

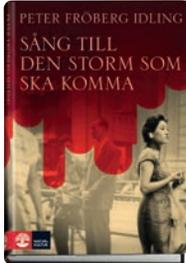
RIGHTS LIST FALL 2012



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FEATURED TITLES

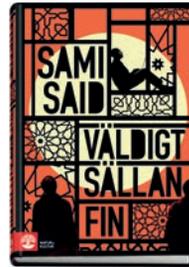


PETER FRÖBERG IDLING:

»**SONG FOR AN APPROACHING STORM**«

A long awaited first novel from one of Swedish literature's most critically acclaimed voices, the story of a love triangle involving the young Pol Pot in the mid 1950's, as Cambodia stands on the brink of dramatic change after gaining its independence.

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SAMI SAID:

»**HARDLY EVER NICE**«

A strikingly original first novel that blends the registers of sitcom and solemnity, about a young Muslim man and his struggle for self-definition within a secular life world.

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LOTTA LUNDBERG:

»**THE ISLAND**«

The Island is one of the Commonwealth's last colonies in the Pacific and home to Olivia, a Swedish doctor. When the UK sends out officials to investigate sexual abuse allegations, unspoken norms start rising to the surface. Whose paradise—and whose idea of paradise—is it?

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CAROLINE RINGKOG FERRADA-NOLI:
»NATURE«

A literary debut at the intersection of prose and poetry, writing »to die for«, raw and poetic. A young, hypersensible woman, wandering, observing, and feeling contempt for what she sees in New York, Paris, Malmö, at the beginning of the 21st century.

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PETER HANDBERG:
»SHADOWS«

Award winning Peter Handberg's new autofictive novel chronicles a son's desperate search for his father. Literally stepping into his father's suit, the narrator pieces together an account of their life together.

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JESPER WEITZ:
»ALL THAT DOES NOT GROW IS DYING«

A fast-paced existential thriller, set against the backdrop of an impending disaster. Weitz' breathless novel tells the story of a family in free fall, separated by forces they can't control.

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Lotta

Lundbe



P.37

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Lotta Lundberg (b. 1961 in Uppsala) has lived and worked in Berlin since 2004. Her first novel, *Let Yourself Happen*, published in 1998 while she was working as a teacher, told the story of a teacher

who falls in love with one of her female students. The book caused considerable controversy. Her real breakthrough, however, came a few years later with *Roll Up, Roll up* (Skynda, kom och se) in 2006; a novel depicting four circus dwarves and the shabby world of freak shows in New York, Berlin and Stockholm in the 1930s.

The novel was a critical success and sold in Finland, Norway, Denmark and Holland. With *The Island* (2012) Lotta Lundberg continues to explore her signature themes: social, political and sexual codes and prejudices; liminal spaces, and the construction of normality.

Lundberg holds a degree in German and politics and regularly contributes writing and columns to major Swedish newspapers. She also conducts classes in creative writing, in Berlin and elsewhere.

THE ISLAND

Original title: Ön

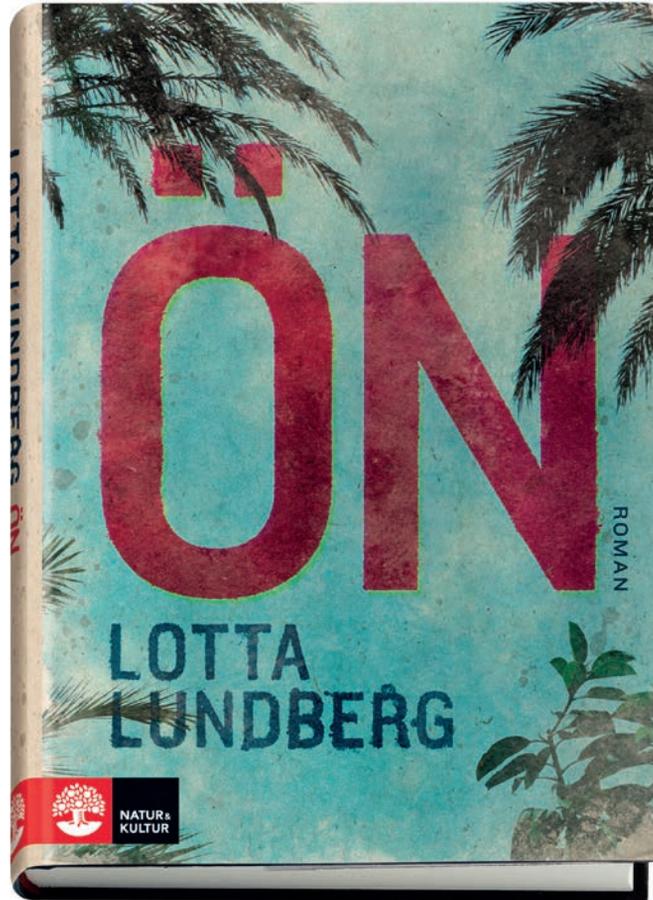
Genre: Literary fiction

Publishing date: March 2012 (hardcover); December 2012 (paperback)

Hardcover, 311 pp.

Reading material: Swedish novel, English sample translation

English, Dutch, German and Russian reading material from Lundberg's previous novels is available



ABOUT THE BOOK

Far out in the South Seas lies the Island; majestic, forgotten, a paradise wrapped in the soft shade of its palm trees. For the past twenty years, it has been home to Olivia, a Swedish physician who works in the cottage hospital. Olivia sees herself—and is seen by others—as a natural part of island life; she is in a relationship with Taip, the island leader, and regularly participates in the dances on the Cape.

When tourists from a luxury cruise report the occurrence of sexual abuse on the Island, Christian, a high ranking British health care official, is sent over from the UK to investigate whether there is any truth to the allegations. As center meets periphery and cultures come crashing into each other, everyone involved is forced to re-think their ideas about freedom, sexuality, and guilt.

The Island is one of the Commonwealth's last colonies in the Pacific. But who does paradise belong to? And who is prepared to abandon their concept of it?



The Island is based on my thoughts surrounding the events that took place on the island of Pitcairn in the Pacific Ocean, home of the Bounty mutineers and a remnant of British colonial rule.

After some visiting tourists reported the islanders for sexual abuse, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair sent a delegation to uncover the truth behind the allegations. In my mind I visualised the English judges wandering in their black gowns and white wigs beside the turquoise lagoons as the islanders disappeared into the jungle to hide among the hibiscus flowers.

A cliché, of course—it didn't really happen like that. But what did happen when the

women of the island called a meeting to try and clear the names of their sons and husbands? And when half the men on the island were thrown into the jail they were forced to build among the palm trees? And what about the western world—what was it doing while it waited for the cruise ships to set course once again for this paradise island surrounded by myths. And can a colony ever be a paradise?

Every good novel revolves around an ethical conflict, and a story has to fascinate me with its many layers and profound complexity before I can even think of beginning any kind of in-depth research. But there have to be less easily-interpreted

grey areas as well, in order to create a story in which the characters are psychologically credible, as if they did really exist. That to me is the great art of writing.

All of that was present in this story, I felt, if only I dared to look at myself and my culture in the mirror. It was the most difficult project I had attempted because for a long time I wanted history to be black and white.

I spent hundreds of hours reading Heyerdahl, Margaret Mead, Moby Dick, Paul Gauguin, Tomas Cook, Bengt Danielsson, Anders Källgård and others. I buried myself in the research of anthropologists and wild seafaring legends. I was given

a bursary and travelled to some of the Cook Islands, living with the inhabitants, only to discover that my view of the world had been inflexible and ethnocentric. I experienced an extraordinary clash of cultures. I was ecstatic, I was ambivalent, I was in paradise.

And so a novel came into being—*The Island*—which tells the story of Olivia who has fallen in love not only with the island but with Taip, its local leader. For twenty years she has worked as a doctor in the island's clinic and become part of its culture. Then out of the blue there is the British Visit and everything changes.

The book is also about Christian, an English social services

senior manager close to burn-out. He is sent to the island with two colleagues to handle the case and for a couple of sweltering months all his preconceptions of freedom, sexuality and guilt are turned upside down. It is also about Moana, whose dreams are different from those of her parents, just like most of the island's teenagers. And also how hard it is to be a human being and know where to draw the boundaries—»Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: And here shall thy proud waves be stayed.«

It is also about the way tourism indirectly influences the cultures we turn into the paradise of our dreams.

Because who does paradise

belong to? And who is prepared to abandon their concept of it? And what will happen in the Pacific Ocean after the Chinese have bought up the South Sea Islands' fishing rights? But most of all it is about this: when is sex abusive?

The novel follows on from my earlier work: I have written about boundaries, sexuality, identity and taboos before. My writing has never been uncontroversial, often it has given rise to debate, but seldom has it been as difficult as this—or as important.

—*Lotta Lundberg*

TRANSLATED BY SUSAN BEARD

Praise for The Island

»[The novel] is challenging in an unusual way. It delves deep ... A good metaphor for man's inaptitude to understand a society not constructed on the same norms and values ... A blend of moral inquiry and thriller ... She's a very astute writer. This is about taboos, and how they change according to how much power someone has, or how little.«

KULTURNYHETERNA

»Lotta Lundberg's ability to bring matters to a head and to question thought patterns and structures makes the novel an important and at times uncomfortably thought-provoking read.«

SVENSKA DAGBLADET

»The reader is forced to constantly re-think, think again, about perennial questions concerning one's own taboos as much as others' potential misdeeds. Where do you draw the line? The intellectual material for this novel is very strong, and yet it never overshadows the story; The Island is powered as much by the strong characters and the exciting plot as by the thinking that underwrites it.«

HELSINGBORGS DAGBLAD

»The most complex and nuanced novel I've read in a long time ... Lotta Lundberg has written a novel that is as frustrating as it is rewarding.«

ARBETARBLADET

»Lotta Lundberg explores a mined field in her novel The Island; a brave thing to do.«

UPSALA NYA TIDNING

THE ISLAND

TRANSLATED BY SUSAN BEARD

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On the beach the pigs are gorging themselves, their snouts rooting among the freshly fallen mangoes, their mangy bristle gleaming in the baking heat of the sun. Tails erect, lost to the world.

They ought to be shot, she thought.

Olivia stands in the shade of a palm tree, watching them step down into the water. Three of them, with suitcases and pink hairlines. The waves break against the flat boat and the one in front has his hand to his forehead. Like a scout he surveys the island, where the youngsters are hanging in clusters on the roof of the customs house. He raises his hand in an awkward wave and she draws back, not responding to the gesture, although what she really wants to do is go up to them and ask why they are not wearing their wigs and black gowns already. But she stays where she is, treading the sand. It is dry but nevertheless sticks between her toes. The sun beats down and their faces swell in the heat as they wade barefoot towards the shore, their shoes hanging around their necks by the laces. The woman dangles hers from one hand and lifts her

skirt over her knees to avoid the cresting waves. The men's trouser legs are already dark with salty water. They try to look happy, as if they are arriving on holiday with pockets full of condoms, as if they had already downed a crate of beer on the boat.

For a split second she feels an impulse to take off her clothes and swim out, to give them the welcome Captain Cook received 300 years earlier. To fill her mouth with sea water and spray out an alluring little fountain, kick her legs suggestively and let her breasts bob on the surface. To float about stark naked and beckon them to follow her through the lagoon. Naturally, she does not do that. She remains under the palm tree, playing with the ballpoint pen in her pocket, clicking it in and out, in and out. Watches as the cases are unloaded, the computers and trunks and other baggage, and carried on the heads of the boys through the water and up to the beach. No-one meets them with garlands of flowers. Everyone waits languidly up by the road. Almost everyone; Taip's mass of hair is nowhere to be seen.

Can you tell me what this is all about? she asked, when the confirmation came through. Would you please be good enough to tell me.

That was earlier in the year and he had not replied. His mouth was a thin line and his pupils small and hard and Olivia could no longer meet his gaze. Instead she stepped closer and pressed her face to his throat as if she could hide herself there, at the same time offering comfort, but the smell was sour and it was hard to breathe so she twisted sideways, digging her fingers into his shoulder. A little too hard. A little too much fingernail. He yelped and pushed her away so roughly that she almost stumbled.

Hey Doc, what are you doing?

She turned her back to him and inhaled a breath of air through her nose. It sounded like whistling. He knew very well that she hated it when he called her Doc. He grabbed her shoulders and swung her around. She looked him in the eyes. And there they stood, locked in their power struggle.

Normally there was eroticism in those moments,

a desire that could only end one way. But she felt anything but desire, only a faded contempt and she did not know whose it was. After a matter of seconds she averted her eyes and walked out onto the verandah, taking the steps down to the water in two strides. A hen scratched around in the grass. *Don't stay*, just keep walking, walking straight out into the waves until the currents are so strong they pull you over and suck you away. Walk far enough to make him invisible. But already at the shoreline, where the shells start to crush underfoot, she stopped, thinking for a moment that he had followed after her, that any minute he would grasp her waist and tip her onto the sand, lie on top of her and prise her out of her shirt, wrestle and laugh against her neck, *Give in, Olivia, give in...* But he did not follow. No heavy, playful Taip followed. Instead he remained on the verandah, calling. She took one more step into the water and watched it swirl around her ankles, stirring up the sand and sucking her feet down deeper and deeper, and for a moment she felt almost static, as if

fixed to the spot, until she heard his voice again. It reached her in between the swell of the waves. And it was not playful or even angry, but afraid.

They have come ashore now, all three of them standing in the sand looking confused, tired and hot, and from nowhere the children suddenly appear with hands full of garlands after all. Toby, Nick, Caroline, Ria and Mata.

Olivia does not understand it. Hadn't the village council decided not to give them a welcome—at least not with lei. She looks about, not seeing anyone in charge. The children place the flower garlands round the pale necks and the three visitors smile politely, thanking them and looking around, wiping the sweat from their foreheads. No sign of Taip. Where on earth has he got to? She clicks the pen in and out, in and out, wondering one more time whether she ought to go and show some goodwill. Forget Taip. No doubt he is sitting drinking somewhere or lying on the verandah tossing himself off, because surely he is not at home in his tourist bungalow, shaking mosquito nets and mak-

ing their beds? That is an unlikely thought. She cannot imagine where they will be staying. Who has opened their home for them? No, she is not going to bother. She will not go forward and take part in the spectacle, smile and say *How do you do. You're very, very welcome.* It will not do. Over her dead body. She runs away, quite surprisingly. It is not her style, Olivia never runs away. But she does now. She rushes home to her clinic.

It has been raining. The red earth is as slippery as soap and large black butterflies with violet eyes play above the road. Their downy insect bodies flap against her upper arms and tickle her skin, making the hairs stand on end. She will talk to them, all in good time. All in good time they will stand face to face, but not now.

Where is he? She stumbles over an unopened box on the verandah and the scissors, tubes and sugar that came on the last cargo boat rattle around inside. She throws her shirt over the arm of the chair, rinses her face and glares into the mirror. She has never been one for mirrors so she does not smile. It

is his mirror that he hung up on steel wire above her wash basin. He stands there sometimes, shaving. The frame is rusty, salty spray has flecked the surface and there is a line of shaving foam along one side, or is it toothpaste spit? She blinks. The person she sees between the flecks is not ugly, but middle aged, and a few strands of grey hair have escaped from the elastic band and sweaty silver hair clings to her forehead. Around her eyes the wrinkles are plentiful, some of them connecting with the ones running up from her mouth. They look like parentheses. The fine lines on her upper lip are multiplying, as if she had been a smoker or had pursed her lips around something equally idiotic, and she discovers new brown patches along her jaw line—well, at least her jaw has not disappeared into her neck but that is due to good posture, she thinks to herself. She would never allow herself to let her chin droop. Never. On the bridge of her nose the freckles have grown together to form a big brown mass, bleached by the sun. If she had been in Sweden she would have had it tested

long ago to eliminate malignant melanoma, but she isn't, so this is how it is.

Taip had been obsessed with them, had never seen a freckle in his life, or so he said. He could lie beside her and count them all night long, count and count and count. His fingers wandered over her shoulders and back and down her thighs. He found freckles everywhere.

He competed with himself. I don't want to count to more than twenty-five, he had said when he was very young. I'll be an old man the day I have to count to more than a hundred, he said some years later. And in between he would rather not count at all. It is impossible, she said, men need to recover. And he thought that was unfair. And she thought he was uneducated and childish. She could wake in the middle of the night and feel him counting, feel his fingers playing on her collar bone or in the creases of her knees. You are always open, he whispered as he drew her towards him.

And that was true. Not once had she turned him away. Why would she do that? But she could tease.

How many thousand freckles do you need these days? He tolerated that. And it excited them both to remind each other how it had begun.

He had been one of the most beautiful oarsmen: wearing a black pirate scarf tied around his head he was to take the boat over the reef. It was hard to miss him. Even harder to miss her. All those freckles. And a doctor's bag.

She had no idea that this island was to be her last. There was no postal service so she had not planned to stay longer than she usually did, just until the money ran out and she needed post offices and letter boxes. But things turned out differently.

To reach the island they had to climb over the schooner's railing while it was still at sea, beyond the deadly underwater reef, and down a rope ladder, and from the bottom rung jump into a smaller, flat-bottomed boat. First they heaved in the trunks and baggage, then the animals, and then it was Olivia's turn. The sea was rough. Olivia dan-

gled on the rope ladder which slapped against the port side, hanging there like a monkey, waiting for the shout to tell you when to jump, because you could not simply let go whenever you chose. You had to monitor the height of the waves and then at the right moment it was as simple as taking one short step. But if you waited too long you would end up in between the swell and then it was at least three metres down to the boat. The men shouted like wild cowboys and Olivia jumped at the wrong second and fell and injured herself. Her ankle hurt so badly she was sure her foot was broken. No paradise for me, she had time to think, because who will take care of this? And for the first time in the entire journey she had been afraid. Not of being lame or in pain but that now it would come to an end.

The jumping continued until the last man, goat and child were sitting on the flour sacks, and then the oarsmen stopped shouting, rowed towards land and began to sing. But on reaching the surf they fell silent and it was as if every muscle

in their bodies tensed. They were waiting for the right wave to take them over the shallows. Not at the top of the highest wave, Olivia realised, but on the following wave, which was strong enough to get them across the reef without capsizing them, allowing them to glide over the knife-sharp underwater landscape and out of danger. The schooner had long since disappeared from view.

Then she was standing in the baking hot sand, feeling small and bewildered as people came running out of the jungle to greet their nearest and dearest. The sun stung her eyes. There was kissing and nose rubbing over every face and the flowers irritated and stank, sweet and prickly. Olivia had garlands up to her ears. She could hardly move her head and they laughed at her, toothless, kind and shy, before the baggage was dragged up to the road where the red dust whirled and flat bed mopeds and wheelbarrows waited to take them further.

Olivia rested her doctor's bag on the sand. It was an ancient thing made of black leather, half empty in fact, containing only a stethoscope, a reflex

hammer and a blood pressure monitor. She had wanted to get rid of it for a long time, to throw it into the sea, but as time passed she had become attached to it and liked the feel of the worn handle.

It was the first boat to have come across the reef for several months, she realised, so it was not surprising they wanted to celebrate. There was to be a big party, they said.

We're going to dance on the Spit, said one of the tall, slightly younger women, reaching out her hand. And you can come too.

And before Olivia even had time to think about where she was going to stay she was put to work slicing papayas. The juice ran up her arms to her elbows and itched. Behind her they were about to butcher the pig. Its screams chilled the blood. They had brought it along on a flatbed moped and it lay there with its legs bound. Then it fell off, thudded to the ground and someone gave it a kick and threw it back onto the moped again. It shrieked incessantly and Olivia turned her head away, bending over the papaya, but out of the corner

of her eye saw it lying there, its legs in the air. She peeled another fruit and clamped her mouth shut. A strand of hair fell over her face and she pushed it out of the way with her upper arm, the juice of the fruit sticky between her fingers. The pig screamed, darkness fell and the moon rose, colouring the sky lilac. If I don't like it I can always go back to Tahiti or Suva, she said to herself. I can always lie in a pool and have sex with the barman, drink piña colada and write postcards, maybe take a guided tour into the jungle with a tattooed tourist guide from San Francisco, admire a parrot chained to a coconut palm, have photographs taken with a boa constrictor around my neck, read Vogue in a sun lounger and sneak a look at one or two pairs of bulging swimming trunks. Or dance in a neon-lit nightclub that looks like a 24-hour petrol station, drag a dreadlocked tourist, or preferably two, back to my hotel room. I can decide whether I want to wake up with a joint in the ashtray and sand all over the bed or if I want to listen to the pig.

No kick was hard enough to stop the screaming.

Or the laughing. That was almost worse, everyone in unison so that it sounded almost good natured.

The orange wine was passed around; cloudy and yellow it intoxicated in all directions. Aromas became stronger, the smell of frying and hibiscus burned her nose, and on her skin the sweat lay like dew drops.

Then they rammed the pole down the pig's throat and she looked into its staring eyes. Saw the knife slice through the air and the whites of the eyes flash. Then at last it was silent and the blood ran over the goat track.

Much later she recalled the lorries on the autobahn, the animals packed together, the way they climbed over each other to get some air. The cloven feet, trapped and injured in the slatted wooden floor, the grazed heads, torn ears and blood-shot eyes, the stress and the small bubbles of blood on the snouts. At least the screamer on the flatbed moped had lived a life full of solitary meanderings through the jungle. Those that travelled between European slaughter houses had never stood

waving their snouts in the air on a beach of white sand, gorging on mangoes.

Fish and bananas were laid on the coals. River crayfish, eels and slippery prawns slithered in cracked oil drum pans. Coconut milk was poured on the meat and the logs hissed. The avocado was soft, the breadfruit tender and sooty, and when the sky sank in violet veils torches were lit and the drumming started.

Taip sat opposite her. She looked at him over the flames. His face was painted; there were black lines over his cheeks. His gaze was fixed on hers. It was so predictable. It was so unavoidable.

One of the older women began the dancing. Her arms outlined waves, mountains and sky, her hips rotated, her steps were small, her movements playful. At first. Then they progressed to something quite different. Olivia threw a look at the children; the youngest sat open-mouthed, staring as transfixed as she was. Some were playing absent-mindedly with their genitals. Olivia crossed her arms. The smoke made her eyes run and the drums

pounded. Many people were dancing now. Taip had also stood up. The pulsating and gyrating came closer, his knees pounded below his loincloth and the blood rushed to Olivia's face. He was dancing right beside her. If she stretched out her hand she could feel him. There. But she did not do that. Instead her eyes flickered about, noticing the absent, slightly crazed look radiating from every eye. Bodies shone with sweat, tattoos contorted, hips swayed and collided. She turned her face away, the sea was black and her ankle burned. Olivia wanted to join in too, to throb and boil like red-brown lava, to sweat, to get up on her feet. Dance and not let go of his gaze. Draw it into herself. Follow the hands on the drum skin, the veins on his temples, his throat, his thighs that opened and closed over the furious feet. Confused, she wondered: where will we sleep afterwards, all of us? Then the circle broke up, the dancers retreated and there in the middle, barefoot on the red earth was Siora, the woman who had taken her hand when she stepped off the boat. She danced alone as if in a

trance, her head thrown back, throat exposed, mouth half-open, eyes closed, swaying gently. The drum beat slowed and she began to shudder. First quivering and then shaking, she threw her upper body around, standing firmly on her feet, her toes curled like claws in the sand. Olivia froze. The drum picked up speed, Siora's black hair whipped around her face, her entire body shook and an eternity passed. The moon sailed overhead and the drum pounded. Taip's gaze made her body tingle, burned her chest, imprinted itself on her belly and thrust his presence towards her. But it was Siora—Siora's lips, the gently rounded stomach above her grass skirt—it was Siora she wanted to caress, and that wild hair. Calm the pulsating body, lay her down on her back and take her. Like a man ... and Olivia averted her eyes and stopped breathing, tensed her thigh muscles ... and shut her eyes.

When she looked up again everything was clear. The starry sky hung heavy and wet and Siora rocked quietly with closed eyes, while Taip's sweaty upper lip moved in a silent question. His

outstretched hand, now close to her chin, was as hot as the glowing embers. He pulled her to her feet. And Olivia danced.

Over Taip's shoulder she saw a teenage boy's grin, his white teeth. A woman her own age smacked her lips and poured coconut milk over the pig that glistened on the spit. Two small girls giggled silently, hands over their mouths. They followed her with their eyes as they wandered off into the darkness, as if they knew better than she did what was going to happen, as if there were no secrets for adults only, no-one excluded when eight people sleep on the same rush mat.

She switches on the ceiling fan and it coughs a few times before it gets going. It's on the highest speed—the lowest does not work—and the walls sway but the cool air comes and with it the small quick shadows that flicker before her eyes. She no longer imagines the day when that fan will lift the entire roof and whirl off with it. She is not worried about such things any longer. She is worried about

something else. And furious. She runs her hand over the table restlessly but there is never dust in the tropics, just a sticky dampness. And with that come the ants, always on a march towards the fridge or the waste paper basket or the sink. One forgotten crumb and there they are, like small soldiers. Small black judges. She goes to find a cloth and starts wiping, haphazardly at first then roughly, wiping in wide arcs across the draining board. The rumours. It is inexcusable, inexcusable, inexcusable. The only way to stop rumours and ants is to keep things clean. You have to act justly in this world.

As a child she had a prison. When a fish in her aquarium had done something stupid, naturally it had to be punished. She would lift it out with the net and tip it into a tea cup which she put in the wardrobe, turning out the light. At the beginning she used to get up in the middle of the night and release the prisoner back into the aquarium again, because she felt sorry for it, but as time went on

she hardened and could sometimes let it swim around in the stale water for several days until her father found the prison and of course had opinions. You have to act justly in this world, he said. And so she tried.

The fish had food every morning, thin dry flakes that she crumbled between her fingers before going to school, and then all day she would sit at her desk secretly sniffing her thumb and index finger as the world that was described from the front of the classroom no longer agreed with the one they lived at home.

Like an old-fashioned priest she rules over her congregation, wrote her father in one of his letters to her mother, which Olivia always read in secret before they were posted. She baptises her new fish in a cognac glass on the dining room table. When a fish dies it has a proper funeral, laid in a coffin in the form of a matchbox, buried beneath one of the birches behind the house, with hymn book and tears and cake. She arranges birthdays and confirmations. She carries out weddings in the

cream dish that also acts as a honeymoon destination; a few specially chosen fish are allowed to swim around in the bowl for a while as she gives a speech about love and sings a popular song.

It requires patience, he continued, because there are fish all over the house. Every kitchen bowl is filled with water and put on book shelves and under beds. I have tried to keep it within reasonable limits and shown her how she can keep records of deaths and marriages in a little file. Every new purchase is entered in columns for birthdays and christenings. When a fish dies she draws a cross and writes sentimental runic inscriptions that she has seen in the newspaper. Every week she carries home transparent plastic bags from the pet shop in town very, very carefully. In all kinds of weather they survive the journey from the shop on Svartbäcksgatan, along the pedestrianised street and across the square where she gets on the number seven bus. All on her own. Yes, she can travel by bus alone. All her pocket money goes directly into that pet shop, and her present list consists only of fish

paraphernalia. She has bought pond weed, an oxygen pump and sand, she brings home stones and arranges them in pretty formations on the bottom. There is a plastic pirate ship from a cereal box in one corner and in the other she has marbles in shining patterns. She is a proper little anthropologist. Our daughter has a very idiosyncratic emotional life. I wonder who she takes after, the letter ended.

Hasn't she got any friends? her mother wrote back. But he never responded to that.

She jumps. Someone is coming along the road.

At last! There you are! she wants to shout. But those are not Taip's footsteps, they are Moana's. And the closer she gets to the clinic the more clearly Olivia can read her expression. It is agitated.

Where have you been? she asks as she walks into the kitchen. It sounds almost like an accusation.

Here. Olivia is relieved that it is not Taip. I've just been here. You?

Down by the boat. Moana tries to look uncon-

cerned, flinging out the words as if they did not matter, and they do not, always, but today is a special day. Everyone will remember where they were the day the Englishmen stepped off the boat. How it felt and who else was there and what was said and perhaps even what they were wearing. The way it usually is in the west when some prominent person is murdered. But on the island no-one remembers what they were doing when Kennedy, Lennon or Princess Diana died. On the island they will instead remember what they were doing on the day of the visit. But she does not say that. Olivia tries to keep her anxiety to herself, and watches as Moana goes to the fridge and takes out a can of Coke. As if nothing had happened. The can hisses and she sucks up the layer of froth.

Mind your lips, says Olivia, and Moana shrugs and twists off the ring pull. She sinks into the chair beside the fridge, swallows a couple of large gulps and then stretches out the can to Olivia, who shakes her head.

No thanks. She pats her waistband, because

even though she has lived on the other side of the globe for nearly half her life she has recently made up her mind that it is not fat you have to watch out for but carbohydrates, the sugar in fizzy drinks. But she does not say that either. Moana hates the doctor voice, as she calls it. And Moana is not fat. Well, perhaps a little, compared with the people who stepped off the boat, but not compared with most of the others on the island. But she ought to be careful, anyway.

So, you were at the boat ... Olivia hears her voice sounding higher now, the way it sounds when she is trying not to reveal her irritation.

Yes, but you weren't. Moana kicks off her swimming shoes and rests her feet on the stool opposite.

I had a few things to do here. She looks down, wondering why she has lied. Would it have made any difference if Moana knew she had been standing under the palm tree, watching? Like all the others. As if she had never before in her life seen three pig-pink Englishmen.

Oh, right. Moana plays about with her tongue in the can opening.

Don't do that, Olivia says again. You might cut yourself. Her voice is shriller now, not only high and irritated but thin, as if it could crack. But it does not crack; Olivia has nothing that cracks, and even if she did sometime, somewhere, she would make sure she cracked alone. And for good reason. Instead it is Moana's voice that cracks.

I hate them, she says suddenly. I hate them, and her head sinks to her chest and it sounds almost as if the kid is crying.

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He has two thoughts in his head as he walks along the road that goes no-where. The first one is: *Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun.* Never was a truer word said. It can even be captured in a photograph. He is in fact the only person out strolling in the heat, and slinking along after him is a scabby village dog. It is so afraid of being beaten that he would only have to stamp his foot for it to disappear into the trees, but the midday sun has made him too lame to stamp. So on they go, one after the other along the red road.

The second thought is the report. He has no idea how keen they really are in London to receive some sign of life. Sometimes he even thinks that if they have waited this long they can wait a little longer, but most of the time he feels under pressure. He must start putting it together soon, but something is stopping him. It is not that he has nothing to write. Quite the reverse: Sarah and Thomas keep coming back with more and more proof. Like clever dogs they retrieve one story after another: illegal possession of weapons,

drink driving, teenage pregnancies, abuse of judicial procedure, manslaughter and paedophilia, no life jackets or cycle helmets or age limits for anything, a cavalier attitude to attending school ... he does not know whether to laugh or cry as he walks along. He grunts instead, quite involuntarily, and the dog contracts like a worm behind him. And he hears himself calling to it: Don't be afraid, come here.

Truth be told he has started to despise the report, every bit of it, the whole confused mess. He might as well admit it. Recently he has found himself longing to write something that does not need to be true: a ghost story, a folk tale or even a nice short story, anything at all that would not have to be based on evidence. Imagine being able to write *something, some time* that did not have to involve the law. The expected. The conventional. But that is not his job. He is not an author, he is a sweaty, somewhat overweight and at present decidedly peeling civil servant who feels more and more dispirited for each day that passes. He is not really

sure if *the technique* they are using to carry out their investigation is entirely defensible. Dancing with young girls, drinking each other under the table, this *getting to know each other, building trust* and *helping out* that his associates are busy with. They are flying under false colours. After all, they represent an authority. They are here to form a basis on which they can later administer justice.

Back in the bungalow the boxes have been unpacked. The law books they have brought with them are not lying around getting mouldy out of carelessness or indifference. The plan is to give them away when they have finished: after putting them to good use they will hand over 56 volumes of British law in eight cardboard boxes, slightly damaged by damp. He can see it all in front of him, how they are draped with lei at the harbour, the white palms waving, everyone watching as they board the boat and are rowed across the reef to the big ship which will take them back to Good Old England at the end of the world. And the entire jetty full of Halsbury's Laws of Eng-

land, half-bound French style, gilt-edged and with five raised bands, that they will use to wipe their backsides when the toilet paper runs out and the typhoon prevents new supplies arriving to civilise them.

And in certain versions of the fantasy there is also a tiny little accident precisely when they have reached a deceptive distance away from shore. It is always Sarah who falls in the water and Thomas, wanting to be stoic, dives in to rescue her (as if she were unable to swim...) and they land right in the middle of a school of sharks and Christian is the sole witness, and before that Taip character lifts his oar and tips him overboard as well he just has time to see how the water has been stained red with the blood of his friends before they are all gobbled up by the small grey reef sharks.

It could happen very easily and afterwards be explained and eventually regretted. They would never bring out guns to get rid of them: guns provide proof and can leave a trail, but sharks swim

in a school and appear out of the blue, and stupid nosy Englishmen, wanting to save the world and each other and not realising that you have to sit still in the boat on the third wave, make a very plausible tragedy.

For this is a tragedy, he thinks, and notices the dog is no longer keeping a guarded distance but has slunk up close, his nose to the ground, licking at goat dung and every rotten coconut.

So you're not afraid of shit, he mutters, and the dog glares at him.

It is as hot as hell. He ought to get back, have a bath, pull himself together. Or at least sit by the sea in some cool bar and drink something cold. But there is no shady hangout here on the island, no tourist traps with martini umbrellas. This is paradise of course, untouched, and he thinks what a bloody shame that is, for several reasons. Not even an ice cream to buy to cool yourself down. Besides, he is going the wrong way assuming he did want to slip into that jungle shop and have a beer on a plastic chair. He is on his way out of the

village and the houses are getting fewer. He carries on, leafing through his imaginary charges.

Illegal possession of weapons. They might insist they only use a rifle to shoot down breadfruit or to kill a pig or two, but these are men with weapons that have not been registered. Not one single gun has a licence or is entered into some kind of log. It is a crime, even if in these forests they call it hunting equipment.

Drink driving. Well, he has seen that with his own eyes. Every one drives under the influence, with or without children on board. According to Sarah the doctor was plastered when she climbed onto her moped the other evening after their little tête à tête outside the jungle store. The whisky bottle had remained under the table and it was over two thirds empty.

I was over the limit myself, Sarah admitted. But I walked home.

According to Dr Danielsson teenage pregnancies were *not particularly shocking*. Clearly it was not only Lorna, Thomas's little princess, who had

been exploited by older men. And what the doctor had said, more or less, in the island's defence, about it being *impossible to get to know your own sexual ability and boundaries without sometimes over overstepping them* was an unpleasant thought that really made him feel sick.

That the statement had come from a doctor, no less, was exceptionally distasteful, Thomas had said.

And as if this were not enough, Doctor Danielsson was of the opinion that girls matured earlier at these latitudes; she had delivered many teenagers' babies.

We need to bloody well check up on her, said Thomas.

In addition Lorna had confided to Thomas that a certain Krabban—surely he had a different name in his passport—had violated young girls and died in unexplained circumstances. That was a shame; to be crass it would have been good to get their hands on at least one culprit, but according to the rumours the islanders had taken the

situation into their own hands and shoved him into the sea.

It was not only paedophilia, it was also abuse of judicial procedure, unlawful interference and possibly murder.

And then there was Mr West, Liza West's father, who as long as he lived would never withdraw his report about the games in the lagoon with his daughter four years earlier. At least five boys carried out the assault, and perhaps a few girls as well. That was plenty to be going on with.

Even if we have to be here for a hundred years, Thomas had said with a worrying gleam in his eye, we will scour this island so not one single sodding person thinks he can rape children again.

Thomas thought it was a good thing that there were girls among the perpetrators.

If early uninhibited sexuality even turns girls into criminals, then we can be grateful, he said. Because it's nice that it's not always the fault of a male-dominated society or testosterone.

And perhaps he was right when he said it was

a clear case of cultural behaviour, in all probability related to the environment, and therefore in the long term easier to prevent than some damned hormone.

That doctor, the Swedish woman, or Taip's lay, as Thomas called her when he got himself worked up, had obviously voiced the opinion during the whisky evening that she thought it was reasonable to assume that *someone mature enough for sex meant someone who gave themselves permission for sexual experiences and positive satisfaction.*

And what did you say?

I asked her to be more precise.

And?

Well, when I pressed her she backed down a bit and added *that's not the same as saying that every sexual experience has to be or even is pleasurable.*

And Sarah thought she had got her cornered because that was actually an alarming statement they could quote verbatim during the investigation. But then came the disclaimer: *...often our early sexual experiences are more about taking steps*

towards some kind of sociosexual development, where the knowledge in itself is valued, rather than the experience.

Sociosexual development, snorted Thomas. That has to be a Swedish invention.

And then they discussed the Swedish sin backwards and forwards until Sarah recalled an enormous backlash over the issue, and that brought them to prostitution legislation and the Swedish hounding of men who buy sex, before Christian tried to bring an end to the debate.

We are not here to learn about Swedish legislation on paying for sexual services, he said. Though it wouldn't surprise me if that was one of the reasons she was here, a Swedish liberal hiding herself in the jungle for profoundly dubious reasons. What did you say her company was called? *Hotlips*. Has anyone managed to ferret out what she sold?

No, but it won't take long to find out.

We've said we will avoid confrontation, Sarah sighed, and the company ceased trading in the mid-nineties. I checked.

Hotlips. Oh yes. Thomas was slumped in the chair with his hands behind his neck. The hair in his armpits was as frizzy as an afro. The heat curled everything. Not a single sheet of paper stayed flat, not a single bank note. Every page in every book rolled itself up and turned gluey. Salt fastened in the salt cellar and a thin membrane of damp covered everything.

Sociosexual development? What does she mean?

I think she means that lots of people who learn to cycle at the beginning of their career fall off and graze their knees. Sometimes there can be an awful lot of scabs before you finally cycle off, perfectly balanced, but in the long run that's insignificant. You carry on cycling. And you even like it.

You can hardly compare a grazed knee with rape.

No, and that's not what I'm doing, either.

Why are you making such a ridiculous comparison, then?

Because I think *that's what she's thinking*.

Them!

What?

Them. I don't think it's only Taip's lay who thinks that way. I think there is a whole world out there, secret bloody child-fucking syndicates who look at it like that, who justify violation.

What the hell, have you never had an unsuccessful shag, then?

Are you defending them?

Come on, calm down.

No, I won't.

Yes, you will calm down. Christian raised his voice. They were back there again.

Shivery and tired in the middle of the summer heat Sarah disappeared to her room and her computer, and Thomas went off along the beach.

Christian groans as he walks. Shit, you can't write a line without having to decide where you stand, he thinks. Or can you? Can you be somewhere without having a direction? Can you take a single step without having to decide? Always responsible. Always guilty.

He had been on a stress management course a couple of years ago: an entire Saturday he had sat in a circle thinking about the things that made him feel stressed and how everything can be turned around to achieve a greater sense of calm.

There are sentences built into our thought map, the stress instructor said. Things we say to ourselves because they have been repeated so many times they have created our very own spider's web in our brain. That you should be perfect, or clever, or whatever. Then she had asked them to take their time and think about their own stress sentence: what is it that seems to whisper inside you the very instant before you feel stressed, the thought that makes your heart beat faster, your hands go clammy and so on.

They had to lie down on the floor on foam mattresses and close their eyes. And the sentence that came into Christian's mind was crystal clear. It was about all the choices. *You have to choose. You have to make a decision.*

Then they stood up and walked once round

the room and the girl turned each stress sentence around and said the opposite, and the atmosphere became warm and calm and giggly when they saw how simple it was. You *don't have* to be perfect. You *don't have* to be clever all the time.

But when she got to Christian it went wrong, somehow: You don't have to make a decision, you don't have to have an opinion. What the hell kind of sentence was that to go around saying when things got difficult, he had thought. He had really wanted to talk to her about it the following day, but that evening he received an important message and could not stay for the Sunday, so he never did ask his question.

Who will I be if I think I don't have to decide? So much for that course, which had cost Brixton's social services hundreds of pounds.

But now he is thinking it. Out loud: I don't have to have an opinion. I don't have to make a decision. The dog lifts its head and gives him an impenetrable look. He stops talking. Through the jungle he can see a patch of sea. He walks faster.

They always swim with their clothes on, he thinks. Well, everything dries in two minutes. A cooling dip is exactly what he needs. The dog must have had the same thought because it picks up speed between the lianas. Such a myriad of small flowers in a thousand colours, new types of vegetation, a stream that dances over the black lava rocks. The sun flashes in the dewdrops on a spider's neat web in the shade of a vibrant hibiscus bush. Flowers like waterfalls.

And then he is standing on a strip of land that juts out into the diamond clear water. He sees traces of a fire, empty coconut shells and discarded bottles. This is a very special place, he thinks, and feels his heart leap.

This must be the place known as the Spit.

With inconceivable ease he removes his sandals and walks to the edge of the water. A wind blows a flock of birds out of the trees behind him. He follows the coastline, searching like a beachcomber for more remains. He really is at the end of the world. He feels the way he did as a child, going on

a treasure hunt, but he is not looking for gleaming shells and round white stones but rather the remnants of the party, traces of adventure. He hums contentedly. For a while he forgets the heat. Every banana skin and cigarette end is making him aroused.

He throws a look over his shoulder. He is alone, alone and mortal and immortal at the same time, so he takes off his shorts and shirt, placing his watch carefully in one of the breast pockets, and stands there at the water's edge wearing only his underpants. The water swirls about his feet, the sand sinks beneath them. He takes another step, then looks round again. The dog has stayed in the shade.

Now! he shouts, and taking off his underpants he throws them up onto the beach, standing there by the water, stark naked, looking longingly out at the ocean. He cannot remember when he last swam naked. He waves at the dog who sits up as if it is keeping guard, and then he walks out into the sea and sinks to his knees, shutting his eyes.

And starts to imagine what it looks like here at night, under a sky heavy with stars, as the drums beat faster and they come dancing out from between the trees. The nut brown bodies, the crow black hair, the moonlight, the fire. Wide mouths, loud laughs from between white teeth, small pink toenails in cool white sand, small pieces of floral cloth, arms high above their heads, undulating wrists, breasts, bare breasts, kisses, smiles, naked, entwined—and he has a monumental erection when he hears the dog bark.

Two girls are walking down the path and on to the shoreline. They have not noticed his little pile of clothes. He drops down on all fours in the water so that only his head is visible, watches as they pull their dresses over their heads. They are precisely on the brink of puberty, thirteen, perhaps fourteen years old, small budding breasts on their brown bodies, so small they could be hidden in the palm of a hand.

He dives under the water and stays there suspended, not breathing, lying still and trying to

make himself invisible. Waits, but the oxygen runs out under the water, his lungs are bursting. He sticks his head above the surface, breathes.

They are laughing up there, chatting, their clothes in small heaps on the sand only ten metres away from him. He does not know whether to come out or swim away or stay where he is, to shut his eyes or look. Perhaps he ought to shout but that might scare them, but surely it is better to reveal his presence loudly rather than lie here in wait like a predator.

If he does not reveal himself he will look suspicious; he has no idea how long they will be swimming, or if any more are coming. They look out at the water and he dives down again. But he cannot hold his breath for long. He has to get out now, this is madness, but what can he say? Should he be nonchalant or apologetic? Should he say anything at all, or simply look down at his feet? *I am sorry*, he can always say, but sorry for what? For being naked?

There is no way he can be naked when he talks

to them—think if he gets an erection again? He must not get an erection! He has to stay where he is. His heart thuds, there is no air left in his lungs. He is going to drown.

What will they say when they get home to their parents? When they meet next time in the shop? Will they pull on their mother's skirt and point at him: That's the man who spies on us in the lagoon.

He feels even more panicky, realises how thirsty he is, lifts his head above the surface and takes in more air. The sun is beating down, the girls have not caught sight of him yet. He can see them moving about at the water's edge. He is stuck—what the hell am I going to do?

Then he sees them hold hands and run into the water. Straight towards him.

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