



Jakub Nowak

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Translated by Sean Gasper Bye



1.

In December of eighteen hundred and eighty-seven.

Captain William Mayhew and his daughter Caroline.

Winter is coming, the times are ending.

The whaling ship *Rhea Silvia* is roaming the freezing Pacific in a snowstorm. The sailing ship has three masts, three vats for melting oil, four whaling boats, as many lifeboats, and an impressive length of 137 feet. None of this matters. If the Good Lord peeked out from the relentlessly uniform veil of nimbostratus clouds hanging low over the black, churning waters, He would behold a terror-stricken little ship, all alone and lost, tossed at will by the elements of cold and water amid the impenetrable dark of an icy oceanic labyrinth.

Except God isn't looking down on us, thinks William Mayhew, the *Rhea Silvia's* captain. The blizzard is getting stronger, and the pragmatic part of the captain's soul is starting to believe that it's been snowing forever and there has never been a world without snow. The blizzard is enveloping the four corners of the Earth, he will never experience another world again. Now winter is coming and the times are ending.

Captain William Mayhew is alone. He stands at the ship's wheel in the half-dark of the pilothouse. Over his head swings a small ceiling lamp. His shadow dances over the wood of the walls in rhythm with the waves.

It was midnight when Mayhew entered the bridge. The first helmsman was dozing on his feet at the wheel. William placed a hand on the man's shoulder and woke him up. The helmsman, Thomas Fisher, struggled to lift his right hand from the wood of the compass. His hand was bare and it left behind a little skin.

Where's your glove, asked the captain.

I lost it, replied Thomas Fisher. He examined his hand. It was swollen and covered in rough, ugly-colored skin. I thought it was a glove, added the helmsman, a trained, clever and brave man. He observed his fingers in amazement, as if they belonged to someone else.

Captain Mayhew unwrapped the scarf from around his own neck and face. His joints ached—his elbows, wrists and fingers. The helmsman stood beside him without looking him in the eye.

Mayhew carefully wrapped his scarf around the man's frostbitten hand.

Go look for Caroline, he told him.

You think so, captain?

The gale outside whistled through the ice-laden rigging like demonic pipes.

It doesn't hurt, said the helmsman. He hid his hand behind his back.

Look for her, repeated the captain. And then bring me my scarf back.

I'm sorry, said the helmsman before he left. I thought it was a glove.

Fisher shook his head and left the bridge. The captain was left alone. The captain is always alone, all who sail know that.

The *Rhea Silvia* has been zigzagging somewhere on the western shores of Canada, pushed northward by the winds and the icebergs looming faintly in the distance, which are growing all around seemingly by chance. They have already scraped against several after spotting them at the last minute. The ship's crew anxiously observe these shapes during the day. People strain their eyes more when a snowstorm wanes. At night they think of those extravagant monstrosities of icy geometry, infinitely sturdier than their ship.

The nights are cold and getting longer. The days arrive tardily, they come briefly and reluctantly, entirely bereft of sun, as if someone had sloshed dirty soap suds over the unwashable black of the night's fabric. Evening after evening arrives before the sailors know it. Nights, borne on the breakers of waves, pour out over the deck, sticking to the crew's cold-stiffened clothing.

That winter, the nights are thick, low and starless.

The captain thinks about the man he gave his scarf to. He mindlessly scratches the uneven surface of the compass with his finger. He notices he is scraping off the frozen tissue of the helmsman's hand.

He opens a drawer of the binnacle and takes out a screwdriver, which he uses to clean off the wooden grip. Next he wipes the tool with the sleeve of his watch coat and returns it to the drawer. He remains near the binnacle, propped up on it more than he would like to admit.

The light of the lamp inside it is meager and gives off no heat, but Mayhew still wishes he could open the box, shrink down and squeeze himself inside. He peers into the meager flame behind the window and thinks about his fading heart. He can't remember when he saw the sun.

He thinks about his first helmsman, Thomas Fisher, and his frostbitten hand. And how he can't remember the last time he saw the second helmsman. The captain has forgotten his name. He glances at a small painting of Christ hung on the wall of the bridge by one of William's

predecessors, dozens of voyages ago, and realizes he can't remember the second helmsman's face.

The *Rhea Silvia* is weeping. William Mayhew can hear the ship rebelling, creaking and rattling, overstrained, though she is empty, after all. She's not carrying whale oil, she's not carrying meat. The gale howls as it whips over the tattered sails.

The bridge door opens and in it stands Thomas Fisher. The first helmsman's cap, spencer, pants and shoes are covered in a layer of ice, glistening deceptively angelically in the light of the ceiling lamp. Thomas peers at his captain, trying to remember. He still has the scarf wrapped around his hand. The night floods past him into the bridge—with cold, with snow and the shriek of the elements.

Have you been to see Caroline? cries William Mayhew, shouting over the winter.

Fisher stands there hesitantly.

Have you been to see Caroline?

The helmsman shakes his head and the captain goes up to him, then gently pushes him out the door.

Go see Caroline. Face to face, close enough that there is no longer any need to shout. Go find my daughter.

He closes the door behind him.

He returns to the helm, checks the ship's position behind the window of the binnacle. Several days ago the *Rhea Silvia* should have smashed to pieces on one of the islands of the Alexander Archipelago; the ship must be further west than the instruments are showing. Deep in his soul Mayhew wishes they would wreck. Land would bring rest.

The captain stands at the wheel, reconciled to the fact that this is his last voyage; his mind returns increasingly to his childhood and the events that, it seems to him, made him into the man he is now, worthy of death. Threads of thoughts and emotions are intertwined and easily tear when you try to seize them too tight. Many of them reach deep into the past, toward the First Baptist Church in his native Providence. To keep his mind busy somehow, William Mayhew hums his favorite hymn.

Awake, awake, my sluggish soul! Awake, and view the setting sun!

See how the shades of death advance, ere half the task of life is done.¹

The roar of the ocean rouses him. The second officer enters the bridge, closes the door behind him and waits. Mayhew looks at the clock and tries to count. An hour early, he says to the officer. He's too weak to pretend convincingly to be angry.

With your permission, captain. I'd rather start before dawn.

As William says nothing, the officer's teeth chatter with cold.

An hour early, says Mayhew with a shake of his head, but he makes room for the man at the ship's wheel.

Have you seen Fisher? he asks him before he leaves.

No, replies the sailor with a frown. He's not in his cabin.

The captain hesitates. He should also ask about the second helmsman, but he's embarrassed that he can't remember his name. Every day he finds it harder to think. Mayhew pulls his hood over his head and leaves the bridge.

¹ "Awake, Awake, My Sluggish Soul!" by Ottiwell Heginbothom, first printed in 1794.

He makes his way toward the stern. The snowflakes are heavy and wet. William thinks about the man sitting now in the crow's nest, high at the top of the mainmast. He doesn't raise his head, trying to keep his collar covering his neck. The lamplight accentuates the rows of sharp icicles hanging on the rigging, which glow like rows of teeth in an open maw. As if the *Rhea Silvia* were surrounded by beasts patiently readying themselves to gorge.

The captain opens the hatch and, removing a lantern from the wall, descends the creaking stairs. The stairwell smells of urine. Mayhew stops at the door of the officers' cabin, but after a moment of hesitation he passes it and, without knocking, peeks into the room Caroline has taken. His daughter is not inside. The bed is made. William closes the door and goes to his own cabin.

Inside, he takes off his cap and coat, and hangs them up on a rack made of Narwhal tusk that his daughter gave him back when the sun still reigned in the sky. From his desk drawer he takes three pieces of beef jerky he should have eaten long ago. He sniffs one of them, feeling the saliva emerge in his mouth, and his head swim. He puts two in his coat pocket and lays the third one on his desk. He pours himself a half-finger of whiskey, sits down on his bunk, downs the whiskey, drinks a cup of water and only then eats the meat. He closes his eyes while he chews. The pain in his feet turns into a dull tingling he can feel in his heels and calves.

The captain contemplates their escape. The remaining supplies in the ship's hold were plundered in San Francisco. The people at the harbor, like rats, could sense something terrible was coming. Soldiers boarded the ship and, holding the crew at rifle-point, simply took the contents of the hold, leaving individual barrels and boxes. Stripped of her cargo, the *Rhea Silvia* set off northward along the coast. In Tacoma, shortly after going ashore, they had to flee back to the ship. The crew opened fire on the surging crowd, because they quickly grasped that these half-crazed people intended to eat them. The locals had a small cannon, which they tried to fire

at the ship. Mayhew assented to using the ship's cannon and now sometimes the sight of the bodies they left on the shore haunted his dreams. After that he decided once again to set course for the north.

The people of Tacoma, Washington had wanted to eat them.

They were left with food supplies onboard for two, maybe three weeks.

William takes off his pillowcase and wraps it around his neck. He puts on his watch coat and cap, which have started to go unpleasantly stiff, and leaves the cabin. He looks in on Caroline, but his daughter is still gone. Mayhew goes on deck and with his very first step, is jolted by a shudder.

Day is breaking.

The snowstorm is dying down. The sky to starboard is the color of cannon steel, and somewhere in the distance, beyond the shadow of the bowsprit, that false space is beginning to loom where the sky seems to have become water, and the water, sky. The cold is worst at dawn, but right then, the ocean still sometimes smells like it did before the arrival of winter.

Mayhew goes to the prow and down into the forecastle. A sailor is blocking the bottom of the stairs. The man squats at the entrance to the corridor, his head hidden between his knees. The captain pauses, then simply takes a long stride past the sitting figure. The sailor does not raise his head.

William enters the forecastle. The cramped and dark room brims with the sharp stench of life. A few men are sleeping on their bunks in thick cocoons of multiple layers of linens and badly stained sheets. The rest stare at the woman sitting among them on one of the beds, faces turned toward her as if she were a hearth. Caroline Mayhew, the ship's doctor and the captain's daughter, is singing.

My name is James Scott and my first port was Boston,
Onto the ship *Claire* the Devil lured me.
The old girl sailed south on the winds of my daydreams,
Sunburned in my bunk, the sails sang to me.

Caroline looks up and notices her father, though she doesn't stop singing. The men don't take their eyes off her. They stare in suspense, as if fearing Miss Mayhew will forget the words of the song and not finish it. Most of the men are even younger than she is. Caroline sings on.

My name is James Scott and my last port was Sidney,
To pinch Liz's bottom the devil lured me.
She squandered my wages and spoiled my daydreams,
Climbing her like a mast, her body sang to me.

The captain looks at his daughter. He knows well her thick mousy-brown braid, the furrow around her narrow mouth and her eyes like the most delectable chocolate cake—he has known them much longer than Caroline has been alive. William Mayhew remembers his wife, waiting for him on the other side of the world, in Providence, Rhode Island, and prefers not to wonder—*those people in Tacoma wanted to eat them*—how she is doing in these times.

Caroline's voice is strong and full of melancholy, the shadows around her eyes are the color of ash. William listens to her sing, and again the thought comes to him that he shouldn't

have given his daughter the belt so often when she was little. That thought dims the lamps in the cabin.

Will we eat our own shoes, he wonders, once we're out of food? And then will we eat each other?

Caroline finishes her song. Captain in the forecabin, she informs the men around her with a smile. The sailors leap to their feet. Mayhew stops them with a gesture.

Miss Mayhew, he says to his daughter, I need you.

Yes, captain, replies Caroline.

She does not lift herself from the bunk with ease. She also places a hand on the forehead of one of the sleeping men, then walks to the exit, toward her father. The men motion uncertainly, as if wanting to help, but none dares to touch her. William would offer her his arm, but it would be too cramped in the corridor anyway.

Goodnight, boys, says Caroline to the sailors.

Goodnight, miss, they reply, disappointed.

The captain lets her out first and, looking at her back, is amazed, yet again, that from behind, you can't tell at all that Caroline is pregnant. It's because of this diet, thinks her father. We've begun starving and she's starving; her baby, too.

As they walk up the stairs onto the deck, the captain remembers the sailor who was sitting there before. He's gone now.

On deck, he gives Caroline his hand and the two of them stumble toward the stern, through wind and snow, as if he were leading her to the altar. He should also look in on the bridge, but he doesn't.

Come into my room, he says to his daughter as they go down to the cabin. For a moment.

Caroline fulfills his request. They sit side-by-side on the bunk and their knees touch.

Well look, she says. I've gotten fatter than you.

Her smile disappears as she observes her father.

Papa, she says, don't cry, papa, or I'll start bawling too.

William Mayhew just gives a dismissive wave of the hand, unable to choke out even a word.

Because I'll have to tell them. That I saw that old son of a bitch Mayhew cry.

Caroline takes off her glove and with her hand, wipes the tears from her father's cheek. Her hand smells like her mother, thinks William Mayhew, or maybe now his head's getting mixed up and that's just the smell of a woman.

They wouldn't believe it, he replies quietly. That I cried.

They wouldn't believe it, repeats his daughter. Do you hear? She lifts her gaze to somewhere above the ceiling. It's calming down.

They listen in silence.

What do you have around your neck? A pillowcase?

He tells her about the first helmsman and his frostbitten hands.

I haven't seen him, explains Caroline. He didn't come to see me. I have another scarf, I'll bring it to you.

You've got to get some real sleep. You're the one who needs to rest.

Yes, captain.

Wait a moment.

He reaches into his coat pocket and takes out the two strips of jerky. Caroline takes the beef from him and stands up.

No, says Mayhew. Now, here.

Caroline looks him in the eye. We'll share them, she replies, and hands back one of the chips of meat. Her father worries that the ship will lurch and the woman standing in front of him will hit her belly on a door or the desk.

All right, agrees Mayhew, but we'll split it in three. He breaks the strip and then, before he changes his mind, eats the larger part of the portion. He waits for Caroline to finish hers. He also asks her if she'd like a little whiskey. She agrees, and drinks the liquor her father pours her. Then she kisses him on the forehead, opens the door and almost bumps into the sailor standing on the threshold of the cabin.

I'm sorry, Miss Mayhew. Captain. You should see this. Something in the man's voice told him to hurry upstairs.

Like in hunting days, thinks William Mayhew and laughs out loud.

The crew is jumping up and down on the deck and everyone is euphoric, their emotions are too big for their faces, too big for their bodies, the whole ship seems to heave with them, the sails are flapping harder. It's still snowing, but it's grown bright enough to give them the clearest morning in many weeks. The men—his men, thinks the captain, and that thought endlessly touches and torments him at once—are peering at him expectantly. So many pairs of eyes all around, bloodshot spheres of white like planets in the cosmos, flesh and unearthly space. William Mayhew will remember those gazes for the rest of his long life.

He gives an order:

Boats one and two—launch! Lie to, he adds, and the hungry animals on deck roar in praise of their leader and in happiness to be hunting, while they run for the sails or to get jackets, gloves, harpoons and guns.

Witnesses of a miracle and the subjects of miracles: for, lo, the *Rhea Silvia* is no longer alone in these boundless open waters. Tens, dozens, hundreds of animals all around, whole flocks of terns and seagulls, and strange little birds, plump and colorful, which the people on board have never even dreamed of; and not only do these freaks exist, but they can also fly. All of them are fluttering over their heads and in the same direction as the ship; some are brave enough to land on the crosstrees. And little fish, tiny ones, just beneath the surface of the waves, swimming singly, and some in whole schools, burgeoning under the keel as fluidly as Caroline's sea shanties, and among them, true beasts, orcas and sharks, moving along near the *Rhea Silvia's* own course, their unexpected adjutants, majestic, weighty and full of meat. And even the pulsing shadow of a squid, like the condensed essence of the ocean itself, a lunar creature with a body designed according to laws not of this earth.

And further in the distance, marvelous as a mirage, the most wonderful sight of all for the people on board: fountains of water shooting high above the waves, shimmering in the cold like silver Christmas trees and exuding their pure glow for one beat of the human heart, until a gust of wind disperses them and the spell vaporizes, while the ocean takes back every one of those droplets, because each of them is hers.

Sperm whales, shouts William Mayhew and hurls his fists in the air, good God, sweet Jesus, even fucking sperm whales, and he shouts this way, over and over, until he goes hoarse, dancing on the snow-slick oaken deck. A miracle, a miracle!, this is what the captain shouts, and his people giggle and the davits are already creaking.

Someone grabs him tight from behind. William turns around to his daughter and looks into her eyes, which are like chocolate cakes.

Papa, says Caroline, they're going to the warmth, you see? As if she couldn't catch her breath or her thoughts. Papa, his daughter exclaims, they're all swimming to the warmth.

With the back of his glove, Captain William Mayhew wipes away the frost left on his eyebrows. so much hope comes with that thought that he will have to portion it out.

Thomas Fisher, the first helmsman, approaches him and returns the scarf to his captain. I found my glove, he says.

William nods and laughs out loud.

In the head, adds Fisher more quietly. I left it there before I started my watch.

I was looking for you, says the captain gently. Where did you get off to?

Thomas thinks for a moment and then replies, I have no idea, captain, and Mayhew can see the man is speaking honestly. Fisher leaves to fire up the cauldron to melt the whale blubber.

William looks around at the world his ship has found herself in. His gaze sweeps over this eclectic animal pack, racing with them in one direction and toward a common goal, through the bitter cold, through the snow and ice, toward the warmth.

2.

In December of nineteen hundred and seventeen, the thirtieth year of the City's existence, the thirtieth year that winter has lasted.

Robin, the daughter of John Doe and Caroline Mayhew.

I want to go slice up the beasts, whispers Robin, the daughter of John Doe and Elder Madam Caroline Mayhew, First Director of the Lazaretto.

Her brothers look at one another and giggle in response. Robin almost trembles with fury. The three of them are standing around an operating table. The girl looks over the naked man lying in the middle of them and, lifting her chin high, shouts: More light!

The hospital dresser behind her reaches for one of the chains hanging by the wall of the operating theater and, with a creak, an additional electric lamp descends through the labyrinth of steel pipes at the ceiling and halts above the siblings' heads and the naked body on the table. The lamp swings, flickering and buzzing. It's nearly noon and darkness won't fall for three more hours, but the sun hasn't been seen in the City for a good week, so the stifled light seeping through the glass dome of the theater roof is not enough. The tall, cylindrical room is lit with electric lamps hanging over the operating table, and gas wall lamps for the several levels of benches for the audience.

Those benches are filled to the last seat. Sitting on them are surgeons, curious doctors of other specialties, medical students, Lazaretto dressers, nurses, the patient's family and winners of the ticket lottery. Everyone waits in nervous anticipation.

I'm going on the harvest with you, Robin repeats to the twins, lowering her voice so that no prying ears will hear. The wooden tabletop where the man lies is notched with hundreds of cuts from earlier operations. I'm going with you to slice up the beasts.

The brothers finally observe her more carefully and, seeing their sister isn't joking, exchange a glance. Their sister takes their silence at face value. Their eyes, blue and cold as the summer sky over the City, remain untrusting.

The brothers are thirty, making them thirteen years older than Robin. They are almost the same age as the City and, after their mother, are the most important people in the Lazaretto.

Elder Sir Nicolas is powerfully built, one of those men on whom fat unnoticeably sublimates into muscle and vice versa. His thick and tightly curled beard covers a face furrowed with wrinkles, as if the energy needed to operate the massive machine of his body were being used up at an accelerated pace and Nicolas had started aging earlier than his brother.

Nicolas is the Lazaretto's ether technologist. Once the patient was placed on the table, Elder Sir Nicolas tied his arms and healthy leg to the wooden vises on the tabletop. When the dresser moved the cart with the ether-machine up to the table, the technologist placed a mask on the patient's face, connected by a tube to a glass hookah-style water pipe. Next he carefully measured out a quantity of ether, which he dissolved in the water container in the pipe and, after turning the crank, started up the machine. It gurgled and the disoriented patient lifted his head. Nicolas bent over and held the mask on the man's face. The audience murmured, excited.

Let us pray, the ether technologist suggested to the patient in the gentle tone he used to speak to his children. Let us pray to Lord Jesus the Polar Explorer. Nicolas's large hand, as if made of a piece of dough, completely covered the mask.

After a few moments, Nicolas turned off the machine and, just in case, carefully placed an ether-soaked cloth over the unconscious man's face.

Elder Sir Neil is almost a head shorter than Nicolas. He has a boyish face; his hair is thick and stiff like hothouse grass. He has a high, almost girlish voice, and his skin is silky and smooth. Neil's small body is springy and surprisingly strong.

He was his mother's most talented pupil and he became her first deputy in the Lazaretto. Today he is only meant to assist.

You were younger than I am now, Robin tries again. When you first joined in the harvest. Robin is nearly seventeen.

But Robin, Neil says with a frown, then doesn't finish, meaning to imply that she knows, after all.

Robin what?

Come on, you know.

Because I'm a girl.

The boys allow that word to linger between them, like some old, stinking fur coat no one wants to clean. Slick little sealshits, Robin thinks of her brothers.

Nicolas notices her emotions.

Robin, he starts gently, look, before long you'll be doing surgery on your own, so it's not as though—

It's just the harvest, Robin interrupts him. Let's get the saws and go into the labyrinth. They'll awaken, we'll do our thing and we'll come back with the meat.

The girl raises her chin high to look Nicolas in the eyes.

The ether technologist says nothing. Sealshits, Robin thinks again.

Over the entrance to the theater hangs the flag of the Hudson's Bay Company. The firm's acronym is inscribed in red on the banner, and the Union Jack stretches proudly in the canton. Striding beneath the flag toward them is Elder Madam Caroline Mayhew, Director of the Lazaretto.

The chatter in the audience stops short. The sawdust coating the floor, to soak up the blood dripping from the table, muffles the sound of her footsteps. Caroline approaches the table in total silence.

Hello, the mother greets her children. She takes a last drag on a dried-herb cigar and looks around for the dresser, who vigilantly runs up with a clay mug.

Don't throw it out, Caroline warns the man, I'll finish it when we're done here.

Only after the dresser has taken her cigar can they smell the stench of her apron, stiff with clotted blood and glistening with fresh blood, from today. Robin knows even the workers in the massive slaughterhouse in the South City don't stink like her mother. Flies are already circling her shoulders.

I'm sorry I'm late, says Caroline, the mastectomy ran unexpectedly long. The tumor was so big I thought I'd open up the second breast as well. We had to remove both and it took a good while.

The children can tell that their mother, with at least one operation behind her today, is already tired. They nod and Robin glances at the hooks over their heads that lower, among other things, precisely to lift up a woman's breast before removing it.

Robin, daughter of John Doe and Caroline Mayhew, her mother addresses her loudly and ceremoniously, today this table belongs to you.

Robin can taste the pride on Caroline's smiling face, then goes to get the cart holding her surgical case. She pulls it along the floor against the resistance of the sawdust, which is sticky with the soft tissue and bodily fluids of the Lazaretto's patients.

On the case is an engraving of Jesus the Polar Explorer. This is half Jesus the Viking and half Jesus the Mechanic, wielding in one hand a blood-dripping battle axe, in the other a wrench. Inside the case are Robin's instruments: a whole row of knives and a second row of scalpels, and also bone saws, pliers, hooks, probes and ligatures, all just carefully washed with carbolic acid.

When Robin takes her surgical knife from her case, the audience sighs and their mouths hang open. It's so quiet in the theater you could hear a pin drop; only the lamps over the table buzz erratically, accompanying the hardly perceptible, gut-rattling rumble of the Generator,

reaching them from somewhere far away. Robin got this knife from her grandfather William. It has a Narwhal-bone handle.

All four of them—Caroline, Robin, Nicolas and Neil—lean over the man on the table. The patient is short and obese. His right knee is horribly swollen, and the calf below is unnaturally curved inward. The man was feverish and complaining of a pain radiating as far as his chest. Caroline and Neil, suspecting osteitis, advised amputation.

He hasn't been out for too long? Caroline asks the ether technologist.

No, replies Nicolas, but just in case he takes another glance at the clock on the wall.

Mother, Robin begins quietly, I want to join the harvest.

Caroline turns to look at her daughter, surprised.

The harvest.

Yes, the harvest. I'll go with the boys and I'll stick close.

The twins look at their mother. Caroline shrugs.

It's up to them.

Caroline Mayhew knows that's an answer that will satisfy none of her children.

Mother—

He has actually been out for a while, Nicolas interrupts his sister.

Robin, her mother urges her.

All right.

Robin takes a deep breath and squeezes the knife tighter.

Should we tie up his testicles? asks Caroline Mayhew, peering at the patient's bare manhood.

No need, smiles Robin with a glance at Neil. Once during an amputation her brother managed to not just sever the patient's thigh, but also slice open his scrotum, as a result of which the patient died.

The girl looks at her mother with gratitude and certain surprise, wondering if she can take her maternal snideness toward Neil as a sign of support. Caroline Mayhew's elongated face seems emotionless. A Lazaretto fly crawls over her cheek.

Well, all right, repeats Robin, adjusting her grip on the knife. Neil waits with a tourniquet ready.

Robin takes a deep breath. With her left hand, she grasps the patient's thigh and slices below her hand, while her brother squeezes the tourniquet around the leg, staunching the bleeding. Robin places her fingers between the skin and the remaining tissue and pulls it higher, and then, with the subsequent cuts, reveals the femur. The knife scrapes on the surface of the bone; Neil and her mother do it more elegantly. In the electric light of the lamps, the bone has a yellowish hue. The audience is quiet. The air in the Lazaretto grows heavy. The patient doesn't move.

Robin hands the knife to her mother and takes a saw from her. She can see the flush on Caroline Mayhew's cheeks. Neil lifts up the muscle they will use to form the stump, the warm and heavy flesh barely fitting in the surgeon's small hands.

Robin holds the leg down, squeezing it by the diseased knee, her fingers sinking into the swelling like dough. She starts to saw. The bone is surprisingly hard. Only on the third cut does the blade enter deeper. On the seventh cut, the strokes grow fluid and Robin relaxes, simultaneously feeling a surge of strength.

The amputated leg pops off and falls into Caroline's vigilant hands, which toss it into a box full of sawdust. The audience sighs and moans. Neil loosens the tourniquet to reveal the blood vessels that need to be tied off. Robin ties the main artery and, now calmer, the remaining arteries and veins. Next she sews up the remaining tissue, forming a stump.

Twelve, says Neil.

Eleven, protests Robin and instinctively stamps in anger, just like when she was little and arguing with her growing brothers over various things.

Twelve, says Caroline, taking her sons' side.

Eleven, the first time I was just lining up.

Twelve, her mother says with a shake of her head. Every cut of the saw counts.

Robin sighs. She knows Caroline and Neil can cut through a femur in six strokes. She finishes stitching together the pieces of skin crowning the stump. On the table next to her surgical case lies a small bowl full of a solution of carbolic acid. Robin washes the patient's stump and thigh up to the groin, and then covers the stitches in gauze and attaches the dressing to the thigh. She doesn't rush, using this time to calm her heart pounding in her chest. As she finishes, one of the dressers takes away the tools she hands over after cleaning them.

Lamps, whispers her mother.

Lamps, shouts Robin into the space over her head.

A mechanical *shunk* rings out, and the electric glow over their heads disappears. They stand in a half-shadow that seems warm.

The audience applauds. Another round of applause will ring out when Elder Sir Nicolas, the ether technologist, removes the handkerchief from the patient's face and the man awakens. But that comes later; for now, the man on the table still looks like he's sleeping.

Robin straightens her neck, lifting her head toward the faint daylight seeping in from the top of the theater. She narrows her eyes; the light is like the gaze of some huge thing. The sharp odor of carbolic acid mixes with the smell of blood and her own sweat.

Brava, sister, says Neil.

Robin slowly focuses her gaze on the figures standing nearest to her. The twins are giving her friendly and proud smiles. She looks around for her mother.

She already left, explains Neil.

Caroline's absence provokes in Robin a vague feeling of anxiety, as if on this first independent amputation she'd overlooked something essential. She inspects the man lying on the table and checks the stitches on his stump. The patient starts to fidget and murmur.

Everything's all right, says Neil. His smile is simultaneously loyal and a trifle protective.

It's your moment, adds Nicolas, not hers. That's why she left.

Robin looks him in the eyes but doesn't really know what she should read from them or what she would like to. For as long as she can remember, her brothers have explained their mother's behavior to her.

Robin realizes her mouth is full of long-unswallowed saliva. She doesn't want to swallow it, not here, not in this stench. She rests her hand on the edge of the table and spits it out into the mud of sawdust and blood under her feet. The thick phlegm stretches from her mouth to the floor; she has to sever it with her hand. She wipes her sleeve over her lips and strides out of the theater.

3.

We are children of the beast, as Mr. Darwin wrote. We have blood on our fangs and we have blood under our fingernails. We have our hearts and souls in blood.

Robin is sitting in bed with her knees pulled up and looking at her mother. Elder Madam Caroline Mayhew is speaking quietly and slowly. This is how she always speaks, the girl thinks. Once Robin took it as a clever social ploy, a trick calculated to attract attention. In time she saw it was a way of conserving energy, of not expending it on needless intonation or exclamations. In this way the Director of the Lazaretto gathers the strength she needs for the endless political battles in the City Council.

Elder Madam Mayhew is standing by the black windowpane, which she seems to treat like a mirror. The alchemy of charisma: her mother's slim figure transforms into a presence taking up the whole of her daughter's bedroom.

We're children of the beast, my girl.

Caroline turns to Robin. In the light of the gas lamp on her nightstand, her fifty-year-old face looks like the frozen countenance of one of the corpses in the City's icy necropolis. Or maybe it's not the light at all, thinks Robin. Maybe her aging mother's skin is preparing for the transformation that will come when her heart stops working.

Technology, says Caroline Mayhew, pointing behind her, toward something out the window, maybe simply toward the City. Technology is possible thanks to this beast. Energy from the Generator, internal combustion engines operating on petroleum—they all allow us to tame it. We tame the beast of nature and tame all the beasts within us. I'm sure the Inuit are right and we are all full of devils. And everything around us is full of devils.

I don't think that's quite right, Robin ventures. They see it a little differently.

Her mother smiles in response, and Robin rolls her eyes. She's had enough condescension.

Technology is the language of progress and the fuel of progress, says Caroline Mayhew. Progress is the law of nature, because we too are a part of nature, and we must develop. Especially now, when the times are ending. Let's emerge from the end of times as mighty we can be.

Mother and daughter turn their eyes to the icon on the wall. The wrench in the hand of Jesus the Polar Explorer is just as magnificent as the axe in the other. The bears he's killed lie behind him, bleeding right into a factory pipeline.

You know there are some people, says Caroline, who fear the Generator will explode?

She says this with a mocking smile, but her eyes conceal a vague disquiet, as if these two parts of her face had been painted by entirely different artists.

They sit a long while in silence with the distant hum of the Generator in the background. The enormous cylindrical structure, towering over the City, can't be seen out the window when the lamp is lit in Robin's room. Yet they can hear it distinctly, its sound like growl of a sleeping animal, uneven but unceasing.

They fear it more than winter, her mother continues. Unbelievable.

I know, thinks Robin. She knows this from Luca, her best friend in the Lazaretto, whose father, a doctor at the college, also attends Council. Robin knows some people are selling their homes in buildings near the Generator and moving to the South City. She also knows Council is starting to discuss whether it would be safer to deactivate the Generator and shift completely to gasoline engines and oil, refined in the South itself.

Unbelievable, repeats Caroline Mayhew like an echo from the world before winter.

It's because of that accident, says Robin.

And I understand that, replies her mother. Its output is falling, Caroline hesitates, as if anxious whether she can share a secret with her daughter, falling more than they say in the newspaper. That's why I understand, but I disagree completely. On the contrary: we should use it even more, while we've got it. These accidents have happened since the very beginning. Once it was deactivated to adjust the core hydraulics. Then the idiots couldn't start it up again. For almost two weeks.

Robin knows this story, as does everyone. People from the southern, suddenly underheated, edges of the city refused to go into work and forced their way into the older neighborhoods, taking over warmer apartment buildings. A mythology of chaos and violence that has petrified the imaginations of those who still remembered the world before winter.

Two weeks, Robin. It was hell. A hell that was slowly freezing over.

Robin doesn't reply.

A year before you were born. Do you see what I'm trying to tell you?

Robin, daughter of Caroline Mayhew and John Doe, understands and does not reply. She starts to feel cold and strangely hot at the same time. Robin can't bear her mother's gaze, she glances down at her hands and sees that she's got leftover blood from today's patient still under her nails. She clenches her hands into fists so she can't see it.

After the operation, she stopped by the Lazaretto temple to say a prayer of thanksgiving. The quiet and warmth inside it, and the soothing smell of the stained-wood pews, put her to sleep. Then she went to the college's lecture halls to look for Luca, wanting to share the day's

success. The porter told her that he was out. Nor could she find him in the library. Robin returned home after dusk, freezing, tired and disappointed.

A message was waiting in the mailbox next to the door of her room. From Luca!

Dear Robin,

after meeting the girl of my dreams, today I slipped out of Miss Labadie's class and headed for the Docks, to taste real life and carnal pleasure. I know I shall not return. Do not miss me, but remember me as you write prescriptions for unlucky souls with especially awful cases of eczema. I'm kidding. I'm about to go to the gas fields with papa, hurrah! We'll be back late.

PS—I was sitting in the last row today. You sure as hell look great with a bone saw.

My sincere best wishes, Luca.

Robin heard a laugh and, realizing it was her own, felt how hungry she was. She went to the Lazaretto kitchen, surprised at how light her steps had grown, when just a few moments ago they had been so tired. In the kitchen, one of the Inuit girls fried her up a little meat. Now Robin's hands still smelled like the fat popping out of the hot pan from which she ate her meal.

Better a Generator out of kilter, her mother continues, as Robin reluctantly pushes away the memory of her best friend's letter, than winter itself. No matter what bad shape it's in.

Tell that to the people in the households nearby, thinks Robin. She thinks over her mother's words. Caroline Mayhew doesn't notice that to Robin, born and raised in winter, the only thing that might fit the way her mother talks about nature is the City itself.

Caroline shudders as if struck by a memory, then goes up to the bed and sits down next to her daughter.

I'm old, she says to Robin, and maybe a little to herself. I can tell I am when I look at my grandchildren, Nicolas's children. And, I think, especially when I look at you.

She turns away and the girl follows her gaze. Two faces are mirrored in the window and only one is young.

I'm old, repeats the Director of the Lazaretto. But I don't feel old. And that's the worst, you see? Because if that's so, then there must be some deception going on. My feelings must be wrong. The way I think about myself, the way I feel. Because biology is truth. Nature is truth. But it seems to me—it seems—that I am young.

Robin looks at her mother's face, at her paper-dry skin. She thinks about love and the ways of expressing it. About how their conversations always go like this, that in the rare moments when it is just the two of them, her mother is most interested in talking about herself.

You're strong and beautiful, mama.

I know, replies Caroline Mayhew and rises abruptly from her daughter's bed. She sighs. But I'm old.

Robin, seeing her mother irritated, pulls her knee all the way up to her chin. She doesn't know how to respond.

Caroline wears her hair short, like a man's, as more and more of the women in the City have been doing recently. Yet Robin remembers her mother having different hair, long and thick, falling far past her shoulders. Elder Madam Mayhew claims there's no way Robin could remember that because she cut her hair the day her daughter was born. But Robin knows what she's talking about.

When we discovered the frozen ocean was awakening and offering us meat, says her mother, now with a different, calmer tone, and we started organizing the harvest, we immediately understood that there was more to it than just acquiring food. We could easily feed ourselves even without the harvest. It's about more than that, about preserving our sense of who we are. As Guardians, as people of the Lazaretto. He who goes deep down into the tunnels to collect meat determines how the other residents of the City will perceive us. And how we perceive ourselves, as people of the winter.

And people of the end of times.

Yes, people of the end of times. Not every man could go on the harvest—

Mother—

Wait. Not every man could go on the harvest, certainly not as many as would like to. We invented—your grandfather invented—rules and trials for candidates. Everyone knew how hard it was to join the harvest and that they're not for every Guardian of the Lazaretto who might wish to.

They used to fight over it.

Yes. Literally, and so violently that we had to forbid it. They didn't listen, of course, sighs Caroline Mayhew, but she smiles at the same time.

Robin peers at her, trying to hold back the enthusiasm growing in her stomach like a small, hot sun. She's not sure where her mother's story is going, but she can't contain her excitement. Luca once joined the harvests. In a way, he was lucky: he was allowed to stand in for his older brother, who'd lost a hand during a harvest in a fuel wagon accident. Robin wished for nothing more than to join her best friend.

I want to go slice up beasts, says the girl.

Language, her mother admonishes her.

I want to join the harvests.

The number of harvesters is fixed, replies the Director of the Lazaretto.

But why?

And why don't we steal from one another? When her daughter doesn't reply, her mother continues: The number of harvesters is fixed, there would have to be a vacancy.

Robin does her best to understand what she's hearing. The ocean awakens, making the harvest possible, on the threshold of every winter. Or, rather: it's a non-functioning Russian electrical plant that awakens it, one ostensibly dead, but still programmed so that once a year for a few hours, it heats up the ice around its core somewhat. On that night, the lump of ice, unyielding from day to day, softens, and electrical discharges make the animal corpses imprisoned in the ice struggle like in some paralytic dance.

The night of the electric plant's awakening was a few days off.

They used to fight over it, the girl repeats after her mother.

Yes. Younger brothers attacked older ones. Is that a problem?

Her daughter raises her eyebrows high and smiled in response.

Caroline Mayhew goes to the door. Before she opens it, she turns again to her daughter.

Neil's first time, he needed fourteen strokes of the saw.

Robin giggles, surprised. She didn't need to know that and the knowledge shouldn't have changed anything, but in a strange way, it cheers her up.

Get some fresh air in here, says her mother, and closes the door behind her.

Robin, daughter of John Doe and Elder Madam Caroline Mayhew, is trying to sort through in her mind what she's just heard.

The number of harvesters is fixed. A vacancy would be necessary.

They used to fight over it.

The girl looks at the blood under her fingernails. She puts her fingers in her mouth and sucks them for a moment, then scrapes out the dried tissue with a hairpin.

She puts out the lamp and goes to the window. She tilts open the vents, letting the winter in. It's warm in the bedroom, the blower fans under the Lazaretto are on full blast and Robin's room, despite being on nearly the top floor, is sufficiently heated.

Robin looks into the window, at the City.

Now she can see it: the Generator is fat and tall, like a giant steel cock, unsettled, vibrating, eternally at work. It rises nearby, towering over the oldest, northern part of the City, over chaotically erected and repeatedly converted structures in clear conflict with the stubbornly intractable winter. Neo-Victorian towers soar above peaked roofs built according to the peaceful logic of Scandinavia. Increasingly dense development has now completely covered the inconspicuous architecture of Juneau, Alaska, which gave the City its origin. The north of the City is never completely dark. As people go to sleep, turning out the lights that shine through their windows, the streetlights stay on until dawn. The north is also warmer, especially on the lowest floors and on the streets, because this is where the City's wealthiest inhabitants live: businesspeople, Council members, clergy, botanists and scientists, and finally, the Guardians inhabiting the Lazaretto, almost all of them Elder Sirs and Elder Madams and their descendants.

Protruding even higher beyond the crooked teeth of the North's peaked roofs are the needles of ships' masts, enmeshed in crisscrossing spider-webs of tunnels and living chambers. Mother keeps saying that from the outside it looks like a gigantic frost-covered anthill, and Robin has to take her word for it. These are the Docks, a few dozen ships that the winter caught at port thirty years ago, and which are now overgrown with a wooden labyrinth of dubious construction, holding itself above the decks probably only by the sheer will of drugged carpenters and Inuit shamans. The Docks sometimes howl at night. The wind sweeping through the sleeping city can contain a different, alien tone, carrying the wails of beings, maybe people, whom someone is doing harm, or maybe of dogs, forbidden and legendary, allegedly bred in secret in the Docks' deepest tunnels. When the Docks howl, Robin can't sleep. Tonight the Docks are quiet.

Robin has never been there, the Docks are wicked architecture for wicked people, as the rest of the City is reminded by the unfortunates hanged and crucified under cover of night on the tops of the masts. The police discover them at dawn, bodies hanging so high that they freeze in the cold beyond the city's heat sources. The police, those pigs, don't even try to get them down. No one ventures into the Docks unless they really have to, and the pigs don't at all anymore.

Extending out around the docks and beyond is the South. The South is the furthest district, dense, cramped, overpopulated and eternally underheated. It's where people live and die who can't afford the North and who at the same time don't intend to test their mettle in the Docks: artisans, lumberjacks, hunters and workers in the gas fields, factories and steel mills that are biting larger and larger chunks out of the south. And also some Inuit, meaning the people of the north, and Métis, mixed people who have decided not to live among the Inuit in the ice beyond the City. In the southeast, a factory district is growing. It lies on the opposite side of the

Lazaretto and Robin can see it from the window of her room only because it was built in the heights surrounding the city. Robin looks at the smoke from the industrial chimneys, silver in the light of the district's streetlamps, inscribing a fairy tale of accumulating capital on the red sky in a factory alphabet. And she looks at the mills, where the steel gullets of Mr. Bessemer's converters impudently belch fire. She can't see it from here, but she knows Southerners keep breaking into the grounds of the district, seeking shelter in its warmth and roar.

Now, when most of the city is sleeping, the factories' muffled racket even reaches the Lazaretto. It's a different sound than that of the Generator. You hear the factories with your ears, and the Generator in your gut.

Progress, progress as a law of nature.

Jesus the Mechanic, have mercy on us.

This is nature for us, mother, thinks Robin. Beyond it is only winter, nothingness and death. Beyond the city, times have already ended.

The girl returns to her bed. She also says a prayer, one of Pastor Rowbotham's litanies composed for the end of times. The refrain is simple and recurs after each section of pleas: the Earth is flat, and we are at its center, we await Thee, O Lord Jesus, return unto us.

She undresses down to her nightdress and then remembers the open window vents. She shuts them and quickly returns to bed. Standing on the windowsill is a little ship. It's a model Grandpa Will made for her based on the *Rhea Silvia*, the whaling ship on which grandpa and mother reached the City. The city lights cast shadows of its rigging onto the walls and ceiling of Robin's bedroom. They would disappear if she closed the curtains, but she doesn't. She likes the lines crisscrossing over her head as she falls asleep, as if they were part of a magical map leading toward a better past.

She snuggles into bed and hears something else, the night wind growing louder and louder. The ice surrounding the city hisses, creaks and suddenly cracks here and there, giant blocks of ice pressing in on their place on Earth from all sides, as if they had unfinished business with the City.

Before she falls asleep, Robin also wonders which of her brothers she should put out of commission to take his place in the harvest.

She dreams that she's cutting through someone's femur. She discovers to her shock that the patient is conscious and watching her carefully to make sure her cuts are skillful and even. It's someone she knows, but when Robin awakes, she won't remember who.

5.

That same night, in December of nineteen hundred and seventeen, the thirtieth year of the City's existence, the thirtieth year that winter has lasted.

Hanta Huntsman, son of Tarkik Moon and Yekaterina Stepanova.

The whale intestine hanging in one of the bar's windows in place of curtains is the color of a scurvy-stricken sailor.

Them bodies what the grave robbers dig up at night outside the city, someone is explaining as Hanta pushes his way through the scrum of individuals filling the tiny saloon, Stanisław buys up them bodies afterward, he thaws 'em, shreds 'em and adds 'em to the rat shish kebabs he feeds us here. One dug-up stiff for two hundred little kebabbies, yum-yum.

This is a voice of the Docks and a joke of the Docks. No one laughs. Who can know what secrets Stanisław Potocki's kitchen holds? The floorboards under Hanta's heavy footsteps creak

as he squeezes his way toward the bar. Every time he comes here he feels like the space is rocking gently. Mr. Potocki's bar hangs high, crammed into the darker end of the highest of the Docks' passageways, attached on one side onto a remarkably expensive cathouse, and on the other side onto a suspicious workshop that even Hanta finds scary. The wooden capsule of the saloon and its two twins hang between the foremast and mainmast of a Dutch transport schooner that got stuck three decades ago.

Ain't seen you here in a long while, Hanta, says mustachioed Elder Sir Potocki. He's standing behind the bar and already pouring Hanta a beer, a weak ale brewed with scurvy grass, as people in the City call greenhouse-grown horseradish.

Hanta narrows his eyes in response.

Hey, who's the giant? comes a women's voice behind him.

That's Hanta, replies another voice, lower and throatier, also a woman's. That is Hanta, who was from here, but ain't no more.

The second voice reminds Hanta of scuffles, slick with sweat and spit. He doesn't turn around.

A hole in the wall behind Elder Sir Potocki belches warm kitchen smells: pancakes from a hot griddle and deep-fried rat meat. Hanta feels his stomach rumbling. He downs half the beer in one gulp.

I got no money, he says simultaneously to Stanisław and the women behind him.

Their voices go quiet. Stanisław Potocki nods. Before winter came, the bartender was a Polish harpooner. Now he runs this saloon, making sure it's never closed. Winter made Potocki stop sleeping. In the Docks they say that's why he married two women, so one of them was always working in the kitchen.

He's waiting for you, says Stanisław quietly, wiping the glasses with a rag. The light of an oil lamp on the counter paints shadows on his face that makes it look like a skull.

Where?

In the hollow 'cross the way.

Hanta finishes his beer. He gets up, unpeeling his elbows from the sticky countertop, and struggling a little to haul the belly hanging in front of him. He nods at Potocki and pushes through the regulars to the exit. People and ghosts of them, bloodshot eyes, swollen gums. Dried blood under noses and the cautious, animal instincts of beings as alert as caribou.

Hanta goes out into the passageway and shivers with cold. It's a narrow, wooden tunnel where, despite the constant crush of people, you can always feel a draft. The large planks the passageway is made from creak in the night's bitter cold.

Huntsman doesn't remember what he did with his hat. He throws the hood of his jacket over his head. He feels like everyone around him is watching him and he's sure some of them actually are.

He passes a stall where an Inuit girl is selling lewd soapstone figurines of people screwing animals in inventive configurations. Hanta moves through a small group of semi-recumbent beggars as if wading into mud. The men and women are floating on ether seas. Their faces are peaceful but their bodies reek. For some reason Huntsman is reminded of his wife Gloria, and the thought terrifies him.

He opens a door he has always slightly feared even walking past, and steps inside a bright hallway, harshly lit with electric lamps. The hallway is empty and ends in yet another door. In the walls on either side he can see two-way deposit slots, and above them, gaps with rifle barrels protruding from them. Hanta stands and waits.

Take off your hood, says a high-pitched voice from behind the wall in front of him.

I'm cold, replies Hanta.

Hood.

Tell him Hanta is here.

Hood.

Huntsman looks at the gun barrels. He follows the order. In the Docks they say that Kinggap Mountain takes on children as gunmen, because they're more ruthless and can go longer without moving.

Hanta glances up and narrows his eyes, somewhat surprised. He'd always thought electricity was warmer.

He doesn't know how long they'll make him wait. Someone behind him opens the door where he came in, and immediately closes it again. The floorboards under Hanta's feet are covered in old stains.

He can hear the thud of heavy bolts and the door in front of him finally opens. He swallows hard. He goes into a low-ceilinged and surprisingly spacious room. It must extend into the rigging of other ships in the Docks. Armed men are overseeing the work of women and children who, divided into groups of several people, are sorting various delicacies on spot-lit tables. The gunmen who were aiming their rifle barrels at Hanta in the entranceway are concealed in boxes against the wall that look like cabinets, and which don't reach higher than Hanta's neck.

No one pays him any particular attention.

They're gonna kill me, thinks Huntsman. Sweetheart, what the hell have you gotten me into.

He feels as though he's looking at himself from the outside, a wounded rat awaiting the final stamp of a shoe.

He thinks of Gloria lying in their narrow bed and the image clenches around his fatty heart like a fist.

A slender Black man goes up to Hanta and leads him somewhere in silence.

Kinngap's soldiers, as eclectic as the Docks and with an equally elusive essence, are lounging on old ship barrels, holding worn-out Russian shotguns and gleaming whalebone machetes. Next to them is a doorway with a bead curtain. The beads are made of the bones of a creature Hanta is unable to recognize.

He walks down a short hallway that ends in a door with a porthole. He goes inside.

Close the door behind you.

Hanta does.

Inside it's warm and even darker. Burning in one corner of the room is a qulliq lamp, a flat instrument made of soapstone, filled with sperm whale blubber and with protruding wicks made of moss from just outside the city. The only furniture is a bed. There are some figures, covered up, sleeping on it. Sitting cross-legged on the floor beside the bed is Kinngap Mountain, with a few bottles and a wooden tray of muktuk, raw whale meat, in front of him.

Ah, says Kinngap. Hanta Huntsman. Sit.

Hanta sits down on the opposite side of the tray. Next to it lies an ulu knife, a semicircular blade made of caribou antler, with a decorative wooden handle. Hanta can smell the sweat of the man across from him and the blubber on the tray. He can feel his mouth watering.

Kinngap's body is glistening and vast, pouring over his crossed legs, almost completely covering them up. His forehead wrinkles and also sags, coming down onto his eyes, as if he had too many things on his mind.

Hanta Huntsman, son of Tarkik Moon and Yekaterina Stepanova, recites Kinngap Mountain ritually. Where've you been? I missed you.

Hanta doesn't reply.

You're my favorite Métis, continues Kinngap cheerlessly. My spirits esteem your spirits.

Huntsman says nothing. On the other side of the bed is a door, through which he can hear a sound he doesn't recognize: irregular blows on the floorboards, loud and dull.

Kinngap starts an oration. He talks at length and gesticulates passionately, his thick fingers glistening with animal fat. He speaks an ignorant blend of the local languages, Yup'ik blending into Inuktitut, and that into Iñupiaq, and all of them Kinngap uses badly. When he finishes, the men look one another in the eye, and in Mountain's eyes there is no tension, which troubles Hanta even more. The Huntsman can understand all of the languages Kinngap intermingles, but even so he has only a foggy concept of what the speech may have been about.

Something thumps the floor behind the door, louder and quieter, louder and quieter. Maybe people are fucking in there, guesses Hanta.

What do you want, he asks Kinngap in English.

Hanta Huntsman, comes the reply. Kinngap also switches to English. Hanta, you've got your grandfather's name and spirit. A great fisherman and a clever old murderer, your grandpa and that tenacious bear spirit of his. Men like your grandpa determined how powerful we are and are still determining it. The bear spirit is with you now, always and forever. A shadow among shadows.

Someone wriggles in the bed. Someone pounds the floor behind the door.

You've got two souls, son, continues Kinngap. Don't forget that. I remember when you were born. Your grandpa's bear spirit came back unexpectedly and looked for space for itself inside you. And then it tore your mother apart.

Huntsman swallows hard.

You carry the spirit of your mother's murderer, Hanta.

What do you want?

I am Kinngap, I am Mountain. You are Hanta Huntsman, you are son of Tarkik, son of Moon. You are the son of a shaman and grandson of a fisherman and murderer. You are easy to find because you've got a bear in your shadow. In my shadow, there's a fly sneaking around. Oh, how I would prefer a predator, Kinngap raises his eyes toward the ceiling, a predator whose mind spins with the first sip of blood. Wouldn't I prefer that to a little creature with this predilection for rubbish and shite? Except nobody notices flies, Hanta. And it's hard to spot them in shadow.

What do you want, Kinngap.

She'll go on the masts, says Mountain quietly, picking up the knife. If she doesn't give back what she borrowed. That and the costs of borrowing.

You rotten son of a bitch, thinks Hanta.

Kinngap leans over the tray and slices off a strip of whale blubber with skin on one end, then divides it in two.

Eat, Hanta. Freshly thawed. For you.

Kinngap puts a piece in his mouth.

She doesn't have the money, says Hanta. I don't have the money either—for now. I'll earn it back, at the lumber field. Or working for you, on your transports.

Eat, urges Kinngap with his mouth full. Your gums are swollen. Eat when I offer it to you, I had it thawed just for you.

The men ate in silence. The blubber in his mouth grows oily and sweetish. His teeth can't bite through the piece of skin, Hanta chews it, gulping again and again. Pink liquid drips from the tray onto the floor. The thumping behind the door subsides momentarily, then starts up again.

She borrowed quite a bit of money, continues Kinngap Mountain. And isn't paying it back.

You could have sent for me when she came to ask for it.

Kinngap snorts in response.

She's sick, says Hanta.

She took my money, says Mountain with a crooked smile, because that white healer who decorates his chest with the crucified god promised he would cure her.

Dowie, yeah. John Alexander Dowie.

You see, Hanta, at least I don't make empty promises.

She's sick, repeats Huntsman.

Take her to a shaman, to your father, let him search for her missing spirit.

I have, thinks Hanta, but he doesn't say it out loud.

Someone has to earn back that money.

Hanta reflects.

Please, Kinngap, do this for me, Hanta says quietly.

If I don't get it, she goes on the masts.

Huntsman doesn't respond, he just chews the meat. He can tell the decision has been made.

There's one young seal, says Kinngap, who has to be put to bed. A cunning spirit that's got his eye on other spirits. And on my money.

Hanta rubs his eyes, the stuffiness of the room reinforcing his fatigue.

I don't want to do that, he shakes his head. I can work.

That's what I mean.

Not like that.

Not like what, snarls Kinngap, leaning over the tray. His lower lip trembles with rage. Hanta can see the muktuk in his mouth.

You've done it before, he drawls. Don't say no.

I have no history, replies Hanta.

The sound coming from behind the door is distracting him, making it harder to think. Kinngap notices this and glances toward the door. That's my dog, he explains with a crooked smile. The dog's banging his tail on the floor.

Hanta raises his eyebrows. He's only seen a dog in pictures. He's thirsty, but Kinngap hasn't offered him the contents of any of the bottles.

Kinngap explains who he means and where Hanta's supposed to go, then rises from the floor. Hanta does too. The two obese men look into one another's eyes and only now is it clear that Hanta towers over his host by a full head. There is frost in Kinngap's gaze.

A bear, a shadow among shadows. Bear will go hunting for seal. So it was, is and shall be, Hanta.

The same tiny, silent man leads Huntsman back to the passageway. The etherites are lying where they were. Hanta angrily spits the chewed-up piece of whale skin onto one of them.

Kinngap Mountain, one of the most important businessmen in the Docks, came to these lands along with a Hudson's Bay Company expedition. Back then he was called Sir Sidney Calvert and arrived here as an educated geologist, naturalist and, when necessary, surgeon, born in the suburbs of Edinburgh, Scotland. A voice of the Docks and a joke of the Docks, thinks Hanta about Kinngap's twists of fate. He descends through lower and lower passageways, heading Southward. He emerges into the fresh air and sees day awakening over the City. He lets himself be swallowed by the morning wave of hustle and bustle. It's a few days until the harvest and he can tell people are hungry and tired. The milky glow of daylight doesn't help, Hanta is cold. The snow creaks under his boots.

6.

Hanta doesn't have the energy to go back home. Even thinking about Gloria makes his knees stop working.

Instead he goes to visit his father. His father lives in a one-room basement in a quadrangle of tenements that mainly houses employees of the nearby steel mill. The apartment is tiny and windowless, but fairly warm. Hanta knocks on the door, but no one opens. He turns the knob and, seeing the door is unlocked, goes into his father's house.

Tarkik Moon is lying in the darkness on the floor, on a makeshift bed made of animal skins. His old bed has vanished somewhere. The basement reeks of a man sick on booze. Hanta checks the lamps; the oil one on the table is empty and so is the qulliq lying in the corner of the room. He props the door open using the only stool, letting in the half-light from the hallway.

Tarkik Moon lifts his head, his dry neck barely able to hold it up. Tarkik is an angakkuq, a shaman who can track down spirits, drive them away or summon them, and speak to them.

Tarkik, when he first looked into his baby son's eyes, perceived that Hanta would also be an angakkuq, that his grandfather's spirit was strong inside him. Only he soon learned Hanta didn't want to be an angakkuq.

Tarkik opens an eye.

Hanta didn't want to be an angakkuq when his father still had some authority over him, and still doesn't want to be. Hanta Huntsman, only son of Tarkik Moon, hates the bear spirit inside him.

Tarkik closes his eye. The sight of his son makes him think again of the bear spirit lurking in Hanta. The spirit of Tarkik's father and Hanta's grandfather, the man who murdered the only woman for whom Tarkik felt any emotion.

Shit, he moans to his son, glancing at the open door, you're letting the winter in.

Hanta stands over his father. The siren at the steel mill is summoning its workers to labor; someone is walking down the stairs from the apartments above.

What do you want, asks Tarkik, not rising from his makeshift bed.

What happened to the bed?

What happened to the bed, says his father mockingly. Is that why you're here?

Interpret my dreams.

His father sighs.

You can't afford it.

Oh, come on.

Well, can you?

Hanta doesn't respond.

Buy me some vodka.

And then you'll interpret them?

Do you know any angakkuit that interpret dreams for vodka?

Hanta takes a look in the closet. He's wearing an old jacket made of cotton from the City's greenhouses; for the lumber field he needs something heavier. He eyes up his father's Inuit parka, made of two sealskins sewn together with the hair facing outward. Tarkik isn't fat like Hanta, but the parka luckily closes around the son's belly. His father peers at him from the bed.

I've got to go to the lumber field.

And what happened to your parka?

What happened to yours, teases Hanta.

The men smile at one another.

Take some gloves too, says Tarkik. Mine are better than the crappy ones you've got.

His son nods and does so. He digs around a little more in a dresser drawer and takes out a whalebone knife that he slips into his boot.

His father's eyes display a care and worry that Hanta has not seen in a long time.

Lock the door, he says to his father and leaves. He doesn't hear the scrape of the lock, but he doesn't turn back.

The City is now fully awake. The narrow streets of the South are full of women, children and the elderly. No sun today, thinks Hanta, glancing above the roofline. But at least it shouldn't snow. Though on second thought, maybe it would be better if it did.

On the square in front of the train terminal he uses his last money to buy a cup of hot tea and potato pancakes with onions. He dips them in a bowl of heated oil. Other men are eating

alongside, standing by the same tall table. He and this same company relieve themselves on a trash heap in an alley by the terminal, and he cackles along with the rest as rats flee from the piss, squeaking. We'll eat them tonight, says someone cheerfully, marinated in piss.

Hanta goes to Kinngap's man and then stands in a little group of people waiting for the narrow-gauge train to the lumber field. Someone offers him a self-rolled cigarette. They do their best not to look at the cutthroats on the ramp across from them, sitting on scattered barrels of ether, alcohol, meat or maybe something else too. The goons have red stubble and cotton caps old enough to remember sea voyages.

The brakes of the approaching locomotive squeal so loudly that everyone covers their ears. Hanta feels the vibrations deep in his belly. The steam engine, with room to seat two dozen lumberjacks in the rear, is pulling several dozen cars hauling wood from the lumber field. Men get into the locomotive and take seats on the tightly packed benches. The boiler makes the interior of the locomotive hot, and blowers warm the passenger area. Most of the lumberjacks remove their parkas; their bare torsos and shoulders glisten with sweat. No one wipes off the steamed-up windows. Some of the men are drinking. A few laugh at a friend who's reading an out-of-date newspaper. In time, the conversations die down and the warmth of the locomotive puts them to sleep. The journey is long. Hanta dozes. He feels good, he doesn't want the ride to end.

The ride ends. The lumberjacks get dressed and go out into the cold gripping the little station in the hills. The forests here are thickly encrusted in frozen snow. Getting wood for the City is a job that combines mountain climbing and traditional logging.

Hanta is smoking a bummed cigarette, shielded from the wind between two gigantic log piles, and he watches the gasoline tractors using hydraulic grippers to form another pile. Next he

goes to speak to someone who looks like a foreman. The foreman tells him to go way up the hill. All right, thinks Hanta, and, after tying his hood tight around his head, he takes a long road up, alongside flumes hewn into the ice so logs can be sent sliding down. The men he passes along the way overseeing the flumes don't ask him anything. From uphill he can hear the metallic wail of saws, growing louder as he climbs. Outside the city you can also hear more clearly the crack of the ice blocks moving around the area, as if the ice were squabbling with the engines.

After a half hour or more, the road bends and levels out. The flumes end. Hanta gives a wide berth to a skidder, a fume-belching, vibrating machine the size of a barrack whose cables drag lumber from the felling site. The crew working around him are shouting back and forth in a language he doesn't know. The fresh smell of wood almost makes Huntsman dizzy. He keeps walking. The trunks, pulled downhill by the skidder's cables, look to him like gigantic insects fleeing the noise of the saws.

He reaches the site. A few barracks stand where the logging is penetrating the erstwhile forest. Portable stoves thaw the wood before the men go to work on it. Hanta, who has been to a lumber field before, can see it's black spruce, not the worst trees to fell. The men, working in small teams, don't stop working. The stoves keep the little valley warm. Huntsman takes off his hood.

Someone asks him what's brought him here. Hanta waits until he's caught his breath from the strenuous climb, then tells them who he's looking for. They point out one of the climbers high up on a trunk. Hanta waits until the man comes down, and the waiting makes his stomach hurt. He can see he's being watched. Finally the man is down. He's young, smiley and handsome. Huntsman goes up to him and with a few quick motions drives a knife into his exposed neck.

The man silently slides to the ground. Hanta looks around, and shouts that Kinngap sent him. They stare at him and no one moves. Hanta slowly wipes the knife on the pant leg of the man he killed. The leg is still trembling, but Huntsman knows it's a matter of time. He rubs a little snow between his fingers and leaves it, melted, on the corpse's mouth. Drink, seal spirit, whispers the bear spirit.

Kinngap Mountain! Hanta stands up and warns everyone once more. Loudly and clearly. Kinngap Mountain! Then he heads back down the hill.

As he walks down to the station, he looks at the City in the distance. It's fascinating and a little frightening, beautiful and ugly at the same time. On its edge, in a triangle between the smoking factory district and the logging stations, the sky-blue of the ice is scored with a dozen or more oil wells. The wells work rhythmically and unceasingly, an army of steel colossi.

And gray all around. Gray-white and gray-blue, gray ice and snow, frozen water and earth, light and dark, and everything in this gray so uncertain.

They must have telegraphed from the mountain to the outpost by the station at its foot. They've spotted Hanta and are now staring as he approaches. No one accosts him and Huntsman waits alone for the narrow-gauge train to leave for the city. He can see they've sent the dead man's body, wrapped in a quilt and tied up in rope, down the flume, from which it has now fallen from the icy gutters, struck the logs, flown up and, after spinning a few times, landed with a thump on the stacked lumber.

Hanta reflects on the lack of respect Southern people have for the body after death. He wonders if he's even allowed to think that. His forearm hurts from the blows he dealt the dead man.

They load the body onto the same steam engine Huntsman is riding. They've pulled the dead man's hood over his head, not covering his face. The steam engine sets off and no one looks at Hanta. The men doze. Hanta doesn't nod off. He wonders how many men riding with him are going back to their children. He rubs his eyes, but his throat and chest feel oddly tight, as if the muktuk from Kinngap wasn't fresh. He wonders whether the pigs will be waiting for him in the City. Or people who will want to do to him what he did up at the logging site.

When he leaves the steam engine, no one is waiting for him. Hanta feels relief and at the same time a vague lack, as if the City has let him down again. Dusk is settling in amid the buildings. The lumberjacks sleepily leave the locomotive, giving Huntsman a wide berth. The train doesn't wait, it moves on to bring the wood to the sawmills. Hanta finds Kinngap's man in the crowd.

Done.

The man doesn't respond and glances over his shoulder at Hanta, observing the people on the ramp hanging around the dead body and not really knowing what to do with it.

I need a little money, Huntsman says more quietly.

Fuck off, comes the reply.

I'm not leaving until I get a little money. I need to buy food.

Kinngap's man looks him in the eye and, after sighing, places a few coins on the barrel next to them.

At the market, which is winding down, Hanta buys some potato pancakes, a little dried fish and, after a moment's hesitation, a portion of the cheapest akutaq, compressed suet mixed with flecks of meat and sweet berries. He leaves some of the pancakes and fish at his father's. The basement is still unlocked. Tarkik Moon is sleeping on his makeshift bed, drunk. His son

leaves him some food on the table and hangs the parka back up in the wardrobe. He puts on his own, lighter jacket.

Once night has fallen he goes home through the narrow alleys of the densest Southern district. The streets are underlit and full of people returning from the factories, who greet Hanta on the way. His jacket now stinks of the den his father lives in, and the smell is oddly soothing.

The only sources of light on the whole narrow street are the glowing windows of the St. George pub. The saint's image has never appeared over the door, and the pub's name on the sign, painted long ago, has already been erased by the winter. Huntsman can hear the hubbub coming from inside and wonders whether to step in, since he has enough for a few rounds of the cheapest beer. He greets the men peeing beneath the windows and, thinking better of it, goes into the tenement across from the alehouse.

The stairwell is unlit and Hanta climbs in the dark to the highest floor. He knocks. Elder Madam Daphne O'Higgins opens the door. He gives her the food and takes off his jacket, and the woman peers at him.

You've got blood on your face.

It isn't mine.

Mrs. Daphne O'Higgins pauses a long while before replying. I'll brew you some coffee, she finally says.

Has she gotten up today, Hanta asks her, before his mother-in-law goes out into the kitchen.

No.

Huntsman goes to the bedroom and closes the door behind him. He gets into bed beside the woman who's lying there. Gloria opens her eyes and smiles at the sight of her husband.

I bought you some akutaq, says Hanta Huntsman to his wife. Gloria closes her eyes and doesn't open them again. Lie here with me, she says. Her husband does as she wishes. Gloria, daughter of Elder Madam Daphne O'Higgins and John Doe, quickly falls asleep and Hanta doesn't know how long he lies there beside her in the dark, breathing in the smell of her skin.

He leaves the bedroom and, after drinking some cold tea, goes down to the pub to spend the rest of his money on beer. A newsboy is lifting up the latest copies of the local paper over his head.

Union activist murdered at logging site!

People accost him at the pub, but he doesn't talk to anyone. He reflects on how remarkable his wife is, for better and for worse.

Gloria is child sick. She dreams of children when she falls asleep, and dreams of them when she's awake, as she silently drifts through the house. She wants to have even just one with Hanta, though winter has come and times are ending. They've been trying for one as long as they've known one another, it's been going on far too long and Gloria still hasn't gotten pregnant.

Maybe it's you, she said to him once, maybe it's because of you, Hanta. He heard no reproach in her voice then, but rather deduction and a constructive attempt to find a solution. Spooked, he took too long to reply, or maybe she just spotted something in his face. He looked her in the eye and understood he would have to tell her. Therefore he admitted: he already had a child, it didn't matter what kind and it didn't matter with whom. She listened to him as she gazed out the window, and didn't say anything more; they never broached the subject again. A few days later, Hanta found out she'd gone to Kinngap for money, which she'd given to Elder Sir

John Alexander Dowie, a quack healer from the palace in the North. Dowie—of course—didn't cure Gloria. Nor did he give back the money he'd taken from her.

Hanta finishes his last beer, his eyes seeing the pink bubbles dripping from the perforated neck of the man he'd murdered today to pay off his wife's debt to Kinngap. He doesn't believe he'll get back the money Gloria gave to Dowie. Anyway, he doesn't think he wants it anymore, he's earned it back today. He makes another decision. He'll go to Kinngap Mountain to help him mete out justice.

How hard is it to send a fraudster priest to the ice?

It's late when Hanta gets back home, into the bedroom and into bed. Gloria lifts up the quilt so he can move closer.

I love you Hanta, his wife whispers to him, not opening her eyes.

7.

In December eighteen hundred and eighty-seven.

Captain William Mayhew and his daughter Caroline.

The *Rhea Silvia*, a whaling ship under the command of Captain William Mayhew, sank the night after the hunt.

They didn't manage to kill the sperm whale, but they bagged an orca, plus plenty of fish and birds. It was a good evening. They stuffed themselves full, and the captain ordered them to distribute the remaining rum, and when that ran out, he brought the last bottle from his own supplies. After midnight, the *Rhea Silvia* struck a drifting iceberg, which tore open the hull a

dozen or so feet from the prow. The ship sank quickly, though they managed to launch all three lifeboats in time.

They called back and forth in the darkness, but a thickening snowstorm smothered the light in their lanterns. At dawn, the sea calmed and the boats got close enough together to communicate. There were twenty of them in the boats, including the captain and his daughter. Five were missing. They had eight guns and freshly cooked supplies. The birds over their heads were going crazy.

They figured they would die. There was no one who could come rescue them. William Mayhew kept his eye on the lifeboat that held huddling Caroline. He wondered if he should ask God to let them pass away painlessly, before his daughter's baby came into the world.

They didn't die. For almost two days and two nights, they drifted in a bizarre fog, thick and icy. Frozen through, they kept drifting in and out of contact. When on the second evening the mists lifted somewhat, they could make out the silhouettes of mountains surrounding their boats on almost every side, as if some giant had scooped up the lifeboats in a ladle and transferred them from the ocean to a complex of lakes surrounded by high hills. Some got it into their heads that maybe they had all died without noticing and ended up on the other side, and as a reward for their stoutheartedness, they had arrived together, and they only had to row to shore to end the journey that begins when the heart beats for the last time.

Mayhew decided on the north shore. They reached it after nightfall. A crust of ice transitioned smoothly onto solid land, which quickly climbed upward in a steep, ice-covered hill. They pitched a makeshift camp a few hundred feet from the water, using the overturned boats. They got up late. One of the harpooners, the largest and strongest of them all, didn't wake up again. To the north they could make out the profiles of mountains. They looked different from

the ones they were camped out beneath—they seemed to be forested. That sight, unexpected and treacherous, provoked an eruption of hysterical joy that ended quickly and sapped their energy. They left the dead man under one of the boats. From the two remaining, they hammered together a sled for their supplies and for Caroline.

She didn't want to get on it and the captain yelled at her for a long time. They had never seen him like that before. He kept brandishing his fists, bellowing obscenity after obscenity, and they were afraid he'd hit her.

Caroline started feeling worse and then she agreed. They moved onward over the ice, north, toward the hills where they thought there were trees growing. They marched through an irregular labyrinth of icy structures, and the mountains rising in the west quickly stole the daylight from them. They were moving at the speed of a slowly walking child. Mayhew didn't stray from the sled his daughter was riding in. After a few hours they felt exhausted. There were fewer birds; the travelers watched them, circling high, out of range of their rifles.

One of the sailors fell and broke his leg. The men held him down while Caroline set his bones. He screamed louder than the wind, then he passed out. They placed him beside her on the sled and continued on. Caroline nestled against that limp body, drawing warmth from it and lending her own. When the sailor regained consciousness, they looked one another in the eye, surprised, but they didn't move apart.

After noon, they found the fresh corpse of a sperm whale. It lay in their path, as if thrown down from heaven specially for them. They worked on it until evening, then sat down for supper around a fire. Their clothes were stiff with the animal's hot blood. The backs of their necks steamed with sweat. The warm flesh made them a little dizzy and their bloodshot eyes flashed as

they gnawed undercooked hunks of the animal, breathing in the smell of blubber melted over two additional campfires nearby.

They dreamed of gunshots and tropical storms.

In the morning they continued on, tired and freezing cold, still heading north. Once it had cleared up, in the distance they spotted sharp, tall shapes, similar to bare trees. No one said it out loud, but each of them prayed they were ships' masts.

It was snowing, but they struggled on, along the frozen shore and in the shadow of an iceberg.

When at dusk they heard human voices, the captain thought he'd lost his mind. The moon was thin and kept slipping behind clouds darker than the sky itself. They sat down for dinner around a campfire, lit in a hollow between two especially tall slices of ice, and that is probably why they weren't noticed at once.

Caroline heard the strangers first. She hushed the others and then they heard clearly: raised voices and shouts in a language they didn't know, but could recognize. Russian. The sounds were coming from nearby and weren't intended for them. They leapt up, the captain first. Seizing a lamp, he climbed up onto one of the ice blocks.

Captain William Mayhew! he shouted into the night. Captain of the *Rhea Silvia*! A three-masted whaler under the flag of the United States of America!

He was answered with a deafening shout, in which they heard fear and amazement. Then silence. Then a rifle shot extremely close by.

Mayhew jumped down among his men. They extinguished the lamp, hissing curses. A few dug up the campfire, and the rest lunged for their firearms.

Don't shoot, shouted the captain, who knows whether to his men or the others, don't shoot!

He seized his daughter by the arm and pulled her down low behind the sled. He left her there and ran to the bag where he kept his revolver. The gun was gone, he'd lost it on the way or one of his men had taken it. The sailors of the *Rhea Silvia* were lurking around, hurriedly loading revolvers and rifles, hiding behind whatever they could and watching out for an attack from the direction in which they'd heard the voices and the gunshot. The sailor with the broken leg was still in his sled. He pulled his blanket all the way up to his eyes.

Which of you speaks Russian? The captain was once again climbing up onto the ice block, this time on his belly.

No one answered him.

The meager moon peeked out from behind the clouds, illuminating the figures hunched behind shelters of ice and the sled. Mayhew's men were waiting with hearts hammering, their freezing hands clutching weapons they had no desire to use.

Don't shoot, William snarled again over his shoulder. The captain peered out over the edge of the block he'd crawled onto. He didn't notice anyone.

Then came a cannonade, from what felt like every direction. Rifle shots, shouts here and there in Russian and completely incomprehensible insults. The crew of the *Rhea Silvia* hid behind their makeshift cover in nervous anticipation. The sailors realized they weren't the ones being shot at. They waited.

Suddenly a shadow popped up out of the ice blocks, leaping in a few bounds over two sailors crouching behind a chest removed from the sled. The shadow raced onward. It tripped on a log and fell into the firepit. Sparks shot up all around. It was a young man in a winter uniform

who they didn't know. O chyort, whispered the lad, looking around the faces surrounding him. They didn't move, they didn't say a single word.

The lad leapt to his feet and raced on into the dark.

Then shots started coming at them. Bullets embedded themselves into the ice or smashed into the wood of the sled with a bang.

Hold your fire, roared William Mayhew, after once again hopping down among his men. He dropped to the ground beside Caroline. Shots were coming from four, maybe five rifles. It was the first time in his life the captain heard bullets whizzing toward him. It was hard to hold out with a full bladder. He didn't want to wet himself while lying beside his daughter. His men were starting to return fire, blasting away incoherently into the darkness around.

Enough! Caroline raised her head above the ice. Enough! she roared with all her lungs and with all her heart, doing her best to outshout the gunshots. Her hoarse cry sounded entirely like a man's. Enough!

Caroline, her father reached out a hand to her, but she shoved it away.

The shooting stopped.

We're Americans! Caroline rolled onto her side, and then struggled up into a sitting position. A-mer-i-cans! If you don't stop shooting I'm going to have a fucking baby right here!

Silence answered her.

Captain William Mayhew! her father tried once again. Captain of the *Rhea Silvia* sailing under the American flag!

Thomas Sullivan! they heard in response. Geographer in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company and faithful servant of the government of the Dominion of Canada!

The voice was coming from nearby.

I am approaching, captain!

Understood, Mayhew shouted back. Hold fire, he snarled to his men. He felt dizzy, although he was still sitting on the ground.

They could hear him coming, heavy steps on the creaking snow. He emerged from between the same ice blocks through which the fleeing Russian had run into their camp. Thomas Sullivan was tall, broad-shouldered and straight-backed. He swept his eyes curiously over the camp. He was resting the barrel of his gun on his left forearm, and it seemed to Mayhew that the Canadian was acting like he was having fun on a hunting trip.

Oh, said Sullivan with a smile, spotting Caroline as she struggled to her feet. He bore the expression of someone who'd come across a rare animal.

Good evening, he greeted them.

Good evening, responded Mayhew automatically.

Thomas Sullivan looked at Caroline, waiting for her greeting. She only nodded.

I'm sorry we were shooting in this direction. We've been chasing them over the ice since dawn, all the way from the settlement.

Settlement?

Yes, the settlement. Juneau. A frozen port on the other side of the channel, you must have seen it before the sun went down.

We saw something, replied the captain slowly, observing a few men who had started to emerge from all around. They were armed, panting, and not showing the enthusiasm of the man who was clearly their commander.

That all of them?

Yep, all of them, replied one of the strangers. He set down his rifle on the ice and rested his hands on his thighs, catching his breath.

Mayhew resisted the urge to glance at his daughter. He didn't know if they were counting the lad who'd run through their camp and disappeared into the dark.

Why were you chasing them?

Sullivan considered.

They attacked us when we were trying to get into their outpost, or maybe I should say, fort. They shouldn't be here, Russian Alaska starts a few dozen miles northwest. The whole Alexander Archipelago, by decision of the government of the Dominion of Canada, has been annexed to British Columbia. The coast has come under the interim administration of the Hudson's Bay Company.

William understood none of this and felt a worsening headache.

The Hudson's Bay Company was a large North American corporation that had grown on hunting and the fur trade, and recently, he had heard, was investing in mining. He'd encountered their ships, representatives and warehouses, but in ports on the East Coast, not here. And that wasn't even the strangest thing.

Did you say Juneau, Mr. Sullivan?

Yes sir, captain.

How is that possible, thought Mayhew.

Thomas Sullivan read something on his face. We're standing on the shores of Douglas Island, he explained.

Mayhew had memorized the maps of the West Coast of the continent, he'd had hundreds of hours to learn them while they were fleeing the winter northward. What were the odds of them

sailing from the south between Baranof Island and Prince of Wales Island, and only wrecking on the ice forming around Douglas Island? Or maybe, it occurred to him, they had made it this far in the lifeboats.

Captain, said Caroline.

She was bent over the sled with the sailor with the broken leg.

He's dead, papa. She pulled the blanket off the man's chest, showing an entry wound in his neck. The blood had started to freeze on his clothes.

Mayhew glanced at Sullivan and felt it grow unbearably hot under his captain's coat.

Oh my, said Thomas Sullivan quietly, that's unfortunate.

Unfortunate, repeated Caroline. She looked at her father. The whole surviving crew of the *Rhea Silvia* looked at its captain.

William Mayhew did not say a word at that moment. For the first time since the start of their roaming, he thought nothing and felt nothing, as if his soul had vaporized, leaving only a void.

Enough of these questions, said Thomas Sullivan, and everyone around him could sense a change of tone. My feet hurt. Come with us to Juneau, we've got a fair crowd there. He smiled broadly at them, glancing in Caroline's direction. I can see you've got fresh meat. Would you like to offer us some?

8.

That man stole your spirit, said Nauja Gull, his Inuit lover, one troubled night many years later when William Mayhew, confusing his desire for absolution with romantic love, shared his

deepest-hidden secrets. He stole your spirit, that Mr. Sullivan, she repeated, but luckily your spirit escaped on its own and found its way home to you. Your spirit is strong, she told him.

Sometimes I see it.

Sometimes you see it.

Sometimes I see it, she nodded, an animal from your world that walks on two paws and has spines instead of fur, and eats rays of sunlight.

There is no such animal, replied Mayhew.

Sometimes I see it, repeated Nauja Gull with conviction.

That night on Douglas Island, Captain William Mayhew didn't say a word to Sullivan. A week later the Canadian gave the order to hang a few local boys who'd swiped a keg of alcohol from the Company's temporary storehouse.

For stealing the property of the Hudson's Bay Company, Sullivan declaimed, sprawled on the priest's chair in a small Orthodox chapel confiscated from the Russian clerics to use as the first city hall, I have no choice but to sentence you to death by hanging. This is absolutely necessary, he continued solemnly, though I am aware it is unfortunate.

Then William Mayhew went outside and checked his revolver. Next he went back inside, walked up to Sullivan and, after placing the barrel to the man's head,

—unfortunate—

he fired.

But that night back on the island, the captain did nothing and said nothing. They ate together in silence, the Canadians and the sailors from the *Rhea Silvia*. After the meal the sailors wrapped up their dead comrade in a blanket. Two dark-skinned harpooners, who Mayhew had always thought were brothers, also sang him a song, sad and ethereal, in a language that sounded

like a blowing trade wind. Next they all followed the Canadians toward the settlement Sullivan had spoken about.

Trudging along the frozen channel, they reached Juneau at dawn, and once the gleam of day had slid up the snowy mountain slopes, they beheld dozens of ships trapped in the frozen channel. They looked like terrified sheep.

When the sailors got closer, their eyes opened wide at the sight of crowds of people. A few thousand souls, as scared out of their wits as they were, cramming the decks of the ships, the piers, and the little streets of Juneau, sheltering in makeshift tents and already building primitive wooden huts. They had no idea that they were beholding the embryo of the City, that their world would now end forever with this place and these people.

9.

When winter arrived, the times ended and the freezing ocean caught hundreds of vessels in a deadly trap, their crews starving or freezing to death. Yet some had broken free and, seeing animals instinctively hastening in one direction, raced on after them, to a place emitting a surprising amount of heat. They had no idea they were heading for an experimental Russian electrical plant, a prototype construction built not far from Juneau, at the site of a former Orthodox mission. The Russians had built it illegally as a bridgehead for a further expansion to the East, counting on the global chaos caused by the approaching Storm.

The plant used geothermal energy, obtained from a ring of cores placed in an undersea complex, hastily dug by automatons brought by rail to Alaska all the way from Petrograd. The new, prototype technology, applied quickly and in more extreme conditions than predicted, did

not withstand the blow of winter. Or perhaps more likely, the crew, seeing the worsening atmospheric conditions, lost their nerve and overexploited the cores. Shortly after activation, the electrical plant suffered a failure: the undersea section went awry and, as the Great Storm grew, warmed the area, attracting sea creatures fleeing the ice.

Humans also were drawn to the station, over sea and over the continent, following such game as still survived. That is how the Hudson's Bay Company expedition found itself in Juneau.

They traveled overland, along the coasts, in a long column of vehicles loaded with mining and drilling equipment, guarded by Canadian infantry and cavalry. They were led by Inuit guides. Like a small army, the convoy numbered nearly three hundred people, excepting the indigenous. At its center rolled a mechanical steel behemoth: a massive British dreadnought on four caterpillar tracks, driven by a twelve-person crew. The machine, Her Majesty's Land-Ship *Lord Coventry*, was hauling on its metal back the Generator tower, built in York Factory, Manitoba on the southwest coast of Hudson's Bay.

London had supplied the technology, in their race to find geographical alternatives for the inevitably freezing European motherland. It was decided to use the speedily constructed Generator on the West Coast, in oil-rich lands—there they intended to attempt to organize human population centers based on two separate sources of energy. The plan was secret and, because of worsening atmospheric conditions, largely improvised; there was no time to send scouts to the site. They simply set off, loading the untested Generator onto the crumbling dreadnought.

When the Canadians reached the west, they headed northward along the coast, following game that was fleeing toward the warmth. That is how they ended up in Juneau, where they found the Russian electric plant, which had not been there five years before. Thomas Sullivan,

his imagination fired by visions of medals pinned on his chest by the Prime Minister of the Dominion of Canada (or maybe even the Queen herself), gave the order to attack. The Canadians could immediately tell the plant was in poor condition. The Russians put up a surprising resistance. Both sides were convinced they would soon get reinforcements. They were both sorely mistaken. Winter had come and the times had ended; no reinforcements would be coming anywhere now.

After two days of frustratingly unsuccessful skirmishes in a harsh and growing snowstorm, Sullivan ordered the Generator to be unloaded from the dreadnought. HMLS *Lord Coventry* was used as a battering ram to break through the fencing and drive deep into the wall of the main building of the Russian complex. Before they succumbed, the Russians had time to set the vehicle on fire. That is what caused the explosion.

The underground section was consumed in the fire, destroying most of the equipment. The underwater part went completely haywire, blasting out electric pulses that killed the animals crowded into the bay in search of warmth. Next the plant stopped working. Then the sea froze.

At the same time, Sullivan's soldiers fought their way into the grounds of the plant. Most of the surviving Russians surrendered. Some were shot on the spot, a dozen or so managed to escape. Sullivan, clearly pleased at such a turn of events, quickly organized pursuit groups and led one himself. That was when, chasing several escapees from the electric plant, he encountered the crew of the *Rhea Silvia*.

After William Mayhew shot Thomas Sullivan, the captain was sure he'd be hanged. It was not to be. Sullivan's death was taken with an ill-concealed relief that surprised the captain of the *Rhea Silvia*. Before his revolver had stopped smoking, he felt on him the eyes of the people around. He knew that look well; it was how his crew looked at him when they were awaiting orders.

In those days Juneau was overrun by violence, fear, mistrust and desperation. They were all watching one another carefully, sometimes leaping at one another's throats: all these merchants, soldiers, whalers, smugglers, thieves and murderers, miners and oil riggers, clergymen, former slaves driven mad by their new unclear status, and former enslavers. As well as people from here—the younger, haughty and proud Métis, in whose veins flowed Russian, French, very young Canadian and old Tlingit blood; and other indigenous people who, like the sailors from the south and west, had arrived here overland from all directions of the north, mixing with local indigenous people and whom soon all the Elder Sirs and Elder Madams from the world before winter would call Inuit.

The settlement and its surroundings were rocked by brawls, looting, lynchings and rapes, which were punished less aggressively than other crimes. Women in Juneau mainly came from the surrounding Canadian settlements and local tribes. In those days, there was one woman for every four men and that proportion satisfied no one. William Mayhew freed all the imprisoned Russians and, sensing that the people needed blood, held a public flogging of several rapists as an example. He made sure it wasn't just indigenous men who were punished, but also two Canadians, a Yankee and a half-savage ship's boy from some exotic southern archipelago.

Many of the women observing the bloody spectacle on the harbor pier became mothers less than a year later.

Caroline Mayhew watched the backs of the men her father had sentenced opening up under subsequent lashes of the whip, and hated herself for how much satisfaction the sight gave her. Then, suddenly, she felt it happening. Her body's violent response implied it would all go quickly.

They carried her inside the Russian plant building; despite everything, that was where it was warmest and cleanest. Her screams echoed down the long corridors that descended toward the areas of the complex that had flooded after the accident. Caroline's blood mingled on the floor with the dried blood of a soldier who'd been shot in that room a few days before. She gave birth after nightfall, bringing two boys into the world. Her father found out after the fact and when, terrified, he ran to see his daughter, he was hurt that she hadn't sent for him. To placate him, Caroline let him choose the twins' names.

The settlement's new leader looked at the two beings, who still looked more like two wet balled-up rags than humans. He looked and he couldn't swallow.

Nicolas, he finally stuttered. Nicolas and Neil.

He glanced at his daughter, because they both knew it all depended on her.

She nodded, forcing herself to smile, and finally permitted herself to sleep. The building where she'd given birth became the seed of the Lazaretto, a hospital for the inhabitants of the City and simultaneously the headquarters of the group of Guardians, as the self-proclaimed doctors whom Caroline would soon lead called themselves.

The tsar's relief force never arrived.

William Mayhew and his crew were soon followed into Juneau by some people who were convinced the world was flat. A peculiar, songful and suspiciously calm group of pilgrims arrived there on two ships sailing, like the *Rhea Silvia*, from California. They didn't know then that these were the last ships that would arrive at the settlement's harbor.

Their first conversation took place a month later. The captain initially thought that his interlocutor was joking when he explained to him that their pilgrimage was aiming for the North Pole, and that the only reason they hadn't reached it was because the winter had foiled their plans. They were talking in a freshly built wooden chapel, which still smelled of pine resin. Young, smiling women were decorating the walls with unsettling paintings of the suffering damned being massacred by spotted Asian beasts and faceless soldiers, under the watchful eye of Christ peering down on all this from above.

Mayhew was talking to the already-aged Samuel Rowbotham, a glib English inventor and writer. Rowbotham, despite his advanced years, had the smooth cheeks of a man who does not need to shave, and a gaze as warm as logs taken from a fireplace. One of the women in the chapel was his wife, and a few others were reportedly his daughters.

The earth is flat, explained Rowbotham to the captain. It forms an enormous, flat disk, on the edges of which rises an ice wall that will remain forever insurmountable to man. And at the center of this disk is the North Pole. Rowbotham paused and glanced over his shoulder, right toward the pole, the captain thought.

A thousand miles overhead is a dome that covers the world. The Sun, Moon and other planets circle beneath it.

Are you aware, sir, Mayhew ventured, that you are saying this to a sailor.

Rowbotham nodded with humility and patience. Those eyes of his, thought William.

You can see, captain, explained Rowbotham, what is happening in the world. You can see the winter. We have hundreds of documented measurements from the last several years showing that temperatures all over the Earth are falling at the same time and to the same level. Therefore the Earth cannot have an ellipsoidal shape. Otherwise the temperatures could not be spread so evenly. The physical phenomenon observed is possible only if the Earth is flat. The laws of physics, Captain Mayhew. The laws of physics rule out any alternatives.

Samuel Rowbotham paused and waited for a counterargument.

William was silent.

The chapel smelled like the shipyards the captain remembered from back in New England.

Listening in on their conversation was a fairly young, bearded man, holding in his hands a small Black baby. The man kept whispering something to a girl painting four horsemen trampling a crowd of unfortunates under the hooves of their massive steeds. The painting was ugly and inept, but in some unclear way that made it more eloquent.

One moment please, captain.

Rowbotham disappeared through the door of the sacristy. Mayhew was left alone. The women glanced at him. The bearded man placed the infant on the altar and, after reaching into a basket next to it, set about changing the baby's diaper.

Rowbotham returned after a moment and handed the captain a pamphlet. Everything is in here, he said emphatically. Mayhew glanced at the cover. *Zetetic Astronomy: A Description of Several Experiments which Prove that the Surface of the Sea is a Perfect Plane and that the Earth is Not a Globe!* The book's author was Samuel Rowbotham.

Please read it, captain. This and Scripture. Scripture above all. In your shoes I would devote particular attention to studying the records of the Book of Revelation.

William realized where the fire in Rowbotham's eyes came from. The Englishman never blinked.

In nineteen hundred and seventeen, in the thirtieth year of the City and the winter, Samuel Rowbotham will still be among the living. An old man over a hundred years of age, having outlived his wife and one child after another, he will refuse death, stubbornly awaiting the arrival of Jesus Christ, his lord and master, who will come to the City directly from the North Pole.

The bearded man listening in on that conversation was John Alexander Dowie, a Scottish evangelist, healer and founder of the city's Christian Catholic Apostolic Church. Dowie's position in the City would rise rapidly. He would build up a dynamic Church around him and, having gained influence on the Council, would be actively involved in the life of the City. He would become a sworn enemy of corporal punishment for convicts, and preach love and equality for all people without exception, which will attract to him the poorest inhabitants of the South, and even Métis and Inuit. At the same time, the Scot would gather a fortune in donations offered in the intention of healings and exorcisms. He will buy up a few neighboring houses in the northern district and connect them with a network of passages, stairs and tunnels.

He is the one Hanta Huntsman will decide to kill on a certain unsettled night thirty years later, for stealing his wife's money and her dreams.

December the twenty-second, nineteen hundred and seventeen, the thirtieth year of the existence of the City, the thirtieth year that winter has lasted.

Robin, daughter of John Doe and Caroline Mayhew.

Robin is going to go slice up the beasts.

The harvesters stick together, a little off to the side, blocked off from the rest of the people by a few flaming cast-iron cauldrons. Robin, like the men around her, undresses to her underwear, removing the dress she wore to church. The harvesters went to the service together before sundown, aware that when night came, the electrical plant would awaken, making their expedition possible. The men glance at her and on every inch of her skin she can feel an obvious fact: no stranger has seen her undressed before.

Robin, now in only a shift and pantalettes, approaches the open crate. The fire burning in the cauldrons crackles to the rhythm of her heart, and the heat stings her cheeks and that delicate place between her collarbones, but on the back of her neck she still feels the cold feather of winter. Chills and goosebumps. Robin tosses her dress into the crate, on top of her comrades' more elegant garb.

She returns to the men and as she joins them, she feels freer. Luca hands her some overalls. He is already wearing his: a tight-fitting uniform sewn of caribou fur, with the first layer of bristles facing toward the skin and the second layer facing out again. This will now be Luca's second harvest, but panic dominates his face. His turned-up nose, narrow mouth, prominent eyes: all as if his whole life, his face has been forming for just this moment.

Robin and Luca's gazes meet. The fires in the containers around burn in her friend's eyes.

It's Friday, December 22, the time when the inactive but not completely dead electrical plant comes to life for a few hours, and for one night awakens the sea beasts. The harvesters are gearing up to go collect meat in the labyrinths under the Lazaretto, through which they will carve out a path for themselves deep into the ocean, which has been frozen for thirty years. Robin will go with them.

Gathered in the hangar constructed on the open area between the electrical plant and the fence are three dozen people who, under the command of Elder Sir Nicolas, will venture deep into the plant. People are bustling around giving aid and support. Technicians are tending to three wagons with equipment and reeled-up hoses attached to air pumps, and as many gasoline carriages, each with a trailer, on which the harvesters are to bring out the hot, still steaming meat.

The City has already started celebrating, preparing for tomorrow's feast. No one is getting ready to sleep. The City is drinking, shouting, singing, waiting for dawn so that on the square in front of the Lazaretto they can welcome the brave souls returning from the ocean's depths.

A snowstorm rages high above. Wind howls over the roof of the hangar, constantly sending the loose boards clattering.

As Robin ties up her boots, her wrist throbs in pain. It's the hand she used to smash Neil in the face to win her right to take part in the harvest. She touches the tip of her tongue to her swollen gums in the spot where her brother's fist knocked out her tooth.

A hell of a lump, comments Nicolas.

Robin nods and smiles crookedly.

I think he left me with the root broken off in there.

I'll look you over once we're back.

I'll get Neil to look at it, replies Robin. He made the mess, he should clean it up.

Nicolas cackles and Robin takes a deep breath. It's a nice feeling to have a brother. Luca is subconsciously trying to blend in with the shadows; he always gets shy in her brothers' presence.

The harvesters are preparing their tools. Robin is given a heavy southern-style axe. Luca gets a machete similar to the long Inuit knives.

It's because I'm Métis, he says to Robin, who isn't sure if he's joking.

It's because, comments Nicolas from behind the young man, your arms are out of proportion to the rest of your body.

So because I'm Métis, says Luca with a grin.

Nicolas gives him a squeeze on the shoulder and goes to the equipment wagon. He removes from its case a two-handed gasoline chainsaw, connected to the wagon's engine with a long cable unwound from a spool.

Go ahead, says Nicolas to the operator standing on the vehicle. The conversations die down. The motor snarls a little then starts to roar, and then Nicolas pulls the trigger and the sawblade quickly picks up speed. A steely growl and flashes of the spinning blade. Nicolas, despite his dimensions and strength, can't hold the saw completely still; his broad shoulders vibrate, and the bristles on his jacket wave a little like the grass in the greenhouses.

Nicolas' thick beard can't conceal his smile.

This is what his sons look like, Robin thinks, when someone gives them a new toy. She even smiles herself, with fascination and timidity.

When she was younger, Grandpa Will took her to a logging site. She came back bewildered; she had nightmares for weeks afterward about the machines there.

You're scared, Luca whispers to her.

I don't know, the girl lies.

I get it, the boy lies.

I think I'm scared of reawakened Russian soldiers.

It's just physics. Luca's cheeks are so flushed that it almost completely conceals his pimples.

I know, but still.

Robin ties her hair into a ponytail and puts on a cap. The harvesters put on their helmets and check if their goggles fit, but keep them for now on the steel covers above their eyes. Their faces disappear under the first, thinner layers of their leather masks. They'll put on the second layer when they need more oxygen.

Nicolas puts down the chainsaw and checks the pumps on the wagons again, since after all in civilian life he's an ether technologist. He raises a hand; time to go.

They sort themselves into five-person platoons, each one in front of a wagon with air pumps. Support people attach elastic hoses through which air will flow into the masks if they suddenly end up in a flooded spot or if an awakened beast swallows someone. On every pump wagon there are two men, on each of the carriages another three: a helmsman and a pair inside the trailer to use the pitchfork, wheelbarrow and, if necessary, other equipment.

Robin is in the same platoon as Luca. Their wagon is going second. Nicolas will walk in front of the first. The girl looks around her comrades. They are waddling around, still testing the feel of their cutting tools in their hands.

Silent Inuit spirits, thinks Robin, faceless and preparing for battle.

They'll never be ready, because how could you be.

Robin fastens the inner flap of the mask and tests out opening the air valve. The air from the hoses stinks; the girl takes an unpalatable gulp. She closes the valve. The pump works.

The City-dwellers gather a safe distance from the harvesters' vehicles, as if the people about to set off into the depths of the tsarist plant might infect them with a mysterious and dangerous affliction. Portraitists have set up their easels and are already sketching the heroes of the evening.

Robin glances at her mother and Grandpa Will. She can't really read the looks on their faces. Nicolas gives a signal, the vehicles' helmsmen start the engines. Robin's chest nervously rises and falls; it's happening.

The world around her thickens in a deafening racket, the vehicles' engines roar, winter wails above the roof of the hangar, and her seventeen-year-old heart is outshouting all of it. The exhaust fills the hangar with brown smog. The helmsmen turn on the lights on the vehicles' heads. The axe Robin is holding is heavy and cumbersome.

Mama, thinks Robin, her eyes flitting over Caroline Mayhew's face. Her mother seems to be looking at her son.

Nicolas turns to face his comrades, then, after pointing the chainsaw at the tunnel entrance, moves onward. It's happening.

They move slowly, limited by the speed of the vehicles. The gasoline carriages move in bursts, the pistons driving the axles don't work as fluidly as on locomotives. Three platoons, each with five walkers and two vehicles: the smaller one in front, equipped with strong lamps and air pumps, the larger one in the back, with the meat trailer. They drive down a wide tunnel hewn years ago through the rooms of the plant to let the carriages drive in.

They leave the lights of the hangar long behind them, and then they imperceptibly go dark. The harvesters press on through the murk, which is dense, impenetrable and alive, concealing something inhospitable, or maybe instead *made of* something inhospitable.

The beams of the headlights are like mechanical eyes that can peer into the past. One flash after another of the world before winter: desks shoved aside and chairs overturned, ransacked cabinets, tile stoves and stacks of pans under a table, open lockers in a changing room, destroyed lathes in a machine shop, and everywhere, two-headed black eagles hanging on walls, their tongues rippling and three crowns glistening above their pair of beautiful avian heads.

They are following the dried, brown trail of previous harvests: boot prints and nematode-like wheel tracks in the puddles of blood that dripped from the meat trailers.

Robin was counting her steps but quickly lost track. The exhaust stings her eyes, but for now she leaves her goggles off. The platoon in front of them has almost disappeared in the stinking cloud. The harvesters forge ahead as if taking a passage to another world.

Some in the City believe that the electrical plant opens a shortcut to the very heart of the flat Earth. That this path goes closer to Christ the Polar Explorer, awaiting Man at the center of the disk.

The girl glances at Luca walking alongside her. She'd like to stop him, take off both of his masks and give him a peck on the cheek. Luca feels her eyes on him and turns toward her, but then Robin sees it isn't Luca, because she doesn't recognize the eyes at all. Luca must be one of the other men marching along.

Someone runs out of the darkness behind her and Robin almost jumps. The figure is running toward the head of the column. After a moment the vehicles and people halt, but they don't turn off their engines. Now Robin can hear the engine of the vehicle behind her running

differently somehow. The runner returns, with the massive figure of Nicolas walking alongside. They're going back to the third platoon. There they talk for a few minutes and seem to be inspecting the vehicle.

She can see Nicolas with two other harvesters beside him. Robin knows her brother is furious—she can tell by how he's moving. She can also see the vehicles of the third platoon are starting to move away. They're going back to the hangar and no one needs any explanation—the vehicles often break down, spitefully choosing to do so when they're most needed, and even the longest preparations can't make up for it. It's happened before that only one made it to the beasts, as if this place had an effect on more than the animals frozen in the ocean and the bodies of the Russians killed during the siege of the plant. That is why the City's residents are afraid of coming here when there isn't a harvest.

It's completely different technology, Grandpa Will explained to her, an electrical plant can't affect internal combustion machines, you can't chat away in English with someone who only knows Iñupiaq. So he said, but Robin knew better.

Nicolas and two others pass her on their way to the first platoon. One man's gaze pauses longer on the girl, but Robin doesn't know if his eyes show disappointment or the opposite. The rest of the third platoon is returning to the hangar.

They move on.

A new sound breaks through the noise of the engines. How can one describe the indescribable? Robin can't, but she knows what it is. The plant has awakened, and awakened the beasts imprisoned in the ice. The beasts—their throats, mouths, lungs—are making different sounds. The sounds are loud, alien and don't resemble the noises made by living beings.

The harvester walking alongside glances at her. He hears it too. Robin chokes down a gulp.

The lamps pick out of the darkness another kind of destruction. Now it's not only the result of the hammer-work the City's residents use to make room for the harvest vehicles, but the more irregular effects of explosions, fires and collapsing walls and ceilings. They enter a large and high-ceilinged hall, similar to the Generator's control-room. Large cabinets in the middle blink with little multicolored lights, as if humming the melodies of the rainbow. Robin knows that by morning they will go out.

By morning, thinks Robin, good God. She feels as though she has already spent so long here that when she returns to the City, all her loved ones will be long dead.

She suddenly spots a figure imprisoned in a tangle of crushed pipes high up at the ceiling. One has impaled the corpse's chest, and a coagulation of frozen entrails dangles from the tip. The figure is rhythmically moving its arms as if in a gesture of greeting. A hiss emanates from the throat of the frozen man, one that seems quiet, but which reaches them despite the engines' rumbling.

The others look too. An awakened Russian soldier. Robin averts her eyes. She's freezing, and therefore sees more than feels that her left hand is jiggling rhythmically. She has to grip the axe handle very tightly to keep the trembling under control. Robin knows it's because of impulses from the cores that the Russians dug into the ocean floor.

They exit the hall straight into a wide tunnel, which has plenty of room for the vehicles. The tunnel seems to extend far, with tracks running down its middle. They go on, every few hundred feet passing alcoves full of rubble. The twisted remnants of machines that broke down on previous expeditions intermix with the remains of plant infrastructure.

The girl feels pain in her temples. She can't fit all this into her head, in the most literal sense.

Someone coughs and, bending over, spits something out of his mouth. One after another, the men fasten their masks. Robin fastens hers too, opens the valve, and after a moment the nasty air from the pump fills her lungs.

The girl feels the plant's cores working on her. Something is pressing on the soft tissues of her body, crushing the fat in her breasts. She feels burning in her sternum, sort of like indigestion, but she knows it's her heart rebelling. She's short of breath.

Robin.

Robin, the frozen ocean whispers to her.

She's aware the ocean is right beside her, just beyond the wall of the tunnel she's trudging down.

Robin, Robin, Robin, a darkness behind them like at the bottom of a well. Her heart burns like it's being seared in a frying pan, that's the electric impulses.

By the time the harvesters reach the labyrinths, she can barely drag her feet. In this spot, explosions breached the walls, laying bare the ocean ice. The City-dwellers have carved mining drifts to reach the meat.

The ocean has frozen, but it's alive. It moves constantly, the drifts create mazes that change every time, sometimes they need to be broken through again, sometimes the way only needs to be cleared. That doesn't matter, what's important is that they always lead to the awakened animals. Dead, but hot and fresh.

They wait for Nicolas to check the drifts and make a decision. Her brother disappears into one after another, and in the meantime everyone else rests. Nicolas comes back and points out

which ones they'll be working in this time. Robin feels as though he's picked an easier, more spacious one for her platoon.

The gasoline carriages with trailers won't fit inside, so they park them right by the entrances. The smaller wagons with lights and air pumps drive into the drifts. The walkers move carefully in front of them, connected to the vehicles with hoses like umbilical cords that slither loosely along the icy floor of the drift. Walking in front are the two largest harvesters, armed with a sledgehammer and a chainsaw. Moving behind them are Robin and Luca's group.

Lurking somewhere here in the ice are beasts, packed into a dense organic mass. Now Robin can hear them, bizarre echoes at the edge of hearing, which her disoriented brain arranges into underwater melodies, full of longing, terrible and beautiful at once.

The ocean has awakened, it is calling. It's come, the time of harvest.

They move very slowly, held back by the slow wagon, sometimes forced to widen a wall that's moved. The ice is warmer, damp. It drips pink on their heads and shoulders, pink runs down the walls.

The drift opens onto an alcove, split in half by an ice sheet. Behind one of the walls, something is moving. A shadow pulsing rhythmically, like a heart, like a huge sleeping caribou.

They take the lights off the wagon and set them up in the corners of the chamber. The wagon operator starts up the chainsaw motor. The man holding it shouts vulgarities to pump himself up. The noise of the motor vibrates in the girl's stomach. The gasoline saw cuts an opening in the ice and before long everyone is working. Beneath a layer of ice a foot or more thick, they find meat.

So much of it that it's like yet another wall, but a warm one, bloody and pulsing. The wall lives, moves, trembles in one place with the flipper of some marine mammal, in another it ripples

slowly in the rhythm of the contractions of something larger, the ice is melting and splattering on the harvesters. A miracle: the meat is hot, steaming and, despite the mask, Robin could swear she can smell it. Her mouth waters.

The five of them stand before it and there is enough work for each of them. They put on their goggles and tighten their grip on their tools. They start the harvest. Robin's mind is getting mixed up. What was before is returning.

13.

Robin's mind is getting mixed up. What was before is returning.

When she and her brother went to visit the graves of his wife and children, where she hurt him.

Neil had sent for her that day. A messenger was waiting for Robin in front of the lecture hall. Before class, Robin told Luca about their mother's evening visit and her plan. She'd decided to strike Neil, the smaller and physically weaker of the twins, and in the brawl win a spot for herself in the harvest.

If we were at war, said Luca, I'd think that was a trap.

Because it is a trap, she replied, excited, a trap laid for Neil.

Her friend, fearful, watched her as she set off for the Lazaretto.

She had completely forgotten that it was the anniversary of Neil's wife and children's deaths. A few years ago Elder Madam Eleonora Mayhew had born him a pair of dead daughters and herself had died in childbirth. Neil intended to visit the city necropolis and wanted Robin to go with him. Nicolas was busy inspecting equipment before the harvest.

Three of them went; Neil was accompanied by his second wife Celine, daughter of one of the botanists working in the greenhouses. Celine wasn't much older than Robin and spoke so rarely that Robin sometimes couldn't remember the sound of her voice.

When they reached the cemetery, the sun had disappeared behind the peak of the mountain on Admiralty Island, on the opposite side of the frozen channel, and it quickly grew very cold. The innumerable cemetery lampposts started pulsing an irresolute white. Neil, embarrassed, wandered from one section to another, unable to find the one where his loved ones lay.

She and Celine watched him from above as he knelt to leave a soapstone figure of a seal and two pups beside the marker set into the frozen ground. Robin should have hit him right then. Peering down at her brother's hunched figure, she didn't feel able to.

Neil didn't stand up for a long time. When he did and looked his sister in the eye, his cheeks and nose were crimson with cold.

Do it already.

Celine took a few steps away from them.

Excuse me?

Do it already, Robin. Hurry up, the Council meeting is tonight.

Who was this a trap for? thought Robin, before her brother punched her.

Fast and hard, his fist landed beneath her nose; pain shot from her mouth down to her neck. She reeled and caught herself on someone's gravestone. She felt her gums instantly swell up, and she felt tears, squeezed out by the burning where she'd bit her tongue. Her mouth was fully packed with flesh.

She stood up straight.

Do it, said Neil again, quickly.

The people around watched curiously.

She threw herself on him. He was nimbler and stronger than she'd thought, and he put up a fiercer resistance, even though he was doing his best to hold back. Enough now, Celine kept saying quietly over their heads, after that brief, exhausting tussle, enough now, as Robin and her brother lay side-by-side holding tight onto one another's coats and trying to rest a little.

You knocked out my tooth, panted Robin, once she'd managed to catch her breath.

He got up first and offered her his hand. She accepted the help. She touched her face. Her head was spinning with pain. No one approached them. Celine passed her a handkerchief.

We'll be in the paper, muttered Neil, pointing at a man beneath a nearby streetlamp, jotting something down in a notepad.

I'm more beat up than you, said Robin, amazed.

That's good, he smiled crookedly. His lips were quickly swelling up. Hurry and get yourself ready, and come to the Council meeting. I'll let mother know.

She narrowed her eyes.

Before the meeting you'll be nominated for the harvest, explained Neil. And that means they can immediately give you a peerage and you'll join the Council, with voting rights. He lowered his voice. Today the Council is going to discuss deactivating the Generator. The South is pushing for full conversion to oil.

And I'm supposed to—

I can't believe, thought Robin, that this is turning out this way. This had never occurred to her when she was daydreaming of the harvest. She had no idea she'd be drawn into the Council's games.

Neil could see that in her face.

Well. There probably won't be a vote today, but mother's not sure. She needs you. So they know how many votes we've got.

I'm too young.

No. Well, maybe you are, actually. Nico and I were only a little older when we were nominated.

Well exactly.

But who decides that?

Well exactly.

The chairman of the Council makes the nominations.

Grandpa Will. Is this his idea?

Mother's.

Mother's, repeated Robin. Immediately she heard the voice of paranoia: when had she started fantasizing about joining the harvest? Wasn't it after talking to Caroline about it? She felt like it had been her fascination forever, that she'd dreamed of it for as long as she'd been hearing stories about it. But fascination at a distance is one thing, and a very concrete intention is something else. When did that intention arise in Robin's mind and how close to her was Caroline at that time?

But come on, thinks the girl out loud, joining the harvest doesn't have to mean a nomination. I mean, Luca—

Luca isn't the grandson of William Mayhew. And he's not the son of the director of the Lazaretto. It's about your blood, Robin.

She recognized a pride in her brother's voice that she didn't like. The wind hit her with a whistle and Robin shivered. Now it was completely dark.

I'll attend Council anyway, explained Neil and Robin saw her brother was starting to get impatient at having to lay all this out. Even though you're taking my place in the harvest. I'll attend—

As a representative of the Lazaretto, she finished his sentence.

Neil spat something out.

Oh no, Celine interrupted them, picking up pieces of the soapstone figure from the ground. It broke.

It doesn't matter, replied Neil, but Robin could tell he was lying.

14.

It's all getting mixed up in Robin's mind during the harvest. So much meat: tuna, salmon, sea lions, seals—bearded, hooded and ringed—walruses, porpoises and sea cows: creatures she knows from books, zoology textbooks studied as elegies and simultaneously as maps of fantastical lands. The meat, awakened, is moving and Robin grips the axe and strikes once, a second time, a fiftieth, and maybe even a hundredth, hacking off larger and larger pieces, which she then drags down the drift to the trailer in the corridor. Robin passes them to the man by the wagon and goes back, to chop, chop, chop and now she knows that tomorrow she won't be able to move her arm, this is like the fight with Neil in the cemetery, only all night long, Robin chops and a seal eye bursts, sliced in half by the axeblade, and the girl's lips are burning from constantly licking them.

She works hard, drunk on meat and drunk on the effort itself. She leaves her comrades behind and goes deeper into the meat, alone, she squeezes through the gaps between the beasts, from which the thawing ice drips along the drift. She carves a low tunnel in the meat, which she makes her way along, getting more selective as she goes. The beasts' protruding bones tear at her sleeves, cutting her arms. Entrails fall onto her shoulders, clinging to her blood-stiffened suit like unwanted memories.

The girl cuts out the liver of an elephant seal and she's almost dizzy with hunger. Have you ever been inside a beast, Robin? the ocean asks her, because it is louder than her wheezing breath and the blood roaring in her ears.

Robin moves her lamp closer to the ice wall. Behind it is a shadow—gigantic, extending in all directions. She turns around, checking whether her air hose will get her another few feet. The melting water is already above her ankles, there's nowhere to put the lamp down, so Robin hammers a hook into the wall and hangs it there. She feels as though for the first time in her life she's really warm, and that thought makes her giggle with excitement. Her laughter transitions fluidly into a cough. Robin has to unfasten her mask to clear her throat and to spit. After a moment's vacillation, she puts it back on. Her hand wanders for a while near her feet, unable to find the axe she put down. The water is impenetrable and full of unsettling scraps of meat.

Have you ever been inside a beast?

Robin grips the axe tighter and keeps working. She fights her way through. The metal of the blade crushes the ice with a crunch. She keeps working, hearing a welcoming squelch when the blade enters meat. She fights her way through, the thick contents of the beast sloshes around her feet, a few times almost knocking her over.

When the girl slides inside, on all fours, one hand holding both the lamp and the axe, she begins to run out of air. She doesn't notice, she presses on. It's like a journey to the moon or to dreamland, or to heaven. It's hot and soft, and oddly spacious, but the light and her hands, and the sounds coming from all around—they all suggest she's found herself in a place where physics has slipped beyond the grasp of earthly laws. Something in her brain is screeching, pressing on her eyes from the inside, and Robin realizes it's the sound of effort, because, as she crawls on her knees inside the thawing stomach of a sperm whale, she is still doing her best to think in words.

Robin, daughter of Caroline Mayhew and John Doe, casts aside human languages and immediately feels better. She turns around, hearing a sloshing behind her, and sees a naked woman swimming out of the hole she herself clambered through.

The woman has long, tangled hair, raven-black and shimmering with seaweed-green; intimidatingly large breasts and powerful thighs that merge fluidly into a strong rear flipper. She props herself up on her hands and raises her head, smiling at Robin, who can see the woman's hands are large and fingerless.

Robin knows who this is. It's Sedna, the mistress of the north seas.

Brush my hair, Sedna says to her without opening her mouth. Her hair flows around her face, as if still floating in the water.

15.

It's all getting mixed up in Robin's mind.

Her mother was appointing her to join the harvest in her office, in the presence of Nicolas and Neil. All the nominations Robin had heard of took place in a ceremony attended by the majority of the Guardians working in the Lazaretto. That evening it was only the four of them. Robin was glad for this side-effect of their haste, since she didn't have to take part in a ceremony where she'd be the center of attention.

Her mother and brothers, already elegantly dressed for the City Council meeting, stood facing her, as if she were meant to square up against them. For the evening, Robin had chosen a simple dress the color of the winter sky and noted with satisfaction that her choice pleased Caroline. The girl wiggled her tongue in the hole where her brother had knocked out her tooth and tried to understand how she should feel. On the one hand, she was bursting with pride and couldn't wait for the harvest night. On the other, Neil's story about her mother's plotting deprived her of agency, leaving her resentful and frustrated. Would they have treated her this way, thought Robin as she peered at their faces, if she weren't a girl? And would anyone other than her mother treat her this way?

She didn't know what she was looking for in their eyes. She found love and pride, and she admitted this evening was more than she could have expected.

Like every harvester, she was supposed to receive a signet ring engraved with a gear. They hadn't prepared one. Neil removed his from his finger,

—that's the hand he hit her with—

then handed it to his mother, and she placed the ring on her daughter's finger. Caroline Mayhew's hand was cold, and her skin dull. Robin felt dizzy, in the shadows of this ostensibly modest gesture lurked an association with nuptials.

The metal carried the warmth of her brother's body to her finger. Along with it, the girl felt something else. Like an icicle, slight and sharp, fear of the harvest had slowly driven its way into her heart. All three gave her a hug and a kiss, and once they'd left, Robin realized that during the ceremony she hadn't said a single word.

Waiting for them in front of the office was Grandpa Will and, a few steps behind him, Luca. Robin smiled at her best friend and then Luca grinned with relief and pride, after which he said goodbye to everyone, bowing deeply to the captain in particular, and ran off down the hall.

Robin looked William over. The faster she grew, the more her grandfather's spine curved, pulling the old man's body toward the ground. She would look into his melancholy and faded eyes, and for some time she'd been doing so from above. She did her best not to glance at his trembling hand.

My Robin, said Grandpa Will in a strange tone, as if pronouncing her name for the first time. My little granddaughter's going to slice up the beasts.

Robin didn't remember much from the City council session. She got a high temperature because the hole in her gums was infected, and maybe also as a result of the emotion. Her growing headache seemed to wrap her in a moist bandage that cut her off from the conversations in the chamber. No one addressed her directly and people only glanced in her direction, curious about the daughter of the Director of the Lazaretto, repulsed by the first woman on the harvest and maybe furious at this unexpected attack on the balance of power on the Council.

Before they took their seats, Grandpa Will bestowed her with the title *Lady*. She knelt, and William Mayhew tapped her with the flat of a sword made of sperm whale bone. When the applause rang out, the only ones clapping were the Guardians and a dozen or so Inuit that Robin was seeing for the first time in her life. The more numerous representatives of the South just

gazed in silence. After it was all over, the girl sat down in the back row of the semi-circle of benches, next to the members of her family and the other representatives of the Lazaretto.

Hanging on the wall behind her grandfather was the flag of the Hudson's Bay Company and a dozen or so smaller flags of old countries from before the Storm. Towering over the flags were two statues, a larger Jesus the Polar Explorer and a smaller Inuksuk, a figure made out of stacked horizontal stones. Robin knew that in the City there were temples and houses where Christ hung right on the pile forming the Inuksuk. In the Council chamber, located in the North of the city, such an ecumenical flourish was unthinkable.

They discussed, at first calmly, then with increasing intensity, until the men were just shouting at one another. After the fact, Robin realized that she didn't think her mother spoke even once, like the few other women attending the session. Only Nicolas spoke on behalf of the Guardians.

The Generator must remain operating, argued Robin's brother. It's allowed us to survive and only it will ensure the City endures. That is why we must leave it running. . .

Until it explodes?

. . .because only then can the City obtain heat and energy with absolute certainty.

Until it explodes?

The North remembers well when the Generator was deactivated before and we were unable to start it up again. Do you think that we are any smarter now? That we understand any better how it functions? Do you remember what went through your minds when we discovered we didn't know how to reactivate it? Do you remember what happened on the streets back then? And there's not enough oil for the whole City. . .

There's enough for us!

. . .therefore the Generator must remain active.

Until it explodes?

Christ the Mechanic!

You can see clear as day it's growing more unstable. It will explode and wipe us all out.

It won't explode, why would. . .

And why did the Elder Sir who was our first City heat engineer and his whole family move to the South?

We'll perish without the generator.

Was it not because he was afraid to live next to a bomb?

Oil isn't enough. We truly need the Generator. And you all need it. And you all need us.

Oil alone, they shouted back at Nicolas, oil alone. The generator off and oil alone!

Robin listened to one speech after another, doing her best to ignore the growing chill she felt.

Land, thought the girl, feeling the shivers her fever caused, they're talking as if this was all determined by the land, a place on a map, the network of a city map. Maybe it's because they're all sailors and wanderers, or their descendants. People of sextants, compasses and parallels. After the fight, her neck ached and pain radiated along her spine, making the hard wood of the bench more and more aggravating.

Then the floor was given to the clerics of Jesus the Polar Explorer and even Robin knew she was about to hear some of the wealthiest people in the City. Elder Sir Samuel Rowbotham had to rise from his seat for Robin to notice him at all. It was her first time seeing him up close and from this distance he looked all of his one hundred years. He was limp, dry, and seemed to clatter as he moved, as though made of a bundle of sticks with a tattered sack pulled over it. He

spoke of the end of times and Christ waiting for them nearby, at the pole in the very center of the earth's disk. Robin knew these stories but she had no idea what they meant in the context of the dispute in Council and wondered if the others understood what Rowbotham was getting at.

Listen to the Inuit, hissed Rowbotham, and Robin felt as though his shriveled eyelids couldn't keep their grip on his eyeballs, which kept rolling toward the ceiling; that one after the other they'd pop out of their sockets. Rowbotham pointed at the group of people of the north, sitting in silence in the last rows; the old man's finger was like a twig with a yellow talon on the end. Listen to them, I tell you, for they possessed wisdom before we did. They know, nodded Rowbotham, the Inuit know, they know, they know, the old man repeated himself and Robin had no idea where rhetoric ended and the biochemistry of a degenerating brain began, they know. There is a story and it has been with them forever. About a solitary man who went to live far in the wilderness. Such a man, when he is alone, grows and grows, and grows, and may reach such astonishing proportions that he becomes a giant, and his spirit doesn't fit into his shadow.

Do you see, asked Rowbotham, do you see who this story is about? Do you see what the giant is trying to tell you? Let us finally build an automaton. Let us use the Generator and set off for the pole, to appease the giant.

Rowbotham dropped into his seat and was answered with silence, or maybe someone did actually reply, but Robin didn't hear, because she'd nodded off. When she opened her eyes, Elder Sir John Alexander Dowie was speaking. She had never met him before, but she knew the low opinion her mother and brothers had of him. Yet this gray-bearded, colorfully dressed man made a good impression on her. He was speaking calmly and politely, and she could tell from context that he was encouraging them to organize a universal plebiscite of all adult inhabitants on

whether to deactivate the Generator. As Dowie finished, Robin sensed that Neil, sitting next to her, was squirming and sighing, irritated.

The floor was given to the Inuit. And only one spoke, Ujarak Rock, son of Atanarjuat Fastrunner and Suluk Feather, the youngest of them, Robin thought, definitely younger than her brothers. As he spoke, handsome, youthfully chubby-cheeked and dressed in a vest from the same tailor her brothers went to, she noticed a strange man sitting behind him. Probably older than her mother, but she wasn't sure, because he was very obese.

He was sitting among the Inuit and dressed like an Inuit, in a baggy leather parka decorated with multicolored mosaics, but he had entirely European facial features. Suddenly this strange fat man noticed her gaze and their eyes met. The man's eyes were like stones in the snow, dark dots deep beneath thick, sagging eyelids. A tremor shook Robin and the girl gripped the edge of the bench, so the man staring at her wouldn't notice.

Ujarak Rock was speaking English, with an accent, but flawlessly, though his language was full of expansive adverbs of space and time, which made it sound like poetry or an improvised prayer. He spoke of the winter that had brought the whites to the north, and its terrible results for this land. I don't mean your inventions, Ujarak turned toward the distant Generator. I mean you yourselves. You, people of spring, he was speaking of them and to them with ostensible respect, you and your thoughts, your fears and hatreds. Even your greatest spirit, Ujarak Rock turned to look at the crucifix on the wall, and next addressed Rowbotham, I respect his great power. But he is not from here.

Ujarak went silent, but he did not sit down. He found the eyes of William Mayhew and held his gaze for a long time, as if holding a rope with a bird caught on the end of it, an old and proud one.

Oil, the young Inuk finally said to the chairman of the Council. Oil is from here. Oil is with us. Therefore: oil.

Mayhew narrowed his eyes, then nodded, and even Robin knew that there was nothing left to say.

The evening ended just as incredibly as everything else that had happened that day. Her grandfather and mother walked Robin back to her room. Worn out from her fever, the girl was afraid they would want to dissuade her from joining the harvest, since she had already attended the Council session as they'd wanted. She quickly saw that that wasn't the case. They'd come to speak to her without fear of being overheard or suspected. To her, that felt even more stressful. The girl realized they had never both visited her at once before.

Grandpa Will sat down heavily onto her bed, but soon got up again, unable to situate himself comfortably, and moved to the chair by desk. Mother and daughter stood. The City out the window was losing its contours behind a dense veil of falling snow.

We've found people, said William Mayhew, briefly looking her in the eye, from outside the City. Dead people. White ones.

Robin's head was spinning. She wanted to sit down, but the bed was too far away for it to come across as natural. She kept listening on her feet.

Two bodies and a large sled. We think they were coming to us. But they didn't make it. They looked like the remains of some larger expedition. They were unlucky, because the hunters found them nearby, not even two days' journey from the City. They were starving and we think they killed one another.

Russians? asked Robin.

Not likely, smiled William Mayhew.

Which direction?

He nodded, as if she'd finally asked the right question.

West of the City, replied her mother. Maybe they were coming from the south, the ocean.

They had ice fishing equipment, which they'd used to stab one another in the stomachs.

When?

Four days ago.

Robin gulped. She realized what the event they were describing could lead to.

Who knows about this?

The old man snorted.

Everyone who was at Council today.

But. . . why is no one talking about it?

They spent the whole session talking about it, Grandpa Will responded patiently.

And the newspaper? Is it keeping silent or it doesn't know?

They didn't respond.

The hunters who found them, thought Robin out loud.

They didn't respond.

The girl sensed cold running down her sweating back. She had no desire to follow where her own thoughts were leading. The ones who found them, after all, they—

That's why we don't want to deactivate the Generator, William Mayhew interrupted her. He struggled up out of the chair and went up to the window, picking up the model sailing ship he had given her once as a gift. If we turn it off, he continued, adjusting the arrangement of the sails, then we're sure not to know how to start it up again. Old Rowbotham is right, we should go back

to the project of building an automaton. Maybe even a few. Build them and use the Generator to start them up. But instead of to the Pole, go west. To the Pacific.

We want to look for people, added her mother, not God.

16.

It's all getting mixed up in Robin's mind. She hasn't even noticed that she's run out of anything to breathe.

Robin in the belly of the whale, on her knees. Facing Sedna.

She's so beautiful and big, thinks Robin.

Brush my hair, the mistress of the seas asks with her smile alone.

The girl sets down the lamp and climbs onto Sedna's back. The goddess looks at her over her shoulder, curious. Robin looks into her eyes the color of oceans and knows she's forbidden to pronounce the goddess's name, that no name should be spoken out loud in her presence, so she only removes her gloves, casts them into the darkness and combs her fingers through her royal hair, with a gentle, careful motion. It gives Sedna pleasure, she stretches out and Robin can feel in her thighs the goddess's muscles working. She looks at the fingerless hands that the mistress of the seas stretches out far in front of her.

Robin knows

—that she's getting lighter and lighter, she can feel her head spinning and the accompanying flashes on the edges of her field of vision, all from lack of air—

what happened to Sedna. When she still had fingers and lived with the other Inuit, her father would bring her potential husbands. You all are the worst of men, Sedna would mock

them, sending away one after the other. She didn't let her father decide for her and she married her favorite dog. Her father, furious, dragged her onto his boat and once they'd paddled out far, he threw her into the sea. The girl tried to climb back into the boat, her father cut off the fingers grasping the side of the boat. Sedna sank to the bottom, and her fingers transformed into all the seals.

Robin is sitting astride the goddess's back and combing her hair. In the hole through which she crawled into the sperm whale, she can make out the tiny heads of babies spying on her. She's never seen them, but she knows those curious eyes; they're Neil's babies who died in childbirth. No names, Robin mentally chides herself.

Strange, she's also thinking of Luca. She combs the hair of the mistress of the seas and remembers her best friend's—no names—unruly mop.

Again everything spins and it's as if she and Sedna are hanging upside-down. An unpleasant sensation in Robin's chest, something bursts inside her. The girl withdraws her hands, disentangling them carefully from the beautiful, seaweed curls. She struggles to get up, and apologizes. She has to go. She's suddenly understood if she waits a moment longer, she won't be able to go back.

Only then does she notice that her hose isn't working and in the mask, in her lungs, brain, there's no air. The woman between her legs flips onto her back, raises her hands above her head, straightens out powerful and glistening; her tail curls vertically upward along the whale's stomach, somewhere behind Robin's back.

The girl reaches for the lamp, unable to find the axe anywhere. Sedna uses her tail to slice open the stomach above their heads; some organ falls onto Robin, pinning her back down onto the goddess's body. The mistress of the seas laughs into the girl's cheek at her own undersea

pranks. Robin rolls aside, trying to stand up yet again. She gropes for the lamp and knows she's lost

—air—

the axe. The whale's stomach gapes open above her head like a cleft between worlds; ribs curve above them like cathedral arches. The flesh is warm and mobile.

Robin dives into the hole she climbed through. She crawls out of the awakened sperm whale, leaving Sedna behind. She tears the mask off her face once she's in the narrow ice drift, sinks to her knees and, propped up on her hands, tastes, tastes, tastes the air in chaotic gulps. This place stinks of the sea and fish corpses, and a little of exhaust; all of this ends up in her aching lungs; the air is musty, wonderful, it squeezes tears from her eyes.

The water in the tunnel isn't freezing yet, it reaches up to hunched Robin's elbows and knees. The soaked lamp goes out. Darkness swallows the girl up and Robin waits for Sedna to come swimming after her and wrap her fingerless hands around her waist, to pull her back into the belly of the whale.

Sedna doesn't come. In the drift exposed in front of Robin, a warm light starts to glow. That's where they started working. Robin isn't strong enough to drag herself to her feet; she crawls on all fours toward the light. Blood roars in her ears, blood drowns everything out, and so Robin can't hear anything.

She reaches the spot where the tunnel widens into an alcove and she can't believe what she sees. The chamber is full of the bodies of harvesters, open, dismembered. Human entrails spatter everything around, the human blood is darker than the fish's. The wagon's engines are roaring, the exhaust is belching smog. Next to the vehicle, two men are fighting and Robin is

terrified to see that one of them is Nicolas. Her brother is leaning against the ice wall, cowering in front of the man who is cutting his head in half with a chainsaw.

17.

The night before harvest night.

Hanta Huntsman, son of Tarkik Moon and Yekaterina Stepanova.

I used to not know how to fight, says Kinngap Mountain. I learned late.

They're descending into the depths of the Docks, from the masts toward lower and lower decks, from one crowded labyrinth to another. Only the two of them, a pair of fat, panting men. Hanta goes second, smelling the sour stench of sweat from the man walking in front of him, and he knows that smell, he himself shakes it out of his coat when he slips it from his shoulders.

But, continues Kinngap, it's good that I learned late. I didn't get into any bad habits dictated by mercy or imagination. You know what I mean, Hanta?

Hanta replies that he does, which is essentially true.

They're surrounded on all sides by thieves, whores, scum, murderers and vulgar scoundrels, who glance at them and then quickly avert their gaze, stiffening until the fat men walk past. No one dares to greet them.

Before they go below decks, they pause on a small terrace in a little crowd of smokers. Kinngap conjures up from under his parka a cigar made from dried herbs most likely grown in greenhouses. An anonymous figure offers him a light from a twig pulled from the stove warming the terrace. Kinngap smokes the cigar patiently, now and then offering it to Hanta. The wrapper

tastes like fish grease from its owner's mouth and it makes Hanta's stomach rumble. They smoke for a long time in silence, and it's quiet on the terrace. The night's harsh cold burns on their cheeks.

High on the mast above them, four bodies sway in the wind. The size of the hanged people suggests they're parents and still-small children. Breezes from the hills carry the rumbling of the Generator.

You know who they were? Kinngap Mountain asks Hanta, glancing up.

I don't want to know.

I get that, replies Kinngap. In his eyes, barely visible behind the fat folds of his eyelids, a glacier hardens.

The Lord of the Docks carefully extinguishes the half-smoked cigar on the wall, the wooden remains of an aftercastle, and hands it to someone. Having received a thank-you, he chooses one of the tunnels leading further down, and Hanta follows him.

The wooden stairs are steep and narrow, and they don't want to end. When the men finally get down to the surprisingly spacious hold, they have to wait, leaning on the wall, for their breathing and heartbeats to calm.

Fucking hell, mutters Hanta, shaking his head. He unbuttons his coat, as if it was suddenly too tight around his chest. Kinngap giggles, raising his arms up, and his laugh turns into a fit of coughing. The men look one another in the eyes, and the spirits in their gazes—the bear and the fly—despite the half-light of the room, come to an understanding. Yet it doesn't last long, and soon things between them go back to how they were before.

The goons guarding the entrance nod at Kinngap. The hold, packed with tables, serves as an illicit still and a few ostensibly competing liquor joints, but the end of the low room is

concealed in suspiciously peaceful darkness. It's crowded, loud and hot. It smells of wood, people, food and spilled alcohol.

They push through to the darker corner of the hold and take a seat on the far end of a long bench. At the opposite end, by the feeble light of an oil lamp, a few men are drinking the place's home brew, swearing noisily and making out with the women sitting on their laps so vigorously you can see their tongues.

Hanta takes off his coat, feeling tightness in his chest. Kinngap doesn't take off his parka and Hanta can see the sweat dripping down his face in furrows of dirt, collecting in his beard and starting to dribble on the tabletop. A boy appears.

Want some vodka, Hanta?

Hanta does and the boy comes right back with a full shot and a mug of scurvy ale for Kinngap. The Lord of the Docks raises his mug.

To warmth in your home, Hanta, and to oil in your lamp.

To peace in your heart, finishes Hanta and he drinks, impatient. John Alexander Dowie, he says quietly, once he's shaken off the vodka's aftertaste.

I know, I know, Kinngap narrows his eyes and wipes the sweat from his forehead with a doughy hand.

You're going to help me get to him.

Kinngap sighs.

My spirits esteem your spirits, Hanta. Except what a fool you are. There's no need. Not even that, there's no logic. Look, everyone knows what John Alexander Dowie is like, and every mad dog is mad, so if you offer one your hand, who are you going to blame if it bites your fucking finger off, the dog or yourself?

Hanta doesn't reply, and the boy brings another vodka.

Look after your wife, Hanta, my lad, says Kinngap and Huntsman hears no disdain in those words. Maybe that's why he replies as honestly as possible.

That's just what all this is about. I have to do it because I can't find peace. Now however strong I am is how strong the two of us are going to be. However strong she's going to be depends on how strong I am. A spirit is escaping and I have to stop it.

Her spirit.

My spirit is escaping, Hanta clarifies. Hers escaped long ago and it looks to me it's gone forever.

Go to your father about this.

I have.

I see, nods Kinngap Mountain and peers into the puddle of sweat on the table. I'm about to become a grandfather, he sighs into his mug.

Congratulations, says Hanta after a moment's thought. He drinks a vodka to Kinngap and for a few uneven beats of his fatty heart he feels that second shot in every limb. He looks at Kinngap's hands, with nails bitten until they bleed and remarkably clean, probably because of the nail-biting.

Do you know who's sat there? Mountain points at the people at the other end of the table. That's the City's deputy police chief, he whispers to Hanta, Mr. Johannes Gutenberg, son of John Doe and Jane Doe.

Hanta Huntsman looks into the self-satisfied faces, wondering which of them it is, and concludes that it's the youngest, with the Black whore on his lap.

Why did you make me sit here? says Hanta with a frown. Why are we sitting with pigs?

That's a voice from the Docks and the voice of a Hanta who was gone but now is back, and Kinngap Mountain now knows that Hanta Huntsman has returned.

The boy brings a vodka. Deputy Chief Johannes Gutenberg glances at them, sensing someone's gaze on him. Kinngap raises his mug to him and smiles vaguely.

With pigs, repeats Huntsman and, shaking his head, knocks back the shot. The wooden ceiling of the hold seems to have lowered down right over their heads.

If you want a bairn, Kinngap and then Hanta's heart stops, he's not sure for how long. If you want a bairn I'll sort one for you. I like you, Hanta, I don't know why or what the hell for, but I like you. Any race and totally free.

Hanta looks him in the eyes and finds no trap in them. The Lord of the Docks is able to grant him a child and might even like to. He's sitting across from him, a sweaty mountain of flesh, and getting drunk on his generosity.

Hanta thinks about Gloria, about how his wife let life drain out of her onto the stale bedsheets.

No, thank you, he replies, as if declining another round, and he swears to himself never to tell Gloria about this. John Alexander Dowie.

Kinngap tilts his head, as if wanting to take Hanta in from a different angle. Both men know that Hanta is a hunter and as soon as he's able to go after Dowie, he has to.

You're lucky, lad, sighs Kinngap Mountain. Luckier than you are clever.

Hanta waits for what comes next, his heart pounding.

I'll give you both, says the Lord of the Docks. My spirits esteem your spirits.

Huntsman narrows his eyes, not knowing where to look for a trap. He knows too well who he's dealing with to simply believe him. Then something else catches his eye.

What the fuck is this, he asks Kinngap, and wriggles around nervously. They've taken a few tables out of the middle of the room and led in a woman dressed like a man. The woman clearly doesn't want to be there, but that's no different from the whores sitting around on the benches and the men's laps. They undress her until she's left in too-large pants, held on with a belt. Her breasts are bound with a bandage. An atmosphere of nervous excitement grips the hold and people glance more often at Kinngap Mountain.

What the fuck's about to happen here, Kinngap, asks Huntsman a little too loud. He's already seen performances like this in the Docks and he doesn't want to see any more of them.

It's nothing, says Kinngap with a dismissive wave, it's just boxing.

Boxing?

Aye, there's gonna be a fight.

John Alexander Dowie, repeats Hanta Huntsman. You give him to me and my bear will come back and be yours.

Kinngap nods. I was saying: you're lucky. Because we've found people outside the City who aren't from the City. They were heading our way; some expedition, or part of one. They didn't make it, but still. You get me, Hanta? People who weren't from here and who were coming here on their own. Over the frozen fucking ocean.

Hanta, stunned, says nothing. Kinngap continues:

So you can see for yourself, maybe this is a good moment after all. Because everything's going to change. We thought the times had ended, but clearly not. There are going to be changes and they're going to be sudden, Hanta, and we've got to be alert and active, too, to direct those changes, not just submit to them.

A long moment passed before Huntsman understood that Kinngap Mountain was making him an offer. And what about that kid, thought Hanta again, but that wasn't something to ask about. All the more so because the Lord of the Docks was just waiting for that question to be asked.

Some men came up to their table. Already, sighs Kinngap, feigning surprise. He rises, and Hanta with him.

Kinngap turns to the group at the end of the table. You know what he said to me, he says to them, pointing at Hanta. Why did you make me sit with pigs, that's what he said to me, Kinngap tells the deputy police chief with a grin. Pigs! Cheeky bastard.

Hanta doesn't even flinch.

Gentlemen, allow me to introduce Hanta Huntsman, son of Tarkik Moon and Yekaterina Stepanova.

The hookers scoot off. Mr. Johannes Gutenberg meets Huntsman's eyes and looks happy.

Then the police beat Hanta until he throws up, and keep beating him until Kinngap stops them. He stands over Huntsman's trembling, bloody body, waiting for him to pull himself together. Hanta can't open his eyes for a long while.

Kinngap leads the police away with a smile, then bends stiffly over Hanta and whispers instructions into his swollen ear, telling him where he should go at dawn so he can do what Kinngap asks. Hanta only nods and the motion makes him dizzy.

Look after your lass, Hanta, Kinngap whispers again in his ear, and Huntsman can smell the stench of Mountain's weakening gums. He tilts his head, weary, unsuccessfully seeking within himself the strength to be angry.

Look after her, repeats Kinngap more gently. In the next few days. Don't go to the North. Keep away from the Generator.

Hanta's heart clenches painfully, then struggles, dictated by an instinct dangerously close to emotion, because this could be the gift of life. When, beaten up, he finally climbs to his feet, he sees Kinngap is undressed down to his long johns. Two men are bandaging his hands, spread out as if in greeting.

So it's you she'll be fighting, says Hanta.

Of course, replies Kinngap Mountain, but as if he realized that nothing here was either clear or obvious.

18.

Her husband sits on the edge of the bed and does his best not to move, because he doesn't want to soil the sheets with what's still seeping from the wounds sustained in the beating he received that night. His wife, as she bandages him, dances slowly around his body, armed with damp gauze and tears. It takes her a few steps to circle around in front of him and wipe off his other cheek; the man's body is big enough to fit two or even three of her. The harvest night is ending, the steely dawn out the window does not warm their bedroom in the slightest.

They hear her mother, Elder Madam Daphne O'Higgins, hanging around outside the bedroom door. His mother-in-law knows no other way of showing love than by nosy concern.

I've brought some new heating stones, says her husband, a little too quietly, because he's embarrassed about the vodka on his breath. He doesn't understand that his wife can smell it from the spots where his skin has burst under the punches.

I saw, replies his wife, that's good. Long ago she'd learned not to ask where he got all this, and also not to thank him for it.

The soapstone warmers lay next to the bed. Carved onto both ovals are dense forests inhabited by creatures that neither he nor she can be sure existed.

I'd have to shave you, sighs his wife, trying to wash off the blood dried on his cheek.

Leave it, replies her husband, trying to fight off panic. Ever since he got back, they've been talking as if this were goodbye. I'm going to have to go again.

When?

Right away.

No. Her fingers tremble and then smell even stronger, the smell of her skin cuts through the mustiness. I don't agree.

Don't go too far today, says her husband, at which the woman merely looks out the window and despite the morning, a shadow darkens her face, because he said it as though she had any plans of leaving this bedroom.

And tell your mama not to go anywhere. And definitely not to the North.

What's going on, Hanta?

He merely says, I'll be back soon, and doesn't move from his spot. He hears his wife swallow heavily.

Will they come for me?

I'll come for you, I promise, he tells her, but he can't quite manage a smile.

Oh, Hanta, what have I done.

It's all right, he kisses her hand, which smells like the dirty rag, wondering if he's doing so for the last time.

John Alexander Dowie is praying for the goons who've come to kill him.

The break-in was organized for harvest night. A hodgepodge of Southern Métis scum got into the temple through the dormitory for the homeless. They didn't know that the faithful were already waiting for them. The would-be assassins were forced to surrender without a single shot.

For Reverend Dowie knows all. He hears and sees what is happening on the streets of the City, he observes what is going on in the bars and what is passed on with a wink in the factories. The City, the poorest and most honest one, loves its cleric, healer and benefactor also because, though timid, they gladly come to the warm rooms of the temple of the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church, to get potato pancakes and cloudberry soup, and maybe a handful of change too.

The city refreshes itself, drinks temple beer and testifies. John Alexander Dowie listens.

Reverend Dowie prays long and earnestly for his would-be killers. He knows that their fate is sealed, and the final path that awaits them is short and difficult. The boys serving in the temple will be glad to give vent to the despair they've been holding inside them; they're just waiting for situations like today's.

Dowie is praying, lying face-up in bed, his eyes fixed on a crude painting on his bedroom ceiling showing a smiling Christ welcoming all the creatures crowding around the gates of Paradise, and colorful birds and small puppies drinking the blood dripping from His widely outstretched hands. Two girls massage Reverend Dowie's aching feet and the old man dozes off.

Nothingness.

Surprised, he returns to his bedroom, understanding that the day has not yet come. The girls don't stop massaging, but it doesn't relieve the pain in his feet. He orders the girls to lift him up and hold him upright until the dizziness passes. He tries to pee, but individual drops fall into the bucket, and the effort only gives him a migraine. He tells the girls to help him get dressed, then sends them away. As they leave, the smell of lunch being cooked wafts into the bedroom from the temple hallway.

Dowie sits down again on the edge of the bed, gathering his strength. Then it happens, as it has been more and more often. For a few moments there's just him and his weakening body, the old man can't remember who he is or where he is. Finally he remembers: he'll go speak to his son, who's overseeing care of the attackers. He'll ask if they know now who sent them. Dowie is somewhat surprised to realize that the harvest was last night.

Reverend Dowie's son is resting in the chapter house. He's icing his aching shoulders; now that he's past fifty, his body, despite constant enthusiasm, is starting to refuse obedience. His son complains that his forearms are sore, then tells his father that the Generator exploded last night and chaos has overtaken the City.

I didn't hear anything, admits his father.

I know, papa, replies his son, better not to leave the temple today.

His father nods, for want of a suitable response. He can sense pride in his son's voice but can't locate its source. After a moment of awkward silence, his son returns to the subject of the break-in. He says the goons either really don't know who sent them, or they're still scared to confess, and he has to spend more time on their ringleader.

His father praises his son, and then his son reminds him that a lost soul is waiting for him in the reconciliation chamber. Some businessman from the South is looking for solace in

communion with Christ and is ready to express his appreciation for it with shares in the workshop he runs.

Let him wait and ask for forgiveness, snaps Dowie. His thoughts are already on lunch and the people being tortured in the casemates. He thinks he can hear their screams echoing down the hallways of the temple. It sounds a little like the springtime wind that rolls into the city from the surrounding hills, and a little like the dogs in the Docks on a full moon.

How awful, thinks the cleric, that they scream. How awful that even his temple can't liberate itself from violence and suffering.

Father, his son stops him, that new donor, I gave him penance. Let's go right to him.

John Alexander Dowie hesitates. He knows his son's skills well, so he nods. They head for the reconciliation chamber.

Father and son go inside and close the heavy door behind them. It's light in the large hall, the milky noontime glow pours in through window vents at the ceiling. The man is intimidatingly tall, fat and naked. His shabby Sunday clothes lie in a small pile by the wall. The man is kneeling in the center of the room, holding a small whip. His shoulders and back glisten liquid crimson.

He struggles to lift his head, doing his best to look the cleric in the eye.

Forty-two, whispers the man and strikes himself yet again. Scarlet sprinkles from his back. Forty-three.

Reverend John Alexander Dowie remembers the little dogs from the ceiling of his bedroom, the ones lapping up blood from the hand of Christ, and then tears come to his eyes. With all his heart he wishes to cut this penance short, but he doesn't want to let his son down.

Another eight, brother, he says. To fifty.

It was supposed to be sixty-six, gripes his son from behind him.

Fifty is enough.

The man's face stiffens. A whistle and a hiss. Forty-four.

John Alexander Dowie nods.

All right, the kneeling man sighs heavily, enough of that.

Fifty is enough, repeats the cleric.

The man rises, not without difficulty, and slowly plods to the place where he left his clothes, leaving a crimson trail on the flooring. Dowie and his son, surprised, can't tear their eyes off the living fresco on the man's broad back.

The son realizes first and makes the wrong decision. Instead of moving to the door, he goes toward the penitent, and then the fat, naked man turns toward him, knocks him down, slams down on him, then rises fully to his feet and this whole motion takes less than a blink of the old cleric's eye. John Alexander Dowie looks and doesn't grasp that his son will never again rise from the floor, because he's now bleeding to death from severed arteries.

Hanta Huntsman stands facing Elder Sir Dowie. He raises a hand, in which he holds a bloody Narwhal-tusk knife. Now it's easier to see that someone recently gave him a beating. His bloated body is shaking with fever, provoked by the wounds on his back.

Hanta has two spirits in him, one breathes inside him, the other follows him, a shadow among shadows.

The old man peers at him, uncomprehending. His eyes lack even fear and the fat man can't hide his disappointment.

I need your head, Hanta Huntsman says to the old man, and I'll use this knife to cut it off.

That might take some time, replies John Alexander Dowie quietly, as if commenting a troublesome case of dismantling a building in the City.

The fat, naked man adjusts his grip on the knife. The bear spirit, a shadow among shadows.

Fortunately, says Hanta and gets to work.

20.

December twenty-third, nineteen hundred and seventeen, the thirtieth year of the City's existence, the thirtieth year winter has lasted, the morning after the harvest.

Robin, daughter of John Doe and Caroline Mayhew.

Robin can't remember everything.

A pair of men are fighting in the ice corridor and someone is cutting her brother Nicolas' head in half with a gasoline saw. Robin rushes the attacker and strikes him in the neck with her axe. He's dead before he hits the ground, and the girl can't dislodge the weapon from between his vertebrae. Everyone left around is dead, the carriage's engine is running, coughing out exhaust that stings her eyes.

Robin looks at her brother's body, at the eyeball floating loosely between his teeth, and at all the rest. She doesn't know what she's feeling or should feel, so she just pulls the lighter body of the attacker to the side, not wanting them to bleed into a single puddle. She takes the mask off her brother's murderer and sees a stranger's face. She remembers Luca. She walks quickly from

one body to the next; her best friend isn't among them. She uncurls the fingers of someone's hand, takes their cleaver, and carefully goes out into the main corridor of the plant.

Luca's corpse stands leaning on the vehicle with the meat trailer.

Terrified, Robin can't count the bodies, and looks apprehensively down the corridor, where the vehicle's lights don't reach. The whirr of the remaining vehicles is still coming from that direction. She sneaks up to them and she can see that a second trailer has been loaded with meat, and more bodies lie around the carriages. The attackers have left, are dead, or are hiding there somewhere in the dark. Robin is shivering, it's cold in the corridor. The mountain of meat collected on the trailer is steaming.

After a few attempts, Robin manages to master steering the carriage with the meat. She takes the cleaver, places it on the bench next to her and, alone, all alone, drives slowly through the labyrinth of the destroyed electrical plant. The warm flesh behind her smells. Robin can't resist and hops for a moment onto the trailer to bite off a fatty piece of sea lion meat. She can feel the hot blood and the tough tissue resisting her teeth, and it's so pleasant that it makes her head spin.

They're waiting for her on the threshold of the hangar with weapons ready to fire and Robin understands that everything is even more wrong.

She has to tell her mother about the attack and that Nicolas is dead. She does so, and her mother only nods and replies that the Generator has exploded. Robin looks around automatically, but she has no sense that it's colder in the hangar. In the distance: chaos, screams and shouts.

Neil runs up and, after looking them in the eyes, doesn't ask about his brother. He just stands and looks, as if his brain had broken for a moment, then goes off somewhere, disappearing into the crowd.

Caroline tells her daughter that they're needed at the Lazaretto. Robin glances over her shoulder and replies that she's going back for the second trailer of meat. Her mother thinks for a moment, then nods and they part without saying goodbye. The shock of the attack is wearing off a little, as they focus on action.

No one wants to accompany her and Robin enters the plant alone, holding the cleaver in one hand and an oil lamp in the other. She walks in darkness, and the darkness comes out to meet her, and this march will keep coming back to her in nightmares until the end of her long life.

Robin doesn't encounter anyone alive in the plant. She returns on the second carriage with the meat, and Neil is waiting for her in the hangar. Come with me, the girl says to her brother, let's get Nicolas out of there. And Luca. Neil agrees. They get on the first carriage, which has already been unloaded of its meat. Anxious gazes see them off.

You've got blood on your face, Neil shouts over the carriage engine, as they drive into the plant.

It's from a seal, his sister shouts back and they don't say anything more.

After a moment's thought, they load all the bodies into the back. They only make it a few dozen feet before the wagon's engine goes out. They don't know how to check, but they guess it's run out of fuel, so they throw Nicolas and Luca's bodies off the trailer. Neil tears a strip from the legs of one harvester's overalls, which he uses to hang the oil lamp around his neck. Robin grabs Luca's body by the feet, and Neil does the same with Nicolas's, and they drag them to the exit, resting every few minutes.

The people gathered in the hangar take the bodies from them, but don't let them rest. Their mother is summoning them to the Lazaretto. They go, but Neil disappears somewhere on the way.

The screams, pleading and weeping of the burned. Entrails, vomit, shit. Flies. The sawdust is no longer enough, their feet are sloshing around. Their mother holds a bloody knife in her teeth and soon her daughter is doing the same, to bind up the stumps faster. Severed limbs and ears, torsos full of holes, not from the Generator's explosion at all, and everyone understands that the City, when it finally had the chance to surrender to violence, did so gladly and with zest.

The two of them, mother and daughter, rest sitting on the floor in the corner of the operating room and no one dares to approach them.

Grandpa, says Robin, suddenly touched by a vague foreboding.

Caroline Mayhew sighs. Grandpa died in his sleep, she says quietly and moves her tongue around in her mouth, as if something was getting in the way of her talking. I sent for him when the Generator exploded and that was when they found him.

Do you think that someone, starts Robin, but she can't figure out how to finish the sentence.

That someone murdered him, her mother helps her, I don't know. Only now does Robin hear how tired Caroline is.

They rest, saying nothing, leaning on the wall and on one another's shoulders. The patients in the operating theater are screaming.

Robin closes her eyes and when she opens them, Neil is standing over them. The women don't have the strength to get up.

They're saying it's fixable, says Neil and Robin thinks for a moment he's talking about Grandpa. It was a bomb, the brother explains to them. Three, actually.

My God, Caroline shakes her head. But it can be fixed?

They say so.

We have to find out who did this, says Caroline.

The people we've managed to ask, says Neil quietly, claim it was John Alexander Dowie.

Can we trust them?

I'm not sure.

You're not sure, his mother says, imitating him. She closes her eyes for a long time and then reopens them reluctantly. All right, she adds, calmer now.

Then they operate for a long time, the three of them, and their patients die less and less often on the tables.

The sun is beginning to set when a man walks into the operating theater and Caroline Mayhew pulls him to one side to talk. We're done, her mother says to her children after it's all over, we're leaving.

They just rinse their hands in buckets of lukewarm water and wipe them off on rags. Everyone around is silent as the three of them leave the theater of the Lazaretto.

Robin is too tired to speak and simply allows herself to be led down the narrow little streets of the North. Ostensibly it's just the three of them walking, Elder Madam Caroline Mayhew and her children, but Robin notices her brother keeping an eye out for guards, and when he notices a familiar shadow slipping past nearby, he looks calmer.

Where are we going? asks Neil.

To the try, replies his mother. To meet Kinngap Mountain.

That name doesn't mean anything to Robin.

They smell the blubber try before they see it. Hot meat, boiled in huge pots, forms a mouthwatering fog that sticks to the buildings in the area.

As they enter the square, the work has been humming along for a good while; about a hundred people are laboring under the eye of the police and organized goons from the Docks. The workers trim the muscle from the blubber and chop the fat into pieces, which they throw into pots to try out into oil. Enormous empty barrels wait in rows for the oil, while salted meat cut into strips goes into smaller barrels. The people working on the ramps are processing what Robin brought back from the harvest. Blood squirts out from under cleavers and knives, then dribbles off tabletops into gutters, through which it drains into buckets. The meat smells, steams, spatters onto sweaty faces. People lick themselves off or sneak a little bite. Above the tables, lamps swing in the wind, smothered in haze from the vats, bobbing like ravenous glowworms.

The dogs in the Docks howl in the distance, smelling the fresh blood. They are echoed by the hungry, half-wild children wandering the streets around the square where the try is taking place.

Two groups halt facing one another. On one side, Elder Madam Caroline Mayhew, her son Neil and daughter Robin.

On the other—Elder Sir Kinngap Mountain, a fat man dressed in Inuit style with European features, who Robin recognizes from Council meetings. And behind him stands that young, handsome Inuk, Ujarak Rock, son of Atanarjuata Fastrunner and Suluk Feather, and some enormous Métis, dressed too tightly in a colorful kuspuk with pocket at the belly. The Métis's face is so swollen from fighting that he's clearly having a hard time seeing and breathing. He's holding a sackcloth bag with something heavy inside.

I love this, says Kinngap Mountain with a smile as he looks around the square.

Robin glances at her mother and catches in her eyes a shadow of shame. She can tell that her mother likes it here too.

It shouldn't be like this, says Ujarak Rock and all present now know that the young Inuk hasn't come to hold his tongue.

This is Hanta Huntsman, says Kinngap, not turning around. My spirits esteem his spirits. Hanta steps past Kinngap and dumps someone's head out of the sack at Caroline Mayhew's feet.

Dowie, says Caroline and then Robin recognizes the old man's face.

This is a present from me to you all, says Kinngap, clearly pleased with himself. My fly spirit is walking over this corpse, feeding and shitting on the traitor's face.

Caroline Mayhew locks eyes with Kinngap for a long time, then seizes the head by the beard, goes up to one of the pots and tosses it inside. A brief hiss rises from the pot.

What the fuck is that, gripes the woman stirring the pot with a stick from on top of a stepladder. Shut up, another warns her.

Maybe you'll eat it sometime, says Kinngap with a crooked smile.

I'd like to, replies Caroline and everyone can tell they're joking, because the Lazaretto has its own meat.

It was beautiful, adds Mountain.

For a few moments they stand facing one another in silence. The vat bubbles. Dogs howl in the distance.

My present for you all, repeats Kinngap.

Except, Neil speaks up, this doesn't end anything. It's Dowie's son who's behind all of this.

All of what, asks Ujarak Rock.

This is his doing, replies Neil. The Generator, the attack, all of this. People have been coming to us today wanting to reveal it. Others would prefer not to talk about it, but we went to them too. And they also told us what happened.

Kinngap nods.

They also told us that Dowie son of Alexander wanted to draw the Lord of the Docks into his plan, says Neil.

So they also told you, interrupted Kinngap quickly, that the Lord of the Docks told him to go drink runny caribou shite.

That's why this doesn't end anything, repeats Neil, glancing at the bubbling pot. Because Dowie's son remains.

My present for you all, I said, didn't I? Kinngap turns to the beat-up fat man. Hanta Huntsman fucked the son up today.

Everyone looks at him. Hanta says nothing.

Come on, Hanta, say what happened.

That's what happened.

Kinngap sighs.

Today I fucked up Dowie's son, says Huntsman, and the Lord of the Docks nods.

Neil and Robin glance at their mother.

It can be repaired, says Caroline Mayhew finally. The engineers are sure.

But do we need to?

Let's not abandon it over a little thing like this.

A little thing like this, says Kinngap with a grim smile. Tell that to the geezer in the pot.

Robin perceives something like joy slipping out of Hanta Huntsman's swollen mouth.

It wasn't a good night for old men, resumes Kinngap Mountain and he again glances at the vat of boiling fat. I'm sorry about your father. There was great power in him, long ago I saw him shoot a fellow in the middle of a church with a good hundred people watching.

I was there, replies Caroline Mayhew, I saw it.

Och, smiles Kinngap, and continues.

Samuel Rowbotham passed on too. He didn't live to see Jesus coming from the pole. Or maybe he actually did, who knows. A strange night. My grandson was born. His name will be William. The spirit of your father runs all through this place.

I don't want to talk about him.

Robin wonders if the men know her mother well enough to know how much emotion she has stifled in those few syllables.

I understand, nods Kinngap, then opens his eyes wider. Oil.

Caroline slowly scratches her cheek.

Oil, repeats the fat man.

You son of a flea-ridden Scottish whore and a mangy caribou, drawls Caroline.

Oil, Elder Madam Caroline Mayhew, says Ujarak Rock. Oil is a foregone conclusion.

The vat bubbles. The dogs howl in the distance.

Elder Madam Caroline Mayhew, First Director of the Lazaretto, closes her eyes and opens them very slowly, then offers her hand to Kinngap Mountain.

December twenty-third, nineteen hundred and seventeen, the thirtieth year of the City's existence, the thirtieth year winter has lasted.

Hanta Huntsman, son of Tarkik Moon and Yekaterina Stepanova.

I promised I'd be back, didn't I, says her husband, unable to hold back his tears of relief. I promised.

His wife backs all the way up to the wall of their bedroom for her eyes to take in all of him and make sure this is no wicked spirit, but truly her Hanta. After a moment she throws herself around his neck, as if she wanted her whole self to penetrate into his fat heart.

Hanta, Hanta, oh.

The woman hangs heavily on her husband's neck, but he feels lighter. They stay like that a long time and they both like it. Suddenly they hear a noise that makes the hairs stand up on the back of their necks.

Gloria holds her breath and backs up again.

What's that, Hanta? What's that now? she says with a whisper, though after all she knows, she recognizes the sound that's coming from somewhere in their apartment.

Hold on, says her husband softly.

No, Hanta, his wife shakes her head, no, no, no. No.

The man steps out for a moment and returns with a small bundle that he cradles in his arms, the most valuable of all treasures.

No, Hanta.

Don't be scared, he explains to her.

The baby is crying louder and louder. Gloria's mother peeks out from behind her son-in-law at her daughter.

I can't, Hanta.

Don't be scared.

I can't. Someone will come for it and I know I won't survive that.

Don't be scared, no one will come.

I can't, we can't.

No one will come.

We can't, Hanta, I wouldn't survive it.

We have to think up a name for her.

Her.

Yeah.

The baby cries.

Silly man, Gloria bursts into laughter through her tears. I picked out a name long ago.