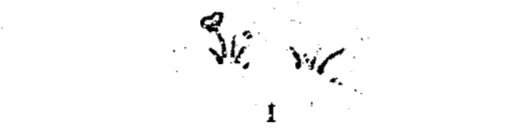


turn around my rowan tree and find the beach emptier than I expected it to be. I'm surprised, but I like it this way. I notice the weight of orange berries dragging its limbs and twigs down. I throw my bright blue beach towel right where the light seeps through the branches, right next to this one lonely searocket flower burrowing its way through the sand. Talking to Fae last spring, I learned how in medieval Europe many thought this tree to protect from witches, many others also thought it would attract them. It would be planted near front doors, but then the witches would also make wands out of its wood, and use its berries for potions.

Much like it goes on this beach, the witches burned alongside the sodomites. I learned about the trails and the stakes on Ghent's city squares in the 17th century, just a few weeks ago, while reading through a few pornographic periodicals from the nineties alongside some activism, some history, and some hot guys staring at me. Later that day I passed the very same cobblestoned square on my way to the park. The men here keep this tradition of burning alive, in intimate and tactile ways. Not wearing any sunscreen, they turn red like poppies.



On this beach, however, the absence of words is what sheds light on it for its regulars. Mostly, people are totally silent, and all dialogues are conducted through eye contact, nervous foot movements, or assertive gestures formulated by hand. That is what beach etiquette is all about, I was told last year by this same Finnish man. This year he once again speaks of it loudly. How the place has been shared in this way since the liberation from the Soviets, when this part of the coastline opened to the public. How the tourists always have more fun than him. How he deserves the fun much more. He also yells how annoyed he is about having to be our interpreter. At the same time I see the glistening guy signing and inviting me to grab my bag and walk towards the bushes.

On our way over there we make out on the wooden walkway and hold hands crawling through the tall and leafy shrubs. They are arched like hedges would be in French jardins, but in ways that suggest English gardens far more. Less uptight, more *spontanéité*. He walks first through this maze of pathways, and takes me to a hollowed out space in the thicket I know quite well. I'm not sure why but I act all surprised when I see it, but I'm not really. I do however notice how it looks specifically full of life today. Its margins are overgrown in fruiting brambles, which are being visited by a few pairs of bees and some butterflies. Towards the centre I see some flowers I can't determine immediately. Last year I was fascinated by this

I too have been attracted to return to this mountain ash, much like my sorcerous ancestors. Around this time last year, I came to call this tree mine. Since then, its roots have been my seat and sometimes my throne, its branches my coat rack, and its trunk my watchtower. Today I'm back after being away for the summer with two mere intentions, which don't differ much from the usual: to read and to watch, in the tower's shadow. I start with the prior.

Last June Carlo recommended to me this novel, written in 1920s Britain from a bed I imagine to be grand and heavy with pastel sheets, and fluffy and laced pillows. He called it a sweet summer read and so I decided to only open it next to fruit (plums, peaches, pears) and a body of water to cool off in. It follows a boy, "whose name was Orvil Pym," as he grows askew into adulthood. His thoughts and language are peculiar and flamboyant, sometimes grotesque, and he illustrates the other characters in a way that makes me want to cross my legs. His dad's lips are described over three paragraphs, and the naked man—who lives alone in a damp hut across the river—'s torso takes over nine.

I have been looking forward to reading this here. It only makes sense. I take off my clothes and adorn the tree in socks and underwear, then fall onto the towel, into the light, to open up to page ninety-two. Orvil throws a tantrum, fistfights his brother, falls off his bicycle during a sudden storm, and steals

place's resemblance to a deer bed during one of my morning walks through the bushes. Its many visitors have slowly but surely left their imprint in the form of an indent into the grass and soil, I speculated.

We throw our towels on the floor, hastily, and continue our dialogue talking in argots of spit and kisses and touches, pulls, jerks, more spit and so on. At first he is careful, and looks me in the eye before heading somewhere new. I wave my fingers through the hair on his chest and notice the wood white flying behind his ears. The swarm of mosquitoes too. It all feels like a scene from the opening half of Fred Halsted's *L.A. Plays Itself*, or from Barbara Hammer's *Women I Love*, or the fabulous fairy feasts drawn by Ned Asta, or any gay porn magazine from the seventies really. I imagine how a stream could run right past us, and to float along on it as he licks my thigh, up and then down. I slip out of time.

We continue floating downstreamwards, touching, handling, sucking, tickling, until he moans, then warns, and comes all over my face. It quietly trickles down while I squeeze his upper arm and shoot all the way onto his chin and the brambles and the bees. I lick my fingers dry, and realise how that feels novel. I resurface and find myself draped onto his chest like a blanket would too, and in this position we make out until we both dry up. His name is Alexander, he tells me.

a cherry-red lipstick. The afternoon slips by in ways I don't notice until it's time to drag my towel eastward, because the sun has traveled west. As I stand up to do just that, I notice how around three men had found themselves some space further along the beach, closer to where most enter the water. Two are having a chat, leaning against another tree (birch, I see). Their posture points rootwards, and I let them be because, for today, I don't believe them to be the site of any spectacle. In between them and me, however, sits a young man that just went for a swim and his skin glistens a little in the sunlight. His feet look muddy. We share one brief moment of eye contact and then I move my sight back to the page. This is beach etiquette, I think.

A few pages along I decide to dare myself into the sea water. It really is Baltic. I walk around the big boulders, next to the leaning men, over the pebbles, into the water and wade my way up until my shoulders also submerge. This takes about seven minutes in total because of the beach's remarkably slow slope. It takes me another ten minutes to get back to my towel where I drown into a few more pages, while trying not to shiver too visibly. This works until I see a pair of muddy feet approaching me.

I find myself looking up to the guy that glistened just a few minutes ago. He asks me a question in Russian, so I answer him in English how that won't work. He tries again in Russian, I try French, he Russian, I then try Italian, so he conti-

On our way back to the city, over the boardwalk and through the forest, he opens his sling bag to grab his phone and writes something down in Cyrillic. I translate and nod, because I would also like to see him again. He proposes coffee or a walk, and then we make out once more before turning the corner into the beach's parking lot and waving each other goodbye.

now sit at a desk, looking out at the canopies of four tall oak trees and appreciating how, for now, their leaves are still fluttering in the wind. Or maybe I sit around a yellow table. Either way, I sit, as I receive a few Telegram messages from Alexander about grabbing a coffee somewhere far away from Lasnamäe. He is eager, in a way that feels slightly less romantic than it did on the beach. He punctuates his invitation with expiring images of his dick. One from the side, one from the top, one with a thumbs-up. They amuse me, but that's all they do really. Until he forwards me an image from what I understand to be a Russian gay porn group and writes: "Just like you!". A guy—twenty-two maybe, strong arms, long blond hair, a hard-on, and a fierce angry stare—looks up to the camera from the corner of a hay-stacked barn. (Me? *Da*.) Staring at this man, and the image looking back so piercingly, turns the room on its axis. I tell him I am too tied up to meet tonight; that I have a complicated roommate; that coffee would have to be poured another time.

He agrees, smiles, turns, and strolls westwards for about five steps, right until he abruptly twirls around to point at me. (Me? *Da*.) He waves a circle around his own face, (Face? *Da*.) and points his thumb upwards. I feel my face turning red. I realise we can't run very far with this dialogue, but he's persistent. I also realise he's been trying to ask me a question, but only do so when he starts drawing numbers in the sand with his fingertips, right next to my beach towel. I tell him, in English, how he's two years older than I am, and mimic his handwriting right under his birth year, to tell him about mine. The sand feels warm.

nues to tell me, in Russian, all things I wouldn't ever understand. I find myself not knowing where to go with this conversation and decide to give him a hand. His palms are wide and his fingers determined. His eyes sparkle and he smiles, which I find remarkable here on this beach, but it comforts me. We continue our back and forth until I give up and point towards my novel. I shrug, and try to do it kindly.

He agrees, smiles, turns, and strolls westwards for about five steps, right until he abruptly twirls around to point at me. (Me? *Da*.) He waves a circle around his own face, (Face? *Da*.) and points his thumb upwards. I feel my face turning red. I realise we can't run very far with this dialogue, but he's persistent. I also realise he's been trying to ask me a question, but only do so when he starts drawing numbers in the sand with his fingertips, right next to my beach towel. I tell him, in English, how he's two years older than I am, and mimic his handwriting right under his birth year, to tell him about mine. The sand feels warm.

We are watched from the birch, I notice, as we continue to both talk and not talk for another few minutes. That is until we get interrupted by a loud Finnish guy putting his towel right in between ours. I remember he's Finnish, and obnoxious, in a heartbeat.

Around this time last year, I came to call this tree mine, because of this same Finnish guy groping

It all reminds me of this conversation when, last spring, I dated this really tall guy that lives in Mustamäe. Joshua and I would go out for drinks, or watch romcoms together just to start making out at the ten-minute mark, and then he would crack the joints in my fingers carefully. And usually that would freak me out, but around him I always found some sense of comfort and ease. One time, however, right after sex that felt both sticky and sweet, as we cuddled into sleep, he asked me when I would cut my hair off, since he didn't really understand it, or what it meant to me. It made me want to leave his apartment building, and run out. Instead it gave me a nightmare. I tried to talk him through why that felt so unsettling, at dawn over tea, and thought of a guy called Vitor.

Him, I specifically remember from that when we were waiting for the rain to end under a small gazebo in a garden named after happy strolls in the very west of Porto. Vitor had the sweetest eyes, and he had made me feel all things novel, and very seen too, a few nights before then. That night I wore a long and wide silk blue skirt that I twirled around in, and we both arrived early to the party. We made out and ended up grabbing coffee the next morning, seeing one play, wanting to go for another. The lead actor for the latter one ended up missing her flight, so we decided to go for a small stroll. After fifteen kilometres it started pouring right as we stood under that gazebo. Every time we met up

me from behind my translation of *Las Malas*, by Camila Sosa Villada. Back then I only had one mere intention, which was reading. He made me feel angry, and vulnerable, and out of place. He later told me about the bushes behind the beach, and the following weeks I made sure I wouldn't encounter him on my morning swims.

few winters ago I read how those who live most high up in the mountains in Aosta have a word for the sun-kissed parts of their mountains, and another for those parts that never get to enjoy it. Much like the *adret* and the *ubac* of the Alps, I imagine that those who work in apple orchards, must have words for the sun-kissed parts of their fruit.

Since then, I've come to notice how I like how some phenomena only seem to come into being, by being perceived by those who collectively inhabit a space in which it unfolds. Much like how Valdostani shepherds came to notice that some parts of their mountains never touched daylight. I like how those things then become more tangible to those same shepherds through its naming. I also like the impossibility to encounter, know of, and understand, all those many words that locate themselves in the *ubac*. And I like how, sometimes, that keeps them safely tucked away.

I would wear a totally different set of clothes. A skirt and a crop top; a butchy pair of jeans and a graphic t-shirt; a dress with exaggerated bell-bottoms. And every time he would tell me how he also liked to see me in those.

return moves over the bushes and the beach in ways that feel quite different from last year. I return to watch the birds migrate, and to finish the book Carlo recommended to me, and encounter it much emptier than it would have been four seasons ago. I wade my way through the thicket and notice how the falling of the birch leaves is making the array of pathways much more visible than just a few weeks ago. Passersby can now notice how I dance around an older man with his pants pulled down, and continue westward for a last swim of the season.

I like returning here to this place, I realise, for its many delights. I like how the apple trees grow so close to the shore. I like how they taste sour because they're small. I like how the language of this space exists in many tongues, and how each of those tongues hold different meanings. I like how the beach has different names to some, and none to others. I like to look at how the tree roots carry my shoulder bag and my socks. I like both the intensity and the stillness in the air, and the haze of desire, desire, desire. I like to spend time in the *ubac*, and I also like to take bus fifty-nine back to the *adret*, and so I turn eastwards to do just that.