

# Calypso In Berlin

**by Elizabeth Hand**

Yesterday morning, he left. I had known he would only be here for those seven days. Now, just like that, they were gone.

It had stormed all night, but by the time I came downstairs to feed the woodstove, the gale had blown out to sea. It was still dark, chill October air sifting through cracks in the walls. Red and yellow leaves were flung everywhere outside. I stepped into the yard to gather a handful and pressed my face against them, cold and wet.

From the other side of the island a coyote yelped. I could hear the Pendletons' rooster and a dog barking. Finally I went back inside, sat and watched the flames through the stove's isinglass window. When Philip finally came down, he took one look at me, shook his head, and said, "No! I still have to go, stop it!"

I laughed and turned to touch his hand. He backed away quickly and said, "None of that."

I saw how he recoiled. I have never kept him here against his will.

When Odysseus left, he was suspicious, accusatory. They say he wept for his wife and son, but he slept beside me each night for seven years and I saw no tears. We had two sons. His face was imprinted upon mine, just as Philip's was centuries later: unshaven, warm, my cheeks scraped and my mouth swollen. In the morning I would wake to see Philip watching me, his hand moving slowly down the curve of my waist.

"No hips, no ass," he said once. "You're built like a boy."

He liked to hold my wrists in one hand and straddle me. I wondered sometimes about their wives: were they taller than me? Big hips, big tits? Built like a woman?

Calypso. The name means *the concealer*. "She of the lovely braids"—that's how Homer describes me. One morning Philip walked about my cottage, taking photos off the bookshelves and looking at them.

"Your hair," he said, holding up a picture. "It was so long back then."

I shrugged. "I cut it all off a year ago. It's grown back—see?" Shoulder-length now, still blond, no gray.

He glanced at me, then put the picture back. "It looked good that way," he said.

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This is what happens to nymphs: they are pursued or they are left. Sometimes, like Echo, they are fled. We turn to trees, seabirds, seafoam, running water, the sound of wind in the leaves. Men come to stay with us, they lie beside us in the night, they hold us so hard we can't breathe. They walk in the woods and glimpse us: a diving kingfisher, an owl caught in the headlights, a cold spring on the hillside. Alcyone, Nyctimene, Peirene, Echo, Calypso: these are some of our names. We like to live alone, or think we do. When men find us, they say we are lovelier than anything they have ever seen: wilder, stranger, more passionate. Elemental. They say they will stay forever. They always leave.

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We met when Philip missed a flight out of Logan. I had business at the gallery that represents me in Cambridge and offered him a place to stay for the night: my hotel room.

"I don't know too many painters," he said. "Free spirits, right?"

He was intrigued by what I told him of the island. The sex was good. I told him my name was Lyssa. After that we'd see each other whenever he was on the East Coast. He was usually leaving for work overseas but would add a few days to either end of his trip, a week even, so we could be together. I had been on the island for—how long? I can't remember now.

I began sketching him the second time he came here. He would never let me do it while he was awake. He was too restless, jumping up to pull a book off the shelf, make coffee, pour more wine.

So I began to draw him while he slept. After we fucked he'd fall heavily asleep; I might doze for a few minutes, but sex energizes me, it makes me want to work.

He was perfect for me. Not conventionally handsome, though. His dark eyes were small and deep set, his mouth wide and uneven. Dark, thick hair, gray-flecked. His skin unlined. It was uncanny—he was in his early fifties but seemed as ageless as I was, as though he'd been untouched by anything, his time in the Middle East, his children, his wife, his ex-wife, me. I see now that this is what obsessed me—that someone human could be not merely beautiful but untouched. There wasn't a crack in him; no way to get inside. He slept with his hands crossed behind his head, long body tipped across the bed. Long arms, long legs; torso almost hairless; a dark bloom on his cheeks when he hadn't shaved. His cock long, slightly curved; moisture on his thigh.

I sketched and painted him obsessively, for seven years. Over the centuries there have been others. Other lovers, always; but only a few whom I've drawn or painted on walls, pottery, tapestry, paper, canvas, skin. After a few years I'd grow tired of them—Odysseus was an exception—and gently send them on their way. As they grew older they interested me less, because of course I did not grow old. Some didn't leave willingly. I made grasshoppers of them, or mayflies, and tossed them into the webs of the golden orbweaver spiders that follow me everywhere I live.

But I never grew tired of Philip.

And I never grew tired of painting him. No one could see the paintings, of course, which killed me. He was so paranoid that he would be recognized, by his wife, his ex, one of his grown children. Coworkers.

I was afraid of losing him, so I kept the canvases in a tiny room off the studio. The sketchbooks alone

filled an entire shelf. He still worried that someone would look at them, but no one ever came to visit me, except for him. My work was shown in the gallery just outside Boston. Winter landscapes of the bleak New England countryside I loved; skeletons of birds, seals. Temperas, most of them; some pen-and-ink drawings. I lived under Andrew Wyeth's long shadow, as did everyone else in my part of the country. I thought that the paintings I'd done of Philip might change that perception. Philip was afraid that they would.

"Those could be your Helga paintings," he said once. It was an accusation, not encouragement.

"They would be Calypso's paintings," I said. He didn't understand what I meant.

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Odysseus's wife was a weaver. I was, too. It's right there in Homer. When Hermes came to give me Zeus's command to free Odysseus, I was in my little house on the island, weaving scenes into tunics for Odysseus and the boys. They were little then, three and five. We stood on the shore and watched him go. The boys ran screaming after the boat into the water. I had to grab them and hold them back; I thought the three of us would drown, they were fighting so to follow him.

It was horrible. Nothing was as bad as that, ever; not even when Philip left.

Penelope. Yes, she had a son, and like me she was a weaver. But we had more in common than that. I was thinking about her unraveling her loom each night, and it suddenly struck me: this was what I did with my paintings of Philip. Each night I would draw him for hours as he slept. Each day I would look at my work, and it was beautiful. They were by far my best paintings. They might even have been great.

And who knows what the critics or the public might have thought? My reputation isn't huge, but it's respectable. Those paintings could have changed all that.

But I knew that would be it: if I showed them, I would never see him again, never hear from him, never smell him, never taste him.

Yet even that I could live with. What terrified me was the thought that I would never paint him again. If he was gone, my magic would die. I would never paint again.

And that would destroy me: to think of eternity without the power to create. Better to draw and paint all night; better to undo my work each dawn by hiding it in the back room.

I thought I could live like that. For seven years I did.

And then he left. The storm blew out to sea, the leaves were scattered across the lake. The house smelled of him still, my breath smelled of him, my hair. I stood alone at the sink, scrubbing at the pigments caked under my fingernails; then suddenly doubled over, vomiting on the dishes I hadn't done yet from last night's dinner.

I waited until I stopped shaking. Then I cleaned the sink, cleaned the dishes, squeezed lemons down the drain until the stink was gone. I put everything away. I went into the back room, stood for a long time and stared at the paintings there.

Seven years is a long time. There were a lot of canvases; a lot of sheets of heavy paper covered with his body, a lot of black books filled with his eyes, his cock, his hands, his mouth. I looked up at the corner of the room by the window, saw the web woven by the big yellow spider, gray strands dusted with moth wings, fly husks, legs. I pursed my lips and whistled silently, watched as the web trembled and the spider raced to its center, her body glistening like an amber bead. Then I went to my computer and booked a flight to Berlin.

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It was a city that Philip loved, a city he had been to once, decades ago, when he was studying in Florence. He spent a month there—this was long before the Wall fell—never went back, but we had spoken, often, of going there together.

I had a passport—I'm a nymph, not an agoraphobe—and so I e-mailed my sister Arethusa, in Sicily. We are spirits of place; we live where the world exhales in silence. As these places disappear, so do we.

But not all of us. Arethusa and I kept in touch intermittently. Years ago she had lived on the Rhine. She said she thought she might still know someone in Germany. She'd see what she could do.

It turned out the friend knew someone who had a sublet available. It was in an interesting part of town, said Arethusa; she'd been there once. I was a little anxious about living in a city—I'm attached to islands, to northern lakes and trees, and I worried that I wouldn't thrive there, that I might in fact sicken.

But I went. I paid in advance for the flat, then packed my paintings and sketchbooks and had them shipped over. I carried some supplies and one small sketchbook, half-filled with drawings of Philip, in my carry-on luggage. I brought my laptop. I closed up the cottage for the winter, told the Pendletons I was leaving and asked them to watch the place for me. I left them my car as well.

Then I caught the early morning ferry to the mainland, the bus to Boston. There was light fog as the plane lifted out of Logan, quickly dispersing into an arctic blue sky. I looked down and watched a long, serpentine cloud writhing above the Cape and thought of Nephele, a cloud nymph whom Zeus had molded to resemble Hera.

Why do they always have to change us into something else? I wondered, and sat back to watch the movie.

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Berlin was a shock. We are by nature solitary and obsessive, which has its own dangers—like Narcissus, we can drown in silence, gazing at a reflection in a still pool.

But in a city, we can become disoriented and exhausted. We can sicken and die. We are long-lived, but not immortal.

So Arethusa had chosen my flat carefully. It was in Schöneberg, a quiet, residential part of the city. There were no high-rises. Chestnut trees littered the sidewalks with armored fruit. There were broad streets where vendors sold sunflowers and baskets of hazelnuts; old bookstores, a little shop that stocked only socks, several high-end art galleries; green spaces and much open sky.

"Poets lived there," Arethusa told me, her voice breaking up over my cell phone. "Before the last big war."

My flat was in a street of century-old apartment buildings. The foyer was high and dim and smelled of pipe tobacco and pastry dough. The flat itself had been carved from a much larger suite of rooms. There was a pocket-sized kitchenette, two small rooms facing each other across a wide hallway, a tiny, ultramodern bath.

But the rooms all had high ceilings and polished wooden floors glossy as bronze. And the room facing a courtyard had wonderful northern light.

I set this up as my studio. I purchased paints and sketchpads, a small easel. I set up my laptop, put a bowl of apples on the windowsill where the cool fall air moved in and out. Then I went to work.

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I couldn't paint.

Philip said that would happen. He used to joke about it—*you're nothing without me, you only use me, what will you do if ever I'm gone, hmmmm?*

Now he was gone, and it was true. I couldn't work. Hours passed, days; a week.

Nothing.

I flung open the casement windows, stared down at the enclosed courtyard and across to the rows of windows in other flats just like mine. There were chestnut trees in the yard below, neat rows of bicycles lined up beneath them. Clouds moved across the sky as storms moved in from the far lands to the north. The wind tore the last yellow leaves from the trees and sent them whirling up toward where I stood, shivering in my moth-eaten sweater.

The wind brought with it a smell: the scent of pine trees and the sea, of rock and raw wool. It was the smell of the north, the scent of my island—my true island, the place that had been my home, once. It filled me not with nostalgia or longing but with something strange and terrible; the realization that I had no longer had a home. I had only what I made on the page or canvas. I had bound myself to a vision.

Byblis fell hopelessly in love and became a fountain. Echo wasted into a sound in the night. Hamadryads die when their trees die.

What would become of me?

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I decided to go for a walk.

It is a green city. Philip had never told me that. He spoke of the wars, the Nazis, the bombs, the Wall. I wandered along the Ebersstrasse to the S-Bahn station; then traveled to the eastern part of the city, to the university, and sat at a cafe beneath an elevated railway, where I ate roasted anchovies and soft white cheese while trains racketed overhead. The wall behind me was riddled with bullet holes. If this building had been in the western part of the city, it would have been repaired or torn down. In the east there was never enough money for such things. When I placed my hand upon the bullet holes they felt hot, and gave off a faint smell of blood and scorched leather. I finished my lunch and picked up a bit of stone that had fallen from the wall, put it in my pocket with some chestnuts I had gathered, and walked on.

The sun came out after a bit. Or no, that may have been another day—almost certainly it was. The leaves were gone from the linden trees, but it was still lovely. The people were quiet, speaking in low voices.

But they were seemingly as happy as people ever are. I began to take my sketchbooks with me when I walked, and I would sit in a cafe or a park and draw. I found that I could draw Philip from memory. I began to draw other things, too—the lindens, the ugly modern buildings elbowing aside the older terraces that had not been destroyed by the bombings. There were empty fountains everywhere; and again, here in the eastern part of the city there had been no money to restore them or to keep the water flowing. Bronze Nereids and Neptunes rose from them, whitened with bird droppings. Lovers still sat beside the empty pools, gazing at drifts of dead leaves and old newspapers while pigeons pecked around their feet. I found this beautiful and strange, and also oddly heartening.

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A few weeks after my arrival, Philip called. I hadn't replied to his e-mails, but when my cell phone rang, I answered.

"You're in Berlin?" He sounded amused but not surprised. "Well, I wanted to let you know I'm going to be gone again, a long trip this time. Damascus. I'll come see you for a few days before I go."

He told me his flight time, then hung up.

What did I feel then? Exhilaration, desire, joy: but also fear. I had just begun to paint again; I was just starting to believe that I could, in fact, work without him.

But if he were here?

I went into the bedroom. On the bed, neatly folded, was another thing I had brought with me: Philip's sweater. It was an old, tweed-patterned wool sweater, in shades of umber and yellow and russet, with holes where the mice had nested in it back in the cottage. He had wanted to throw it out, years ago, but I kept it. It still smelled of him, and I slept wearing it, here in the flat in Schöneberg, the wool prickling against my bare skin. I picked it up and buried my face in it, smelling him, his hair, his skin, sweat.

Then I sat down on the bed. I adjusted the lamp so that the light fell upon the sweater in my lap; and

began, slowly and painstakingly, to unravel it.

It took a while, maybe an hour. I was careful not to fray the worn yarn, careful to tie the broken ends together. When I was finished, I had several balls of wool; enough to make a new sweater. It was late by then, and the shops were closed. But first thing next morning I went to the little store that sold only socks and asked in my halting German where I might find a knitting shop. I had brought a ball of wool to show the woman behind the counter. She laughed and pointed outside, then wrote down the address. It wasn't far, just a few streets over. I thanked her, bought several pairs of thick argyle wool socks, and left.

I found the shop without any trouble. I know how to knit, though I haven't done so for a long time. I found a pattern I liked in a book of Icelandic designs. I bought the book, bought the special circular needles you use for sweaters, bought an extra skein of wool in a color I liked because it reminded me of woad, not quite as deep a blue as indigo. I would work this yarn into the background. Then I returned home.

I had nearly a week before Philip arrived. I was too wound up to paint. But I continued to walk each day, finding my way around the hidden parts of the city. Small forgotten parks scarcely larger than a backyard, where European foxes big as dogs peered from beneath patches of brambles; a Persian restaurant near my flat, where the smells of coriander and roasting garlic made me think of my island long ago. A narrow canal like a secret outlet of the Spree, where I watched a kingfisher dive from an overhanging willow. I carried my leather satchel with me, the one that held my sketchbooks and charcoal pencils and watercolors. I wanted to try using watercolors.

But now the satchel held my knitting, too, the balls of wool and the pattern book and the half-knit sweater. When I found I couldn't paint or draw, I'd take the sweater out and work on it. It was repetitive work, dreamlike, soothing. And one night, back in the flat, I dug around in the bureau drawer until I found something else I'd brought with me, an envelope I'd stuck into one of my notebooks.

Inside the envelope was a curl of hair I'd cut from Philip's head one night while he slept. I set the envelope in a safe place and, one by one, carefully teased out the hairs. Over the next few days I wove them into the sweater. Now and then I would pluck one of my own hairs, much longer, finer, ash gold, and knit that into the pattern as well.

They were utterly concealed, of course, his dark curls, my fair, straight hair: all invisible. I finished the sweater the morning Philip arrived.

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It was wonderful seeing him. He took a taxi from the airport. I had coffee waiting. We fell into bed. Afterward I gave him the sweater.

"Here," I said. "I made you something."

He sat naked on the bed and stared at it, puzzled. "Is this mine?"

"Try it on. I want to see if it fits."

He shrugged, then pulled it on over his bare chest.

"Does it fit?" I asked. "I had to guess the measurements."

"It seems to." He smoothed the thick wool, October gold and russet flecked with woad; then tugged at a loose bit of yarn on the hem.

"Oops," I said, frowning. "Don't worry, I'll fix that."

"It's beautiful. Thank you. I didn't know you knew how to knit."

I adjusted it, tugging to see if it hung properly over his broad shoulders.

"It does," I said, and laughed in relief. "It fits! Does it feel right?"

"Yeah. It's great." He pulled it off then got dressed again, white T-shirt, blue flannel shirt, the sweater last of all. "Didn't I used to have a sweater like this, once?"

"You did," I said. "Come on, I'm hungry."

We walked arm in arm to the Persian restaurant, where we ate chicken simmered in pomegranates and crushed walnuts, and drank wine the color of oxblood. Later, on the way back to the flat, we ambled past closed shops, pausing to look at a display of icons, a gallery showing the work of a young German artist I had read about.

"Are you thinking of showing here?" Philip asked. "I don't mean this gallery, but here, in Berlin?"

"I don't know. I hadn't really thought about it much." In truth I hadn't thought about it at all, until that very moment. "But yes, I guess I might. If Anna could arrange it."

Anna owned the gallery back in Cambridge. Philip said nothing more, and we turned and walked home.

But back in the flat, he started looking around. He went into my studio and glanced at the canvas on the easel, already primed, with a few blocked-in shapes—a barren tree, scaffolding; an abandoned fountain.

"These are different," he said. He glanced around the rest of the studio and I could tell, he was relieved not to see anything else. The other paintings, the ones I'd done of him, hadn't arrived yet. He didn't ask after them, and I didn't tell him I'd had them shipped from the island.

We went back to bed. Afterward, he slept heavily. I switched on the small bedside lamp, turning it so it wouldn't awaken him, and watched him sleep. I didn't sketch him. I watched the slow rise of his chest, the beard coming in where he hadn't shaved, grayer now than it had been; the thick black lashes that skirted his closed eyes. His mouth. I knew he was going to leave me. This time, he wouldn't come back.

If he had wakened then and seen me, would anything have changed? If he had ever seen me watching him like this ... would he have changed? Would I?

I watched him for a long time, thinking. At last I curled up beside him and fell asleep.

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Next morning, we had breakfast, then wandered around the city like tourists. Philip hadn't been back in some years, and it all amazed him. The bleak emptiness of the Alexanderplatz, where a dozen teenagers sat around the empty fountain, each with a neon-shaded Mohawk and a ratty mongrel at the end of a leash; the construction cranes everywhere, the crowds of Japanese and Americans at the Brandenburg Gate; the disconcertingly elegant graffiti on bridges spanning the Spree, as though the city, half-awake, had scrawled its dreams upon the brickwork.

"You seem happy here," he said. He reached to stroke my hair, and smiled.

"I *am* happy here," I said. "It's not ideal, but . . ."

"It's a good place for you, maybe. I'll come back." He was quiet for a minute. "I'm going to be gone for a while. Damascus—I'll be there for two months. Then Deborah's going to meet me, and we're going to travel for a while. She found a place for us to stay, a villa in Montevarchi. It's something we've talked about for a while."

We were scuffling through the leaves along a path near the Grunewald, the vast and ancient forest to the city's west. I went there often, alone. There were wild animals, boar and foxes; there were lakes, and hollow caves beneath the earth that no one was aware of. So many of Berlin's old trees had been destroyed in the bombings, and more died when the Wall fell and waves of new construction and congestion followed.

Yet new trees had grown, and some old ones flourished. These woods seemed an irruption of a deep, rampant disorder: the trees were black, the fallen leaves deep, the tangled thorns and hedges often impenetrable. I had found half-devoured carcasses here, cats or small dogs, those pretty red squirrels with tufted ears; as well as empty beer bottles and the ashy remnants of campfires in stone circles. You could hear traffic, and the drone of construction cranes; but only walk a little further into the trees and these sounds disappeared. It was a place I wanted to paint, but I hadn't yet figured out where, or how.

"I'm tired." Philip yawned. Sun filtered through the leafless branches. It was cool, but not cold. He wore the sweater I'd knitted, beneath a tweed jacket. "Jet lag. Can we stop a minute?"

There were no benches, not even any large rocks; just the leaf-covered ground, a few larches, many old beeches. I dropped the satchel holding my watercolors and sketchpad and looked around. A declivity spread beneath one very large old beech, a hollow large enough for us to lie in, side by side. Leaves had drifted to fill the space like water in a cupped hand; tender yellow leaves, soft as tissue and thin enough that when I held one to the sun I could see shapes behind the fretwork of veins. Trees. Philip's face.

The ground was dry. We lay side by side. After a few minutes he turned and pulled me to him. I could smell the sweet mast beneath us, beechnuts buried in the leaves. I pulled his jacket off and slid my hands beneath his sweater, kissed him as he pulled my jeans down; then tugged the sweater free from his arms, until it hung loose like a cowl around his neck. The air was chill despite the sun, there were leaves in his hair. A fallen branch raked my bare back, hard enough to make me gasp. His eyes were closed, but mine were open; there was grit on his cheek and a fleck of green moss, a tiny greenfly with gold-faceted eyes that lit upon his eyelid then rubbed its front legs together then spun into the sunlight. All the things men never see. When he came he was all but silent, gasping against my chest. I laid my hand upon his face, before he turned aside and fell asleep.

For a moment I sat, silent, and looked for the greenfly. Then I pulled my jeans back up and zipped them,

shook the leaves from my hair and plucked a beechnut husk from my shirt. I picked up Philip's jacket and tossed it into the underbrush, then knelt beside him. His flannel shirt had ridden up, exposing his stomach; I bent my head and kissed the soft skin beneath his navel. He was warm and tasted of semen and salt, bracken. For a moment I lingered,; then sat up.

A faint buzzing sounded, but otherwise the woods were still. The sweater hung limp round his neck. I ran my fingers along the hem until I found the stray bit of yarn there. I tugged it free, the loose knot easily coming undone; then slowly and with great care, bit by bit by bit while he slept, I unraveled it. Only at the very end did Philip stir, when just a ring of blue and brown and gold hung about his neck, but I whispered his name and, though his eyelids trembled, they did not open.

I got to my feet, holding the loose armful of warm wool, drew it to my face and inhaled deeply.

It smelled more of him than his own body did. I teased out one end of the skein and stood above him, then let the yarn drop until it touched his chest. Little by little, I played the yarn out, like a fisherman with his line, until it covered him. More greenflies came and buzzed about my face.

Finally I was done. A gust sent yellow leaves blowing across the heap of wool and hair as I turned to retrieve my satchel. The greenflies followed me. I waved my hand impatiently and they darted off, to hover above the shallow pool that now spread beneath the beech tree. I had not consciously thought of water, but water is what came to me; perhaps the memory of the sea outside the window where I had painted Philip all those nights, perhaps just the memory of green water and blue sky and gray rock, an island long ago.

The small, still pool behind me wasn't green but dark brown, with a few spare strokes of white and gray where it caught the sky, and a few yellow leaves. I got my bag and removed my pencils and watercolors and sketchpad, then folded Philip's jacket and put it at the bottom of the satchel, along with the rest of his clothes. Then I filled my metal painting cup with water from the pool. I settled myself against a tree and began to paint.

It wasn't like my other work. A broad wash of gold and brown, the pencil lines black beneath the brushstrokes, spattered crimson at the edge of the thick paper. The leaves floating on the surface of the pool moved slightly in the wind, which was hard for me to capture—I was just learning to use watercolors. Only once was I worried, when a couple walking a dog came through the trees up from the canal bank.

"*Guten Tag*," the woman said, smiling. I nodded and smiled politely but kept my gaze fixed on my painting. I wasn't worried about the man or the woman; they wouldn't notice Philip. No one would. They walked toward the pool, pausing as their dog, a black dachshund, wriggled eagerly and sniffed at the water's edge, then began nosing through the leaves.

"Strubbel!" the man scolded.

Without looking back at him, the dog waded into the pool and began lapping at the water. The man tugged at the leash and started walking on; the dog ran after him, shaking droplets from his muzzle.

I finished my painting. It wasn't great—I was still figuring it out, the way water mingles with the pigments and flows across the page—but it was very good. There was a disquieting quality to the picture; you couldn't quite tell if there was a face there beneath the water, a mouth, grasping hands; or if it was a trick of the light, the way the thin yellow leaves lay upon the surface. There were long shadows across the pool when at last I gathered my things and replaced them in my satchel, heavier now because of Philip's

clothes.

I disposed of these on my way back to the flat. I took a long, circuitous route on the U, getting off at one stop then another, leaving a shoe in the trash bin here, a sock there, dropping the flannel shirt into the Spree from the bridge at Oberbaumbrücke. The pockets of the tweed jacket were empty. At the Alexanderplatz I walked up to the five or six punks who still sat by the empty fountain and held up the jacket.

"Anyone want this?" I asked in English.

They ignored me, all save one boy, older than the rest, with blue-white skin and a shy indigo gaze.

"*Bitte*." He leaned down to pat his skinny mongrel, then reached for the jacket. I gave it to him and walked away. Halfway across the plaza I looked back. He was ripping the sleeves off; as I watched he walked over to a trash bin and tossed them inside, then pulled the sleeveless jacket over his T-shirt. I turned and hurried home, the chill wind blowing leaves like brown smoke into the sky.

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For the first few months I read newspapers and checked online to see if there was any news of Philip's disappearance. There were a few brief articles, but his line of work had its perils, and it was assumed these had contributed to his fate. His children were grown. His wife would survive. No one knew about me, of course.

I painted him all winter long. Ice formed and cracked across his body; there was a constellation of bubbles around his mouth and open eyes. People began to recognize me where I set up my easel and stool in the Grunewald, but, respectful of my concentration, few interrupted me. When people did look at my work, they saw only an abstract painting, shapes that could be construed as trees or building cranes, perhaps, etched against the sky; a small pool where the reflection of clouds or shadows bore a fleeting, eerie similarity to a skeletal figure, leaves trapped within its arched ribs.

But nearly always I was alone. I'd crack the ice that skimmed the pool, dip my watercolor cup into the frigid water, then retreat a few feet away to paint. Sometimes I would slide my hand beneath the surface to feel a soft mass like a decomposing melon, then let my fingers slip down to measure the almost imperceptible pulse of a heart, cold and slippery as a carp. Then I would return to work.

As the winter wore on, it grew too cold for me to work outdoors. There was little snow or rain, but it was bitterly cold. The pool froze solid. Ice formed where my watercolor brush touched the heavy paper, and the ink grew sluggish in my Rapidograph pen.

So I stayed at home in the studio, where the orbweavers again hung beside the windows, and used the watercolor studies to begin work on other, larger, paintings—oils on canvas, urban landscapes where a small, frozen woodland pool hinted that a green heart still beat within the city. These paintings were extremely good. I took some digital photos of them and sent them to Anna, along with the name of two galleries in Schöneberg and one in Kreuzberg. Then I went to visit Arethusa in Sicily.

I had planned on staying only a few weeks, but the Mediterranean warmth, the smell of olive groves and sight of flying fish skimming across the blue sea, seduced me. I stayed in Sicily until early spring and then

returned briefly to Ogygia, my true island. I could not recall the last time I had visited—a steamship brought me, I do remember that, and the trip then took many hours.

Now it was much faster, and the island itself noisier, dirtier, more crowded. I found myself homesick—not for any island, but for the flat in Schöneberg and the quiet place in the Grunewald where Philip was. I had thought that the time in Sicily might give me other distractions; that I might find myself wanting to paint the sea, the bone white sand and stones of Ogygia.

Instead I found that my heart's needle turned toward Philip. I breathed in the salt air above the cliffs, but it was him I smelled, his breath, the scent of evergreen boughs beside shallow water, the leaves in his hair. I returned to Berlin.

I'd deliberately left my laptop behind and asked Anna not to call while I was gone. Now I found a number of messages from her. Two of the galleries were very interested in my paintings. Could I put together a portfolio for a possible show the following autumn?

I arranged for my most recent canvases to be framed. The sleeping nudes I had done of him back in Maine had arrived some months earlier; I chose the best of these and had them mounted as well. All of this took some time to arrange, and so it was mid-April before I finally took my satchel and my easel and returned to the pool in the Grunewald to paint again.

It was a soft, warm morning, the day fragrant with young grass pushing its way through the soil. The flower vendors had baskets of freesia and violets on the sidewalk. On the Landwehrkanal, gray cygnets struggled in the wake of the tourist boat as the adult swans darted after crusts of sandwiches tossed overboard. The captain of the boat waved to me from his cockpit. I waved back, then continued on to an S-Bahn station and the train that would bear me to the Grunewald.

There was no one in the forest when I arrived. High above me the sky stretched, the pale blue-green of a frog's belly. Waxwings gave their low whistling cries and fluttered in the upper branches of the beeches, where tiny new leaves were just starting to unfurl. I stopped hurrying, the sun's warmth tugging at my skin, the sunlight saying *slow, slow*. A winter storm had brought down one of the larches near the pool; I had to push my way through a scrim of fallen branches, yellow hawthorn shoots already covering the larch's trunk. I could smell the sweet green scent of new growth; and then I saw it.

The pool was gone: there had been no snow to replenish it. Instead, a cloud of blossoms moved above the earth, gold and azure, crimson and magenta and shining coral. Anemones, adonis, hyacinth, clematis: all the windflowers of my girlhood turned their yellow eyes toward me. I fell to my knees and buried my face in them so that they stained my cheeks with pollen, their narrow petals crushed beneath my fingertips.

I cried as though my heart would break as the wind stirred the blossoms and a few early greenflies crawled along their stems. I could see Philip there beneath them. His hair had grown, twining with the white roots of the anemones and pale beetle grubs. Beneath rose-veined lids his eyes twitched, and I could see each iris contract then swell like a seed. He was dreaming. He was beautiful.

I wiped my eyes. I picked up my satchel, careful not to step on the flowers, and got out my easel and brushes. I began to paint.

Anemones, adonis, hyacinth, clematis. I painted flowers, and a man sleeping, and the black scaffolding of a city rising from the ruins. I painted in white heat, day after day after day, then took the watercolors home and transferred what I had seen to canvases that took up an entire wall of my flat. I worked at

home, through the spring and into the first weeks of summer, and now the early fall, thinking how any day I will have to return to the pool in the Grunewald, harvest what remains of the windflowers, and set him free.

But not yet.

Last week my show opened at the gallery in Akazienstrasse. Anna, as always, did her job in stellar fashion. The opening was well-attended by the press and wealthy buyers. The dark winterscapes were hung in the main room, along with the nudes I had painted for those seven years. I had thought the nudes would get more attention than they did—not that anyone would have recognized Philip. When I look at those drawings and paintings now, I see a naked man, and that's what everyone else sees as well. Nothing is concealed, and these days there is nothing new in that.

But the other ones, the windflower paintings, the ones where only I know he is there—those are the paintings that people crowd around. I'm still not certain how I feel about exposing them to the world. I still feel a bit unsure of myself—the shift in subject matter, what feels to me like a tenuous, unsteady grasp of a medium that I will need to work much harder at if I'm to be as good as I want to be. I'm not certain if I know yet how good these paintings really are, and maybe I never will be sure. But the critics—the critics say they are revelatory.

The End

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