

A letter to my father

(Audio text, Marja Viitahuhta, 2006)

I stick my hand in the soil. It is cool and immediately digs into the skin under the nails. The petals of the flowers fall on my palms, I drink water from the well. The grass is newly cut and feels like velvet in the soles. I run to the peer and push the boy down, I don't remember his name. No, that was another time. I wander in the wasteland, I imagine a campfire. I have heard about it. I play with my imaginative friend, my look-alike. She is just like me. We never speak, we don't need to. She knows what I think. I hit my head with a stone. I want to know how much I dare. It hurts. I hold my head with both hands. I run along the shore, my clothes are wet. Who's there to meet me?

A snake is chased behind a cow stable, there mom cuts its head off. I step on a bee, I learn to walk. My cousin rocks me in a swing. She stands on the back and I sit in front of the tire. My aunt is my second mother, my father is a second father, I am a second me. Everybody asks me if my hair is naturally curly. My rash disappears, I am gilded by sun.

I run, I am not sure if I like it. I receive advices, you should listen to your heart, don't fall in the abyss between the mattress and the wall. How are you feeling now?

Let's cut away what is not needed. A stealing hand, a vomiting mouth, the naked rocks, shame and fear, unjustified judgements, the loneliness cherished in the rooms, demands for compensation, lying sweetness, uncertain glances.

What do I know about you? Your name. The colour of your hair, those few curls that mom had cut and put safe in a plastic pocket. Your picture, an identity card. You don't look handsome, not old, not young. You are quite ordinary. You drive a car at night. You die alone. The car has a scaffold filled with harsh sawdust. You work at night. There are no surveillance cameras. When you unload the car, the scaffold is stuck, probably frozen, you go and hit it with a stick, the side of the scaffold brakes, you fall under the heap and later on they find a bump from your head. When are you found? Already at night? Or in the morning? Is mom asleep?

You are unconscious, we all want to think so, that everything happens quickly, the pain spreads exploding in your head, your feet disappear beneath you, your vision turns black, you no longer breathe below the heap, powerless against its weight, your nostrils aren't filled up, you are washed and dressed in clean clothes, like a doll. Your moustache is left, you've got moustache in your driving licence. The hair of the dead keep growing after death. When does mom cut those curls from your hair? Before or after your death? A body that soon disappears - let's save something. Let's compare the colours of our hair: mine is dyed, yours is not. Let's imagine: your hair is cut, the barber is doing the job. You save some of the coils, as a lucky charm. No, mom cuts your hair. It falls on the bathroom floor, you drive away with your car, the hair is left on the floor, not cleared up, and in the morning mom sees it and cries.

I am an accident, a chance. You don't want to have me, but I am in the womb and I am born, and I am your image, your look-alike. Mother is young, and she has got cool and hot and captivating eyes and the same look as in the photograph, now mom is a baby and she sits on the grey grass and looks into the camera. Now I am in mom's arms, mom cries in the funeral, she has a black dress as everyone. I do not remember you, I am newly born. In a photograph you are with me on a bed, your back towards the camera. I can not see your expression. Are you happy or worried? In another picture you are playing a fool, you have a leather jacket, you stand in the doorway. Flashlight dazzles, I can not see your face. I lose you slowly, a thought at a time.

I have got three fathers: there is stepfather and then there is the Father of Heaven, they teach me about it in school, and you are in heaven too, and I compare you to my stepfather and it is unfair, and you always win. There are two suns in the sky and my teacher can name all the capitals of the world and my stepfather knows all the names of the countries and my mom can give me a sister, and she does, a sister not-good-for-a-twin, a sister born-too-late, a sister not-what-I-asked-for, not accompaniment enough during the long car trips to see our relatives, not a twin, but on the backseat of the car I can sleep just fine, I put you under the book and the book under the pillow, you are just a word, you are being looked for, in my face they search you, and I carry you in my pocket, and you are the smallest, my private little treasure.

I am always abandoned, and nobody understands me. I sign with my heart's blood. I jump off the window, but my cousin fetches me to drink coffee made out of milk and wild thoughts. We run by the sandy road, under the bridge, I can blow smoke rings straight away, tobacco has been stolen from the caravan, and we put the dolls on top of each other and they get babies and we rule the world, but in the end of the game all die in a war, because life is cruel like that, one must learn, and everything is distant, sun goes behind a cloud and comes out again. In the sauna I pee in the slot between the boards and by the corner of the cow stable we eat salty grass, it grows from my pee and tastes bitter.

I am on the wrong side. There is a stranger, I have forgotten his face, he asks me to get back, to the other side, not to fall from the bridge. I tell him I was just playing, that I did not plan to kill myself, he continues his way. Another time there was a jump, I don't remember it either. Was the bridge high? Did I imagine it all? The water is cold, I can feel it, I am still alive. I remember: lying in the bathtub, holding my head under the water. But at some point I always have to pull myself up and inhale: the body does not agree.

Then a terrible downhill begins. Skis get stuck across each other. I can no longer go to sauna with my stepfather. They always change the channel when there are people naked in television. Arguments are not talked about after they are over. Loveliness disappears. Spying cars is boring. You never show up, God doesn't give a sign. I lie in the

ditch. My belly is made of plaster, my hair no longer grows curly. Mom dresses me up in a skirt made of tulle. Boys can ride their bikes faster and better. A racket hits me in my leg. I vomit again, I fall in the snowdrift, left and right, the side of the road is full of prints of my body. I play piano, left hand, right hand, and my foot tramples the pedal. The women's choir is singing, during the interims I visit the toilet and the women guess. First I am in custody, then I move out. I'll try and do what the adults told me not to do and look like an adult whilst doing it. And then the bathtub, and the waiting, and the futile attempts. I hold my breath. We scream, threaten, gamble, then there's other traps: dog's excrement, make-up piles, rusting kettles, mouldy laundry, bloody sheets etc etc, I did not plan it, I know, but how can I find something of my own, will you ever help me, why must you walk behind my back and disappear each time I turn around?

Where are the traces of watering cans from the hot roads? In the morning we are slow. Why are love letters composed at night? I write your name a hundred times on paper, I cut it all up in small pieces and throw the chaff on myself. Then I feel embarrassed. I go to the forest in the backyard and bury the chaff there. I no longer remember that name. I caress myself secretly, I win the shame, the shame wins me. My body swells, I am filled with steaming air.

They take everything from me, leave me, I lie here, I am dead, insects are flying into my mouth. And then I have to rise again and search for the path to the village. Bombs are dropping. Limbs, blood. I rake leaves, we play the game. Blood leaks, someone stings my arm. My heel hurts. Look at that picture, the grief of those people, do they really exist or are they just images. I place little bits in the text, small boxes between the letters, Tetris cubes. They fall on the words and melt away. What is done to the images? Are they thrown away? Who finds them? Does he look at them? Can they be forgotten?

You don't grow old. What happens in death? The body remains, first looked at, then it must be gotten rid of, let it turn into soil. The memorials remain, the words and numbers cut into the stone, the property, the garlands that are brought to the grave, cards with rhymes, paper tissues that are used for wiping away the sweat from the foreheads and tears from the cheek, a couple of songs are being sung.

The one who has died is mute.

You come beside the bed. You say you just wanted to see me. You are dead. I can not see clearly where you stand. I am the same age as you when you died. I wish to see a sign of likeness, if only you would come closer. I do not remember more. Your absence is heavy. The summer nights are suddenly cool. Glimpses of memories appear unexpectedly. Grief is tamed, let's put its patience on trial. Let's quiet it down slowly. The wind presses fingerprints on my face. Daylight and heat exhaust me, I try to look forward, I feel dizzy. I pick dead grass from my socks. I sit on the couch and look over the market square. Snow falls, I wake up and it is summer again.

Then later, I am empty. I have a permit to stay silent. My illness is given many names, it is like a dear child. A recovery is promised, forms are filled. We talk a little, hold hands. In the forest I meet a bear, it watches me, I stare into its eyes. I have come too far. I am not afraid, fear has left me. I return back home, I get lost in the felling opens. I carry you, unopened, behind my memory. I look at you, we look at each other.

The lawn must be watered and cut. Weed must be torn up, paths sanded, and the borders of the lawn and the paths kept clear. Everything grows, blooms and decays. The leaves are raked away, the stones become mossy if not brushed clean. Graves are quiet, some are taken care of, some not. Did I cry at your grave last time? Does it make a difference? Did you send your greetings? Did you teach me your wisdom, remind me of mortality? Did you send me blood and sweat? Can you read my thoughts? Are you watching me? Do your hands move softly, can you name leafy trees? Do you want to travel in a hot-air balloon? Have you stared at the sun?

The light blinds you if you look straight into it.