinki. When she woke she was nearly to Lasipalatsi station. A short walk home.

And then what? These questions weren't going to leave her alone.

Let them hound me. If I can't remember, I can't remember.

Her feet made a familiar sound on the stone sidewalk, and the comforting shapes of the older stucco and stone buildings, pastel colored, with neo-classical window surrounds, quiet staircases, street trees in new-green leaf, birds everywhere, the blocks interrupted by sunlit pocket parks . . . all said home. She stopped at a small grocery and bought food for supper, a wine, a pastry...she would treat herself well.

But as she sat at her table with her meal spread before her, the image of Tuuli's face asking that question rose again and again. What was there about us that was bad? She was no longer hungry.

She booked passage for a Friday in late July on the overnight ferry to Stockholm, returning Sunday night. She'd give herself two days and one night on Swedish soil. That



should be enough to drive to Gavle, find the house, and come back home. If it took longer, she'd think about going again another time. Maybe.

Meanwhile, she'd try to remember all she could. Which was nothing. The more she tried to remember, the more she met a gray smoky void. No hints of anything.

Eeva's dreams were troubled, but not about anything she could identify. If her mind was working on these memories, it was framing the work in detours she couldn't follow. She slept badly. She had her usual awful dream of falling. She was falling down a well.

Oh, wait a minute. There was something about a well. The more she reached to capture it, the farther it fled.

The day was a high overcast. The sunlight was thin, but welcoming. She went out, walked the length of Mannerheimintie, over the hill to Jugendstil Eira, stared out at the harbor, at the gulls overhead, at the racks where people washed their rugs in the sea and laid them out to dry. Long rugs lying side by side.

She stared at those rugs: handwoven strips of soft colors. Tuuli still used four of them in the summerhouse, stretched out side by side on the wooden floor, making a pattern of softness on the hard wood. Eeva helped her wash them in the lake every summer.

A finger of cold ran down her spine: The Arneberg house had those rugs, in threads of rose and tan.

She made herself picture the well at the Arnebergs'. A round wall of concrete, with a wooden cover. Next to it, the metal pump. Her breath grew shallow. Einar. That was the boy's name. The dead boy. Einar.

Einar and the well! He tried to throw me in. He really tried. And before that, he threw my hairbrush down the well. My little wooden-handled hairbrush.

She touched her head and was surprised to feel hair. Something was here. She stayed with it. Was I bald then. Is this true? Why would they shave off my hair?

She went into a coffeeshop on the promenade and ordered a coffee and pastry. The people next to her were arguing, their voices low. She couldn't make out the words, but she felt their irritation. She had one more sip of her coffee, wrapped the pastry in a paper napkin, and left.

In the distance, across the flat gray-blue water, she could see the Stockholm ferry leaving. It slid behind the islands in the harbor; appeared again. She'd be on that, soon. The thought brought no response from her body: she had overpowered it with her will and it just obeyed without comment, now.

Was this progress: to kill her body's responses?

Ah, Tuuli! This is too hard.

She remembered a walk-in medical clinic, not far from the harbor. She waited until the nurse finished with her patients. When the waiting room was empty, she asked the nurse, "Why would a child's head be shaved? Can you tell me?"

"Well, for surgery, of course. Brain surgery. Or if there was some skin disease of the scalp, like ringworm. Long ago, they shaved kids' heads if they had headlice. Now we use medicated shampoo. Why do you ask?"

Eeva muttered, "Kiittos. . . thanks," and left, quickly.

Ringworm? Lice? I don't remember any of this.

She let the well/hairbrush/scalp fragment sink back into her unconscious.

It was good that a corporation owned that house now. Houses don't judge people. Sixty years had passed.

She wondered if Mrs. Arneberg was dead yet. She still felt alive to Eeva. She felt like a hot column of hate standing just behind Eeva's right shoulder, sending blame at her all the time.

Eeva was used to the burning column. She'd felt that woman's judgment so long there were times she almost stopped noticing. Then it would blaze up fresh again.

She drove through the eastern Swedish farm country. The road led from one framed vista of fields and ponds, perfect houses and barns, to another even more beautiful overview. It made her uneasy. She hadn't remembered such physical beauty in the area. Still, the information person said it was here, and the flow of the land felt familiar.

As she drove, she had a silent conversation with her long-dead mother. She asked, "How could you put me on a train and not tell me where I was going or when I'd be back?"

"Those were hard times, Eeva. We suffered putting you on that train."

"That's not what I asked. Why didn't you tell *me* what was happening?"

"Children don't understand these things. They can adapt to anything."

"Aiti! That's not true. It wasn't true then, either."

"Why are you punishing me like this?"

"Aiti!"

"I told you, I missed you every day you were in Sweden, safe and secure, while we were holding the line against the Russians. I was so glad you were safe over there, but it was torture for me to be without you."

"You never asked me what happened to me there. Aiti?"

"You were different when you came back. You held back. You seemed angry at us. It wasn't easy to talk to you."

"You didn't even try."

"Eeva, see how angry you are now. What did I ever do to you?"

"You abandoned me."

The road made one more sweeping turn to the right, along the edge of a stone wall, and then the discreet corporate sign appeared. An ornamental iron gate stood open on either side of the stone-paved drive.

This could still be the wrong farmhouse. She would go back to Gavle and ask again.

The road in didn't feel right. The entrance wasn't this long in her memory. But when the car came around the last stand of trees, fire hit her stomach. This was the house.

She parked the car and waited to learn what she would do next. Go inside? Start the car up again and drive away? Weep? Laugh? After several minutes, she opened the car door and stepped out onto the clean stone paving. She held on to the door in case her balance should fail, but she was fine. Strong, standing there.

Wings of new building extended to each side of the old house, and though she was sure it was the right one, it looked different. The fences were gone and the barn was missing. But, there was something else...

The pond was gone.

She went cold. How could it be ...just gone?

She walked slowly along the gravel path that wrapped itself around a playful mound of blue, white, yellow, and red flowers. Stairs led to the door. She didn't think she remembered stairs, but as she stepped on them, yes, she felt them. They had been there.

She touched the door handle. The door seemed to leap open. Inside were the wide-board floors she remembered, with new, pale runners and a few pieces of very fine amber-colored antiques. The walls had faint neo-classical stencils above a wainscot she didn't remember. Tall curtains framed the windows.

A small-boned young woman rose from behind her antique writing table and greeted Eeva.

No, she knew nothing of the history of the house. There was a paper about it, she looked in the drawer of her writing table, there *had been* a paper but it seems to be gone now. She smiled an apology. She herself has been here two years, the corporation came perhaps a decade ago, and before that... She shrugged her tiny shoulders in her well-tailored suit. Perhaps madame would care to write to the corporation. She handed Eeva a card.

Eeva let herself back out into the sunlit colors of the garden. The barn had been to her left, and the pond where the boy fell through ice had been just...here..

The Arnebergs were gone. Many kronor and a lot of corporate bonhomie had scoured off their ghosts.

She went to where the pond had been. A fine-trimmed lawn spread across the area. She triangulated the very place where Einar fell in. She sat down on the grass there.

The earth did not swallow her.

Shadows moved across the lawn while she sat. The young woman came out of the building, said good night, and drove away. A security officer walked past, and later walked past again.

The sun dipped behind the trees and a cool breeze came up. Still, Eeva sat. She waited to feel something. She thought for awhile there was some sense of release, an opening of her inner self, but as she watched, it dissolved.

Stiff from sitting, she got to her feet and returned to her car. If nothing was going to come of this visit, she might as well find a guesthouse and a nice restaurant. She drove back through Gavle. The tourist information office was about to close. She went in and asked if they had a list of guesthouses.

The young man who had helped her before said, as he handed her a printed list of homes that took in guests, "I wondered what had happened to the Arneberg family, so I did some checking."

Eeva looked for something to hold on to, but the room settled down soon.

"Mrs. Arneberg is gone, but Mr. Arneberg lives in a pensioner's cottage not far from here."

"Oh, really?" said Eeva, trying to sound grateful for the information. "How kind of you to make that effort."

"I've written out the address if you want to call on him. I'm sure he'd be glad to see you. Most of those old people are pretty lonely."

Eeva looked at the piece of paper he gave her, but the writing meant nothing to her. Later, she thought, she might be able to make out the words. She put it into her pocket.

He suggested she try a small storefront restaurant across the town square, with tables set out in its adjacent garden. Paper lanterns bobbed on lines strung between the house and the trees. People of all ages were eating and laughing there. It was a summerfest, a buffet meal of seasonal vegetables and fish and a large display of cakes and puddings with fruit.

The thought of summer desserts did it. Eeva dragged herself in, followed the waiter to a small table near the edge of the garden, moved her chair so that her back was to a tall elderberry bush, and sat facing the merry-makers. They seemed welcoming, just like happy summertime families at home. Like Tuuli and her family.

She ordered a sparkling mineral water and a glass of white wine and she began to relax. At the buffet table she took a light supper: herring, potatoes, cucumbers, a salad. A fresh breeze moved the paper lanterns, napkins blew off tables, children scampered after them, jackets and shawls came out.

Eeva thought of Tuuli and her little ones. She pictured them here to enjoy this evening. She would rather see them in this place instead of her.

Always disappearing. Always hanging back. That's why you let that boy, Einar, torment you. That's why you are responsible. Because you're not assertive enough.

What are you talking about? If I'd stood up to him, he would have hurt me more.

Did you ever try it?

Of course not. He was bigger. Besides, he lived there. It was his home.

If you'd stood up to him, maybe he would have stopped bullying you.

Go away.

Nonsense. Look at you now. You're a grandmother, in your sixties, and you're scared of thinking about this episode when you were four. When will you stop being so scared?

Don't hold your breath.

A young woman appeared, wearing Gavle's version of the national folkdance costume: full skirt, weskit, white blouse, shawl. She spoke to several guests, then came over

to Eeva and said, "Pardon me, but may I ask you to move to another table? We need this space for the dancing."

"Of course. Where shall I go?"

The young woman gestured to the other side of the garden, near the house.

Eeva carried her wine glass where she was told, and found an empty chair near a small table. The young woman brought her a glass plate with summer pudding on it. "I thought you might like dessert. Or there are others..."

Eeva said, "Thank you. That's just the one I was thinking of." She smiled at the dancer who did the slightest of curtsies and went back to move chairs and tables off the dancing area.

"That's a fine young woman," said a gravelly voice behind Eeva.

She turned to see a figure pushed even farther back into the corner than she was. He was older than Adam, with a sunken chest and suspenders spanning the air between his shoulders and his trousers. He had a kind face. Eeva said, "She seems very confident."

"Confident! Why should she not be? She'll take over this restaurant in a few years and she'll be set for life. And all the young men in town are in love with her."

"You, too, I think," said Eeva.

"Why not? She's a lovely thing. May I move my chair up to your table? I'm holding my coffee cup on my lap." Which was true.

Eeva slid her chair to the side to make room and the old gentleman moved in next to her.

"I've lived here all my life and never come to one of their dance nights. I figured it was about time I came."

"This area seems a nice place to live."

"When you're a farmer, sometimes a place is your friend and sometimes not."

"My father used to say that, too. The weather, the bugs, the curse of the farmer."

"My farm was near here. It belonged to my father, and his father, and his, too."

“Will your children carry on farming?”

“My son died a long time ago. No, the farming family ends with me.”

“I’m sorry.”

Eeva made herself look at the man, and a wave of recognition flooded her.

Bad joke, God. Get me out of here.

“And you?” he asked. “I think you are not Swedish.”

“I have a Finnish accent, don’t I?”

“Western Finland, nearly Swedish.”

“Yes.”

“Have you been to Gavle before?”

“Once. Long ago.”

“Aaah. Look! The dancing will begin.”

The stone-paved floor was cleared now. The dancers had pushed the tables together into a corner, the chairs were stacked, and, at the edge of the dancing area, a young man lit candles in tall glass lanterns. Now, four girls and two young men, in the traditional costume of Gavle, came onto the dance area from the shadows. A fiddler and a young girl with a tambourine played them in.

Eeva and the old man sat silent, caught up in the dance. The performance ended as the dancers, trailing long streamers of flower-decked ribbons, crossed between one another, weaving an elaborate net of ribbon, and then undid it as they returned to their original positions. As they took their bow, the old man leaned forward and said, “Eeva?”

Eeva held her breath and pretended not to hear.

He leaned back in his chair and said nothing more.

The dancers exited and the audience began to go home. Eeva rose and said, “It was nice to talk with you.” She shook the old man’s hand.

He said, “Will you tell me your name?”

She said, “Tuuli. A good Finnish name, eh?”



“Goodnight, then, Tuuli.”

“Goodnight.” She didn’t ask his name.

Eeva counted the hours as the church chimes announced them. She lay on her bed of frothy lace in the floral bower that was her guesthouse room. The light from the low sun came in the window and as the hours passed, it moved from the western sky around to the east.

She gave up trying to sleep and got up. The last chimes she’d heard announced three o’clock. She dressed quietly and let herself out into the northern white night.

The town seemed to be sleeping, but in midsummer when the light never really fades, people are sometimes awake at odd times, as she was now.

The hours on the lacy bed had been filled with condemnation. How could she come here searching for the truth, and have the opportunity of speaking to Mr. Arneberg and not take it? She knew herself for a frightened rabbit, but even a rabbit has curiosity. Her fear was a protection, she told herself. Don’t go where it’s not safe. But the result of that hiding is a lifetime of blame and you just had the chance to clear it up, or acknowledge it...either would be better than what you’ve done for sixty years.

O, shut up.

If you don’t listen to this now, you not only doom your own life, which isn’t worth much anymore anyway, but you have failed Tuuli.

Leave Tuuli out of this!

Tuuli, Tuuli, Tuuli.

I can’t. What do you want? You want me to go find the old man and ask if I really killed his son?

Yes. That’s what you must do. You heard him call ‘Eeva’ didn’t you? He knows its you. He’s been waiting for you.

Why didn’t he bloody find me?

Not his curse. It was yours. You had to make the journey.

Yes, for Tuuli.

For yourself.

Very early morning in summertime Sweden, like Finland or anywhere in the far north, is bathed in blue light. The sun's rays are long and pale. On such a morning, the sea glows bluer than blue, the air is clean, a slight breeze cools things, and the whole world seems new again.

Eeva went out to the shore and found a flat rock to sit on. She watched small fishing boats bobbing in place. Gulls with black faces circled overhead, and gray crows with black wings walked awkwardly on the jetty, looking for fish parts. They were the same birds as on the Finland side of the Gulf of Bothnia. Same waters. Same fish underneath. Maybe Sweden was more like Finland than she thought.

She reached for any memories of Einar's father. He worked on the farm all the time, came in for meals, said things like "Don't be hard on the girl, dear. She didn't ask to come. There's a war on." Maybe Eeva made that up, but she thought she remembered hearing that.

If that memory was true, why didn't he stick up for her when his wife said "*mordare*"? He was there, in her memory of the ice. He pulled Einar out of the pond, with a pole. She was getting pieces of scene coming to her now, like old movie film spliced together. Einar was chasing her and she ran across the pond. Then Einar was in the ice...in the water and ice. There was screaming and the father had a long pole flat on the ice and he pulled him to himself. There's more. No, there's not. Not yet.

She could find no memory of herself hitting or pushing Einar. Why didn't she fall through, too? The memories all dissolved into confusion.

Her watch said four:fifteen. Too early for breakfast, but she didn't want to go back to her room and lie down again. She set off to see the secondary streets of Gavle.

She tried to think of nothing, to give her memories a break. Thoughts fluttering past thoughts. Ahh, Tuuli, my love for you is costly. The high price of loving someone.

Yes, especially when you've never loved the body you walk around in.

What do you mean?

You took on their judgment and didn't stand up for yourself.

I was four years old!

You were a lot of other ages between then and now. Why didn't you inquire sooner?

Buzz off!

That's a good sign. Come on, fight!

Look, I'm here, aren't I?

Yes, but you haven't looked up the old man this morning. Do you still have that paper in your pocket?

Paper? The address. Yes.

She read the address of Mr. Arneberg's place. A pensioner's cottage. There was a streetmap behind glass near the Information Office. She went back to look up where the old man lived. She counted blocks and rights and lefts and told herself to remember them. She didn't trust her memory. She found a pen in the bottom of her pocket and wrote 3-L-2-R — 18 on her palm. Then she set out.

His street had a row of small wooden houses from the nineteenth century, some with front porches, others turning a closed face to the street. Eeva didn't look for number 18. Not yet. Not so fast. She was sliding herself into the idea of being here, and maybe she'd turn around and go back to her guesthouse. Her options were still open. She still had a choice.

"Hello, Tuuli. You're up early." He was sitting on his porch, as old men do when there's no more sleep in a night.

Eeva went over to him. "Good morning." She was cool, on auto-pilot. And on some level, she was glad to see him.

"Would you like some coffee?"

“No, no, thanks. It’s too much trouble.”

“No trouble at all. Come in...”

Eeva followed him into the tiny house. “You’re up early, too.”

“Farmer’s hours. Never could sleep late. And you?”

“Midsummer light.”

The kitchen was from the same era as her parents’ home. Sunlight flooded in through the window above the sink and lit up the pale wood of his dining table. A yellow begonia and a basket with pillbottles sat next to the wall.

He took a very long time to prepare the coffee, stopping to open cupboards in search of cookies. Eeva said, “I’m not hungry. ...Really. Just a coffee would be nice.”

“I haven’t been to market in the last few days.” He avoided her eyes.

Eeva wondered if he were eating enough. She looked around the room. On the wall was a framed photograph of a woman and a boy. Eeva went to look at it.

“My wife and my son. Long ago.”

Eeva studied the photo. It was taken a year or two before she came to stay with them, so Einar was younger than she remembered.

Mr. Arneberg set two cups of coffee on the table, brought a small bowl of sugar over, pulled a chair out for her to sit, and then sat down himself.

“Now, Tuuli. Tell me about yourself.”

“My daughter’s name is Tuuli. You were right last night.”

“Eeva!” He smiled and his face seemed to blur. He handed her a tissue.

“Were you expecting me to come?”

“Maybe. Someday. I thought you might.”

“Why?” Eeva was puzzled.

“Other Finnish children who stayed around here in the war have been coming back to see where they were.”

“I see.”

“I wondered how your life turned out. You weren’t with us long, you know.”

“No, just long enough to cause your son’s death.”

“Cause Einar’s death? No! I told him to stay off the pond. The foolish boy ran onto thin ice.”

“I thought I ... killed him.”

“Why think that? For sure, you didn’t kill him.”

*Why think that?* I have spent my *whole life* thinking that. Why wouldn’t I think that?

“Say that again, please.”

“My wife thought so, but I knew you didn’t. You were both little ones. You were playing. He fell through the ice. You didn’t push him.”

Eeva’s thoughts protested: We were NOT playing. He was hurting me... Let it go. Keep asking questions.

“Did your wife die thinking I killed him?”

“Well, yes, of course she had to blame somebody.”

He offered her more coffee. She declined and he poured another cup for himself.

Eeva sat motionless.

“My wife... well, she was a bit moody even before then, but I think she was never right after Einar died. It killed her, too.”

“It killed part of me, as well.”

“You suffered because you thought you killed him? My, my.” His head shook slowly from side to side.

After a minute, he continued. “You see, I told my brother we couldn’t take in one of the Finnish children.”

“Your brother?”

“Father Lars, the minister of the church in Gavle. He’s the one who drove you out to us. Do you remember?”

“I remember something. Nothing that comes together.”

“The children from Finland were brought to his church and the families who had volunteered to take them chose: girl or boy, what age, you know. You were left over. Who knows why? Maybe because they’d shaved your head, although I think there were probably others with shaved heads, too.”

“Why did they shave my head?”

“Maybe they thought they saw headlice. Who knows?”

Eeva’s hand went to her hair without her consent.

“So you and Father Lars were left behind at the church. The church ladies had all gone home. They didn’t notice you, I guess...I’m not sure how it happened, but there you were. He didn’t know what else to do with you so he drove you out to us and told me it was our war-time human duty to take you.

“I don’t think my brother knew how bad things were at our house. He didn’t come to visit us often.

“We mustn’t throw out people when they break, you know, but we try to keep their life calm. My wife was doing all right as long as it was just us three. My brother really asked, you know, strongly asked us to take you, so I said yes. It was wrong of me. That’s why I hoped you would come back.

“. . . more coffee?”

He rose. Eeva shook her head, no. He sat down again.

“Do you remember any of this?”

“Pieces. I remember pieces of scenes. I remember the well.”

“Einar threw your hairbrush down it, yes.”

“And tried to throw me in, too.”

“Maybe. I don’t remember that. I remember the hairbush though. Einar was not a bad boy but he loved his mother and he saw that she didn’t want you there, so he tried to drive you away, for his mother. I should have stepped in.”

“When did she die?”

“Ten years ago. I guess you needed to hear this, didn’t you? I thought you’d known it was just an accident. And then I wondered. But every day, I still wish I’d said no to my brother, so none of it would have happened.”

“Your son would still be alive, then.”

“That, too.”

When you’ve spent your whole life thinking you’ve killed somebody, you don’t just change to a jolly person when you find out it isn’t true, but Eeva noticed some changes: a freeing of her shoulders, a distancing from that pillar of rage. It wasn’t gone. It was part of Eeva’s landscape, but she could live with it, she could tell Tuuli, she could know that her grandchildren might not be burdened with it, too.

Summer was winding down: the blackcurrants and raspberries were ready for picking, the wild tabby had two small kittens in the woodshed, and the kitchen carpets, washed in the lake, lay drying on flat, sunbaked rocks.

Tuuli’s babes were building roads in soft earth with blocks of wood. From time to time, a road would cross someone else’s road and a voice would rise in protest.

The sun, diminished in its power now, tried to convince Eeva by its yellow light that it still brought the heat of July. She knew better. Soon the year would swing around the corner and head down toward winter.

Her thoughts meandered, reviewing other late summers, other autumns, the memories of weather and sunlight, of this summerhouse for the past thirty years, and before that, of other summers in other places. There was a continuum, but there was also a difference. She wasn’t who she had been, and yet she still carried the memories of all those years, of pretending to be all right when she believed she was shamefully bad.

How much of my life have I wasted adapting to a secret that wasn’t true? So what that this giant boulder of shame has been taken away? My spirit still holds the shape of the rock. I am dented in that way.

Eeva turned at the sound of the screen-door banging. Tuuli came toward her, carrying a bowl of plums.

“These are nice, Aiti. They’re the last ones.”

She set the bowl on the ground near Eeva. The children squatted nearby and helped themselves to plums. Liisa picked out a large one and handed it to her grandmother. Eeva took it and thanked her.

Liisa stood up, came over to Eeva, and kissed her cheek.

Tears rose in Eeva’s eyes. Tuuli sat down next to her mother.

“Aiti, all the years I grew up I never saw you cry. Now your eyes are running all the time. It’s like you’re melting.”

Melting. The thought floated in Eeva’s mind.

Tuuli and the children went to meet Joonas at the bus. Eeva stayed behind, lying on a blanket on the lakeshore. The book she was reading slipped from her hand and she dozed.

She woke with her heart pounding. The falling dream again. The same dream that plagued her all her life. This time she was falling with ice—big shards of it surrounding her, bigger than she was—ice breaking up, herself falling, ice falling.

She looked about. The lake lay before her as lazily as it ever had. The only sounds were from the full-time residents: birds, crickets, dragonflies. Tuuli had gone. Where? Ah yes. To meet the bus. The waking world seemed less real than the dream. She was still almost falling through ice. She went back into the dream.

It’s hard to pick up a dream again. The mind tries to steer it, but dreams don’t take direction from the waking mind. Eeva lay in the sun, eyes closed, and waited to see if the dream would come back.



Tuuli's family came back. Joonas looked hot and disheveled from the city. Liisa was sitting on his shoulders, waving a new tiny bus and Tomi was driving a small fire engine up his father's right leg. Joonas carefully dragged that leg along so he wouldn't hurt his son.

"You look hot, Joonas. Are you all right?"

"Thank you, Eeva. I'm fine. Traffic was bad, the bus ran late, and I didn't want Tuuli to have to wait for me."

"That was thoughtful."

Joonas looked puzzled. Tuuli also seemed surprised.

Eeva realized that she had probably never asked Joonas anything. Well, he's not so bad. He'd better get used to having me talk to him.

Tuuli moved Tomi off his father's leg, and the four of them went to the cottage. Eeva stayed on her blanket with the bowl of plums. She lay back again.

Dreams don't continue, but this one did. She was falling, she was in water, with all that big ice, but now the ice was melting. She reached out to touch a column of ice and the motion pulled her body out to the side. She was doing sidestroke, swimming among the ice shards. They slowed their rate of fall. Hers slowed, too. The sensation of dropping dissolved. Now she was just swimming. How strange: she could breathe underwater.