

The Challenges Encountered in Translating Ragnheiður Gestsdóttir's Novel *40*
Vikur from Icelandic to English using the Theories and Methods of Peter
Newmark

by

Patrice K. Odegard

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba

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ABSTRACT

“The Challenges Encountered Translating Ragnheiður Gestsdóttir’s Novel *40 Vikur* from Icelandic to English using the Theories and Methods of Peter Newmark” gives an account of the translation process used during this project. A brief overview is given of the theories, methods and processes of translation as recommended by translator and scholar Peter Newmark in his book *A Textbook of Translation*. The methods used and the challenges encountered during the translation process are discussed, as well as the semantic and communicative theories, naturalness and equivalent effect. My translation of the novel *40 Weeks* by the Icelandic author Ragnheiður Gestsdóttir then follows.

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And last, but not least, I would like to thank my family for their support and patience on this incredible journey; my husband Mark, my daughter Alana and her fiancé Gunnar, and my son Eric.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my parents Theodore (Teddy) Einar Olafson and Sólborg (Solla) Guðlaug Olafson and my ammas and afis, Bjarnþór (Thor) and Kristín Margrét (Magga) Lifman and Þórður (Doddi) and Þórvör Sigurlaug (Loa) Olafson.

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Introduction:

A translation can be an interesting journey into another culture, either one that is far removed from our own, or a journey into a culture that is not so different from the one we are most familiar with. My journey took me to Iceland, both literally and figuratively. I have translated a novel for teenagers written by Ragnheiður Gestsdóttir,¹ an award winning author from Iceland. Her novel is entitled 40 Vikur or 40 Weeks and was published in Reykjavík in 2001. In the following chapters I will describe my journey from research and preparation to the translation of this novel and the challenges encountered. The main focus will be to provide background information on the theories and methods of scholar and translator Peter Newmark.² The theories of communicative and semantic translation, naturalness and equivalent effect, as found in his book A Textbook of Translation, will be discussed, as well as an explanation of their use in the translation of 40 Weeks.

Since courses in Translation Studies are not offered on a regular basis at the University of Manitoba, I had the opportunity to spend the 2006-2007 academic year in Iceland, during which time I audited four courses in Translation Studies, taught in Icelandic. Students in these classes included undergraduate and graduate students, as well as people who were already working as translators, interpreters, and editors. The four

¹ Ragnheiður Gestsdóttir was born in Reykjavík, educated in Reykjavík and Denmark, and lives in Hafnafjörður in Iceland. She is an illustrator and author of books for children and teenagers. Her first book came out in 1985. She has won awards for her work in both Iceland and Scandinavia, the latest being the Nordic Children's Book Prize for Sverðberinn (The Swordbearer) in 2005. For more information, see www.bokmenntir.is/rithofundur

² Peter Newmark is professor emeritus at the University of Westminster. He still occasionally lectures and presents papers. He has written several books and articles over the years including A Textbook of Translation, 1988; Approaches to Translation, 1981; About Translation, 1983; Paragraphs on Translation, 1985. For more information, see: <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/translation/staff/newmark/htm>

courses were: Translation Studies; History of Translation; Translation, Text and Discourse; and Translation and Translation Technology. I was also granted permission to sit in on courses offered in the Icelandic for Foreign Students program at the University of Iceland in order to study the Icelandic language. These courses included Conversational Icelandic, Translation Studies, Language Use, and the Icelandic Online courses. In addition, I registered for language courses off-campus at Mímir, a school that offers Icelandic language classes to foreigners.

Prior to studying in Iceland, I had completed the requirements for a BA, with a major in Linguistics and a minor in Icelandic (language and literature courses), at the University of Regina and the University of Manitoba. I also completed courses in Icelandic literature, culture and language as required in the pre-Masters and Masters program at the University of Manitoba.

One of the classes in the Icelandic for Foreign Students program that I audited was a third year course in Translation Studies and it was there that I learned of Peter Newmark and his work. I would like to suggest that my use of Newmark is the most appropriate for this project, as his A Textbook of Translation targets entry level translators and students and offers a clear introduction into the world of translation. The following chapters will provide an overview of the theories and methods of Peter Newmark. In her book entitled Translation Studies, noted scholar, writer, poet and translator Susan Bassnett³ refers to Newmark as one of the pioneers in the field of

³ Susan Bassnett is Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Warwick and Professor in the Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies. She has written over 20 books to date, writes for several national newspapers, and writes poetry. For more information, see: <http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/profile>

translation research, even before Translation Studies became a field of study in its own right (3).

Although translation itself has been around for centuries, Translation Studies is a relatively new discipline which gradually came into being in the late 1970s. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, interest in theory and translation grew around the world and the ever-increasing use of electronic media and computer generated translation continues to fuel this growth today.⁴ Prior to this, translation was often viewed as merely an activity, one which was unscientific and not of any primary importance, and translators themselves were virtually invisible. A translator is no longer looked upon as someone who merely has a “knack” or “gift” for translating, as was once the case, and translation is a profession which is viewed as being increasingly important. The last two decades have seen Translation Studies courses offered worldwide, both at the undergraduate and graduate level. There are many professional journals and associations, as well as countless articles and textbooks now available on the subject. More and more scholars are studying every aspect of translation and its impact on culture and society, and, as noted by Bassnett, there is an ever-increasing interest into the study of the history of translation, as this history provides invaluable information on how important translation has been in discovering what we know today about the world and its cultures (1, 2). With the growth of globalization, the role that the translator plays is only going to become more important, both economically and culturally.

⁴ Bassnett, Susan. Translation Studies. London: Routledge, 2002. Susan Bassnett provides an overview of the evolution of Translation Studies in the ‘Preface to the Third Edition’ in her book Translation Studies.

I. Translation Theory: relating theory to practice.

Peter Newmark states in A Textbook of Translation that translation theory arises from the actual problems and solutions in a translator's practice, and if a translator does not encounter problems, then there can be no theory (9).

Peter Newmark's theory of translating is fully functional and it ensures that the translator is aware of the link that exists between translation theory and the act of translating⁵. The application of this theory begins with the translator determining the type and the function of the text to be translated, namely expressive, informative, or vocative.⁶ Briefly, an informative text or a vocative text's main purpose is to convey information, as in a textbook or article (informative text), or in popular fiction or propaganda (vocative text), and they call for a 'natural' method of translation, in that the translator must remember that it is the reader who is central. On the other hand, a translator must move away from 'natural' and express the style of the author in an expressive text, such as in a speech, personal correspondence or in serious imaginative literature (39-42).

⁵ Newmark, Peter. A Textbook of Translation. Malaysia: Pearson Education Limited, 2005. Figure 2. A functional theory of language. 20.

⁶ Newmark, 40. Figure 3. *Language functions and text-categories and text-types*. At the heart of the expressive function is the writer or speaker who expresses their feelings without taking into account a response. Examples include four principal types of serious imaginative literature - lyrical poetry, short stories, novels and plays; authoritative statements such as political speeches and/or documents, scientific, philosophical, and academic works; and autobiographies, essays and personal correspondence. The author is central here.

An informative text has fact at its core and includes topics that are scientific, technological, or academic and are written in the form of textbooks, reports minutes, etc. The author is 'anonymous' in that it is the information that is important.

A vocative text has the reader front and centre, again the author is 'anonymous' as the main goal is to get a reaction from the reader or to entertain or in the case of fiction, to sell a book. Text types include notices, propaganda, instructions and popular fiction.

The next step is to choose the translation theory to be used, this being either semantic or communicative. The semantic method is used for the translation of an expressive text and the communicative method is used for the translation of informative or vocative texts. Then, as a frame of reference, with respect to the theory used, the translator must be able to identify a problem, be aware of any matters of context relative to the problem and which translation procedures are available that then offer a solution.

Newmark's theory of translating encompasses four levels: the textual, the referential, the cohesive and the level of naturalness. A brief summary of the four levels is as follows: first, the textual level is where the SL (Source Language) is translated into the TL (Target Language), making changes to the SL grammar as required by the TL. It is the text that is the base level of any translation. Second, the referential level is the level at which the translator asks what the text is about, what is its aim, what is the author's purpose. One important task at this level is for the translator to be able to visualise what is going on in order to impart this reality to the readers. The referential level, or the level of reality, must not be viewed as something separate from the textual, or linguistic, level. Third, the cohesive level is more general and provides a link between the textual and referential level. It pays attention to the structure and mood of the text. Fourth, the level of naturalness, discussed below in more detail, ensures that the translation makes sense and sounds natural to the TL reader (19).

The above discussion of Newmark's theory of translation, which shows that translation is a practical exercise versus a theoretical exercise, is further supported by the words of Susan Bassnett, who says that "[T]he purpose of translation theory, then, is to reach an understanding of the processes undertaken in the act of translation, and, not, as

is so commonly misunderstood, to provide a set of norms for effecting the perfect translation” (43). She notes that translation scholar André Lefevere tried to define the goal of Translation Studies by suggesting that its purpose was to ‘produce a comprehensive theory which can also be used as a guideline for the production of translations’ (16). She says it is important to note that his intent here was to link theory with practice and not to set them apart on parallel paths. Translators continually face problems and they must discuss these problems, both practically and theoretically. The findings and ideas which arise from the theoretical discussions may then be applied to the practice of translation proper. “To divorce the theory from the practice, to set the scholar against the practitioner as has happened in other disciplines, would be tragic” (16). This statement is very important in that a translator cannot be bound so tightly to theory that the naturalness given to the TL text from spontaneity or ‘gut feeling’, artistic freedom, or practical problem solving is limited. A translator does not begin a project with the intent of strictly adhering to any one theory, but as problems arise, there is the knowledge that theories exist to find a solution.

II. Definition of Translation.

Peter Newmark defines translation as “rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text” (5). For example, with respect to 40 Weeks, the goal or expectation would be for the readers of the TL text to react in the same way as Ragnheiður’s readers reacted to 40 Vikur, the SL text. In order to accomplish the goal of an effective, natural-sounding translation, the translation has to be written effectively and competently in the language that the translator normally uses.

Even though a satisfactory translation is always possible, a translator is never fully satisfied with the finished product, as there always seems to be room for improvement: a better way to phrase a passage, to express an emotion, or to get a point across. Newmark points out that since translators are always striving to improve themselves, there is no such thing as a “perfect, ideal or ‘correct’ translation” (6). A translator works on four levels, in that a translation is a science, with respect to facts and the language required to express them, truthfully and correctly; it is an art, with respect to good writing, creativity, and inspiration; it is a skill, calling for appropriate language and correct usage; and it is a matter of taste with respect to preferences (6). As such, no two translators will express the facts in the same way nor will they be inspired in the same way.

Keeping the above in mind, Susan Bassnett states that it is common knowledge in the field of Translation Studies that if a group of translators were to all translate the same poem, each finished piece would be different. However, in each piece, something that translation scholar Anton Popovič refers to as the ‘invariant core’ would come through. This consists of the basic semantic elements and constants in the SL text that each translator finds and expresses. The differences in each poem appear as variants, or in other words, the way in which the individual translators express themselves. She stresses that the ‘invariant core’ must not be confused with “the speculative arguments about the ‘nature’, the ‘spirit’, or ‘soul’” of the piece (33, 34).

III. Analysis, Process, and Method.

The title of the novel which has been translated is 40 Vikur or 40 Weeks. It is the story of a young girl, 16 year old Sunna, who is hard-working, studious and a good daughter. She has just finished elementary school (10th grade in Iceland) and is looking forward to the end-of-the year class trip which is abruptly cancelled because some of the boys cheated on their final exams. Instead of going home to tell her parents that the trip was cancelled and subsequently joining them at their summer cottage for the weekend, she and her friend Brynja decide to have the weekend to themselves, as Brynja's family has also gone away for the weekend. They plan on going to the mall for dinner to celebrate and then take in a movie. At the movie theatre they run into several classmates and then go to a house party where there is alcohol. Sunna has a few drinks and ends up with Biggi, the class 'cool guy.' One thing leads to another that night and soon after Sunna discovers that she is pregnant. The story is written in diary form and the reader follows Sunna through the next months of her pregnancy and the birth of her child. The book is written from Sunna's perspective and gives an account of her feelings, emotions, the judgement, and the support she finds from those around her.

40 Weeks was analysed using only those of the suggested recommendations in chapter 2 of Newmark's A Textbook of Translation which were deemed to be applicable to this project. The results of the analysis, without providing the details from the list of choices available in each category, are as follows:⁷

⁷ Newmark, 11-18. The details of the full analysis of a text as recommended by Newmark can be found in chapter 2 "The Analysis of a Text".

1. *Reading the Text*: A translation begins with a reading of the SL text in order to first, get an understanding of what it is about, and second, to be able to do an analysis through the eyes of a translator, thus allowing for the selection of an appropriate method of translation and also to be able to note problems that arise repeatedly. The whole text was read thoroughly three times before beginning the translation in order to get an idea of the intent of the text and the gist of the story. It was at this time that a list of difficult or unknown words and passages was made. Close readings were done frequently on challenging or unclear passages (11).

2. *Intention of the Text*: The translator must be aware of the author's approach to the subject matter in the SL text. In 40 Weeks, the author has approached the subject of teenage pregnancy by telling a very warm but straightforward story to the intended readership of young teenagers (12).

3. *Intention of the Translator*: The intention of the translator is usually that of the author of the SL text, as is the case here in the translation of 40 Weeks (12).

4. *Readership*: The readership of the translated text and the original is the same in this case, namely young teenagers. The TL readership dictates the language and tone of the text (13).

5. *Stylistic scale*: The scale of formality is informal, as opposed to using "officialese" or "taboo" language; the scale of generality or difficulty is neutral, as opposed to "simple"

or “opaquely technical”; the scale of emotional tone is warm, as opposed to “intense” or “understatement” (14).

6. *Setting*: The TL text is targeted for the same type of readership as the SL text. The reader of the TL text would have knowledge of the topic, but it would be from a different perspective, based on cultural differences. If published, the TL text would be published in Canada, perhaps for a North American readership (15).

7. *Quality of the Writing*: The writer in this case is an award-winning author in her genre. A translation must adhere to the quality of the writing of the author whether it is good or bad and a translator must not deviate from this or try to improve upon the SL author’s writing (16).

8. *The last reading*: This is where the translator takes a very close look at and makes note of all cultural references in the text, such as personal and place names and words that at first appear to be untranslatable. These words are underlined, examined and re-examined in context and in isolation, and then once again in context (17).

Newmark points out that such in-depth analysis is invaluable for the beginning translator, especially if the translation will be for a readership that is very different in educational level or culture from the SL readership. By fully understanding and examining the text in such careful detail at this level, the translator is more able to see the relationship between translation theory and practice (17, 18).

IV. Level of Naturalness.

Naturalness is one of the biggest challenges for a translator. The translation must make sense and it should read like an original to the TL audience, but at the same time, the translator must be sure to be true to the story and say what the SL author intended to say, and in the way the author intended to say it. In the case of 40 Weeks, the story had to be told through the eyes of a sixteen year old girl. Peter Newmark notes that the translator can only achieve naturalness by stepping away from the SL text and reading the “translation as though no original existed” (24). A useful strategy is to let the translation sit and go back to it after a while, if time permits, and then ask if this is something that would ever be seen in a text of the TL (26). In order to do a thorough final test for naturalness, the translator should read the text aloud (36). Words and expressions need to be checked and cross-checked in an up-to-date dictionary. Translators have to continually check words in the TL, even the meanings and uses of the most familiar words.

V. Unit of translating.

“[T]he sentence is the ‘natural’ unit of translation, just as it is the natural unit of comprehension and recorded thought” (65). The sentence was used as the basic unit of translation for 40 Weeks. Each ‘diary entry’ was read through, then the paragraph to be translated was re-read, and finally the sentence was read and analysed. Particularly difficult or confusing passages were translated word-for-word and phrases were marked. A great deal of translating may have to be done at the word level, but the sentence

provides the element of cohesion throughout the text. The context of the paragraph, 'diary entry', or the whole text became reference points when challenges or uncertainties arose from the translation at the level of the sentence.

VI. Semantic versus Communicative.

The central problem with respect to translation has always been whether to translate literally (word-for-word) or freely (sense-for-sense) from the SL into the TL. This argument has been around and argued by translators and scholars since before the first century BC. Orators Horace (65-8BC) and Cicero (106-43BC) argued that translations should be done freely, leaving the word-for-word method to the grammarians.⁸ Bible translation is also paramount in the history of translation, starting from the Vulgate, St. Jerome's translation of the Bible into Latin, right up to modern day translations.

Newmark says that in order to attain both accuracy and economy in translation, there are two main methods or theories to consider, namely semantic and communicative⁹(47).

a) *Communicative translation*, with the emphasis on the TL, attempts, says Newmark, "to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership"(47). It is written at the linguistic level of the readership and is used for informative and vocative texts, which were discussed earlier. 40 Weeks is a vocative text in that the readership is front and centre and the author is 'anonymous'. Naturalness in communicative translation is

⁸ Bassnett, 45-78. See also chapter 2 "History of Translation Theory" for more in-depth discussion.

⁹ Newmark, 45-47. See also chapter 5 "Translation Methods" for an explanation of the methods used in semantic and communicative translations.

absolutely necessary and a proper translation can only be attained if the TL is the translator's habitual language of use, insists Newmark (26).

b) *Semantic translation*, where the emphasis is on the SL, is written at the linguistic level of the author and is used for 'expressive' texts. It pays attention to the aesthetic value of the SL text "compromising on 'meaning' where appropriate", so as to leave the end product intact and true to the SL (46). The translator deviates from 'natural' here in order to capture the style of the writer of the SL text.

A translation is not usually either only 'semantic' or 'communicative' as there are parts of both methods that may be used in a single project. Take, for example, literal, or word-for-word, translation, which places emphasis on the SL. The word-for-word method was used for difficult sentences or phrases in the translation of 40 Weeks. Faithful translation, again with emphasis on the SL, uses transferred words - words that are transferred directly into the TL. This would include the translated words for grandmother, grandfather, and great-grandmother, which are *amma*, *afi* and *langamma* that are used in the translation of 40 Weeks. These words are cultural and functional and are deemed to be easily understood by the TL audience.

VII. Equivalent effect.

The topic of equivalent effect has been an integral part of translation and Translation Studies discussion over the years. In order to attain equivalent effect, a text translated into the TL should have the same effect upon its readers as did the original text in the SL. Peter Newmark says that equivalent effect should be "the desirable *result*, rather than the *aim* of any translation" but the translator should be aware of the fact that this may be

impossible if there are great cultural differences between the SL and the TL (48). For example, if the novel 40 Weeks was translated into a language whose speakers belonged to a culture that oppressed women or forbade premarital sex or alcohol use, then theoretically it would be unlikely for there to be an equivalent effect upon its readers, if in fact, publication of the novel was even allowed.

Newmark states that "... in the communicative translation of vocative texts, equivalent effect is not only desirable, it is essential" (48). One way that the effectiveness of equivalent effect, along with naturalness, may be measured in popular fiction, for example, is in book sales. Communicative translation, which is set at the level of the reader's level of knowledge and language, has a better chance of creating equivalent effect than semantic translation (49). This can be attributed to the fact that often a semantic translation is aimed at a very specific audience, for example, scientists or academics.

With respect to 40 Weeks and equivalent effect, the goal or the result should be to have the reader empathize with, connect with, and understand Sunna. The translator wants to be able to impart the following to the reader: the kind of girl that Sunna is; her relationship with her family; how she feels on the night of the party; how she just wants to be with Biggi on that night; her anxiety and fears at the thought of being pregnant and how it could not possibly be true; how hard was it for her to tell her friend Brynja that she would have had an abortion; her feelings toward Steini, a boy from the choir; and finally, with the birth of her baby, how she feels about the new reality of her life; she is now a parent, and school and her plans for the future, are on hold.

The readers of the SL text would have the advantage of “following” Sunna around Reykjavik: to the mall, to school, downtown, to the hospital, to Akureyri, watching fireworks on New Year’s Eve, whereas to the TL readers, these places and events would just be pictures in their imaginations, a product of the words on the page. Although there is not a great cultural gap between Iceland and Canada, the Icelandic readers would identify with Sunna in a way that Canadian readers might not, mainly because of the difference in the way teenage pregnancy is perceived in the two countries.

VIII. Method of approach used in 40 Weeks.

The following sections will describe the methods, processes and challenges encountered during the translation of 40 Weeks:

1. The novel was read three times before the translation began, in order to assess the type of text that was to be translated and to get a feel for the author’s style of writing, as well as to ‘get to know’ the characters in the story. The understanding of the language, the characters, and the story increased with each reading.

2. A list of difficult words and passages was made and dictionaries – monolingual, bilingual, and on-line – were consulted.

3. The translation was written first in longhand and, as difficult words and passages came up, then 2, 3, or even 4 possible solutions were listed, each separated by a slash.

This draft was transferred to the computer, each choice was considered, and the most appropriate entry was chosen. If there was still doubt, problems were left for the meetings with the advisor, whose first language is Icelandic. Difficult passages were at first translated word-for-word. Phrases often posed problems if it was not immediately

evident that the words were part of a phrase. Question marks were used if a word could not be decided upon or if a solution could not be found. Notations were made during the initial translation that word order may have to be changed.

4. After transferring the first draft to the computer, changes or corrections that were obvious were made before meeting with the advisor for the next two edits. Fourth and fifth edits were then completed. At this time, suggestions for changes which affected the naturalness of the translation, as recommended by a second reader whose first language is English, were made. These changes were classified as 'awkward wording', 'poor word choice', 'too literal', 'old-style language', and 'cultural'. These classifications made it possible to note the type of problems being encountered and how often they were occurring.

5. There was initially an uncertainty as to how 'free' the translation should be. For example, the first translation draft of the novel, as compared to the revisions at the end, was almost a 'literal' or a word-for-word translation in many areas. This was not the intent, but it is clear that the translation was inadvertently being very true to the author with respect to word order, punctuation, etc. This resulted in an awkward, choppy and foreign sounding first draft. It can be likened to not seeing the forest for the trees, as the focus gradually narrowed down to the word versus the sentence, paragraph, page or text.

6. The author's paragraph scheme and the diary format of the novel were left intact. Punctuation was adapted as required for a natural sounding translation.

IX. Challenges.

Two of the greatest challenges dealt with the level of naturalness and equivalent effect. There were other challenges and problems under the umbrella of the above mentioned, such as voice, 'false friends', word order, phrases, the case system, filler words, verb tense, and the Icelandic language itself to name but a few, but naturalness and equivalent effect were the most important factors with respect to the final product.

Matters of culture and society also fell under naturalness and equivalent effect, even though, as previously noted, there is not a great cultural difference between Iceland and Canada. First and foremost, the question that arose was whether this translation would have the same intended effect upon its TL readers here as it did upon its SL audience in Iceland, and more broadly, is it even possible to expect this from a translated work?

For example, would the poetry of Jónas Hallgrímsson, a famous Icelandic poet, describing the Icelandic landscape, read aloud in English, have the same effect upon a Canadian as it would upon an Icelander, hearing the same poem read aloud in Icelandic? On the other hand, would an Icelander, hearing the part of the story about the exploding outhouse in W.O. Mitchell's Who has Seen the Wind? react in the same way as someone from the Canadian prairies? Is it reasonable to expect someone from another culture to really "get it"?

Many Translation Studies scholars say that exact translation is impossible and that culture cannot be translated. Susan Bassnett provides an example of this with respect to the French phrase *bon appetit* where she says that the context would have to be considered when choosing an English translation, be it *dig in*, *tuck in*, or *I hope you like*

it, as *good appetite* just does not make any sense (29). Another example is from the Icelandic *gjörðu svo vel* or *gerðu svo vel* which translates into English as ‘please’; ‘please help yourself’ as in someone offering someone else some food; ‘go ahead’ (and start eating); ‘please’ as in a polite command to do something; or ‘come in’, to give a few examples, showing that the translation of this phrase depends upon context.

Examples of the challenges encountered with respect to culture and society appear in italics, followed with an explanation:

- *Teenage pregnancy*: There is a sense of a cultural difference with respect to teenage pregnancy between Iceland and Canada. In Iceland, it does not seem to be a major catastrophe if a young girl becomes pregnant, whereas in Canada, there may often be a stigma attached to the situation and the girl’s life is considered to be ‘ruined.’ That is not to say a teenage pregnancy is not difficult for a young girl in Iceland, but the attitude seems to be that ‘this is life’ and the young girls receive more support and understanding from their families and society. It has been part of the culture in Iceland in a different way than it has been a part of the culture in Canada. In 40 Weeks, Sunna’s Amma Dóra was herself an unmarried mother and she told Sunna that her own mother (Sunna’s great-grandmother) was somewhat put-out that the baby was not left for them to bring up, fearing a life of poverty for mother and daughter. Sunna’s sister Sara is also an unmarried mother, although she is engaged and living with the baby’s father. Marriage in Iceland is not something that is rushed into.
- *Names and naming system*: a child’s surname is the genitive form of the given name of the father, followed by *–son* or *–dóttir*. For example, Sunna’s father’s

name is Guðmundur so her surname is Guðmundsdóttir. It is possible for all of the members of one family to have different surnames, depending upon the gender of the children; the mother's surname would be from her father's given name, and not from her husband's name. Biggi's surname is Grímsson, as his father's given name is Grímur and his surname is Birgisson. Sunna tells her amma "...og mamma hans heitir Pálína, ég veit ekki hvers dóttir" which translates literally as 'his (Biggi's) mother's name is Pálína, I don't know who's daughter', meaning that she doesn't know Pálína's surname. It is also not unheard of for the baby to take the given name of the mother, followed by *-son* or *-dóttir*, as was the case in this novel. According to standard custom, Sunna's daughter's surname should have been Birgisdóttir, but Biggi felt that it was too common a name and that Sunnudóttir would be nicer.

- *24 hour sunshine in the summer and darkness in the winter*: Sunna says that cold and dark go together, as do heat and light, referring to the fact that Iceland is in the dark for the long winter months, but enjoys 24 hour daylight during the summer. She describes what it feels like to be in a foreign country during the summer, where there is heat, and yet night falls, or pours over everything. "*Mér leiðist myrkrið á veturna, en elska sumarið þegar aldrei verður dimmt. Mér finnst alltaf skýtið að vera í útlensku sumri þegar heitt myrkur hellist allt í einu yfir. Myrkur og kuldi fara saman, birta og hlýja fara saman.*"

The light plays a significant part in Iceland's culture and Icelandic authors often write about it. Sunna makes reference to the colour of the winter sky and light often during the story – when she is in the hospital; as they are bringing the baby

home; the light coming through the curtains in her new room; the afternoon sunlight streaming in during the christening and the brightness of the party night.

- *Christening*: A baby's name is often not revealed until the christening, as was the case in this novel. The baby was nearly a month old when Sunna and Biggi made her name known. Not even Sunna's parents knew what it would be. The priest had been told the name the evening before the christening so that he could be sure the name was legal. There are strict rules to follow in Iceland when it comes to naming a baby.
- *New Year's Eve*: The incredible New Year's Eve celebration is an amazing sight to behold and involves a display of hundreds of thousands of fireworks lit by individuals, families, the city, and the nation and nearly defies description. Sunna says that her father is like a little kid once a year when it is time to set off the fireworks in the back yard. The whole city of Reykjavík and surrounding area takes part in this event where hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent on fireworks.
- *Christmas*: The tradition in Iceland is that everything must be done by 6:00 p.m. sharp on Christmas Eve so that everyone is ready to go to church. Christmas stress, shopping and other preparations would be familiar to the TL readership. In Iceland, there is more of a time constraint.
- *Merchant's Weekend*: *Verslunarmannahelgina* is the August long weekend. There is a huge outdoor celebration in the Westman Islands and in other locations around the country and stores and businesses are closed, hence the reference in

the novel to the bewildered tourists walking around a half-empty town during this weekend.

- *Iceland's Independence Day*: June 17th is when Icelanders celebrate their independence from Denmark. It is a national holiday marked by celebration.
- *Place Names*: *Kringlan* is translated as 'Kringlan Mall' and was the first major, and for a long time, the only, mall in Reykjavík; *Tjörnin* is translated as 'The Pond' and is a pond or small lake in downtown Reykjavík; *Hljómskálagarð* is translated as 'Bandstand Park' and is located along The Pond; *Akureyri* is a city in the north of Iceland.
- *School System*: In Iceland, children go to playschool before the age of six; from the age of 6 to 16, a child is in *grunnskóli* or compulsory school ; from 16 to 20, they go on to *menntaskóli* or grammar school/ high school; *ffölbrautarskóli* (upper secondary school or comprehensive school); *iðnmenntaskóli* (industrial vocational school); *sérskóli* (specialized vocational school).¹⁰ In the novel, Sunna was said to be in tenth grade and not in elementary or middle school, as a direct translation would indicate. She was about to enter high school at age sixteen, whereas in Canada she would have already been in high school. A pregnant sixteen year old in elementary school would not have depicted Sunna in the proper light, according to her character and age in the novel.

Versló is the name of a secondary school in Iceland.

- *Personal Names*: The Icelandic names and spellings of the characters as they appeared in the novel are used because a person's name and its proper spelling is

¹⁰ <http://www.euroeducation.net/prof/iceco.htm>

part of their identity. Young people today are accustomed to seeing and hearing names from all over the world and the Icelandic names should not be difficult for the young reader to accept. The letters may present a problem at first. The 32 letters of the Icelandic alphabet are:

a, á, b, d, ð, e, é, f, g, h, i, í, j, k, l, m, n, o, ó, p, r, s, t, u, ú, v, x, y, ý, þ, æ, ö

A rough guide to the pronunciation of the letters is as follows:

a a as in *father*; **á** ow as in *cow*; **e** e as in *men*; **é** ye as in *yet*; **i** i as in *big*;

í ee as in *see*; **o** o as in *not*; **ó** o as in *hope*; **u** u as in *put*; **y** i as in *big*;

ý ee as in *see*; **æ** i as in *mind*; **ö** i as in *bird*; **ð** th as in *there*; **j** ye as in *yet*;

þ th as in *think*

Amma, *afi* and *langamma* were used instead of grandma, grandpa and great-grandma. Children in North America have a variety of names from different cultures which they use for their grandparents.

- *Food*: *skyr* is often translated as ‘yogurt’ and is a yogurt-type product, and this is an example of a cultural term with no direct translation; ‘crepes’ was the translation used for *pönnukaka*; *brauðterta* translates as ‘ribbon’ or ‘layered sandwiches’; *rjómaterta* is a ‘cream cake’; *kransakaka* is a ‘wreath cake’.
- *Newspaper*: The name for *Morgunblaðið*, one of the daily newspapers in Iceland, was not referred to by its name but rather was called ‘*Mogginn*’.
- *Slang*: Baby talk from Brynja’s little sister; *sadna* for *þarna* ‘there’; *blörru* for *blaðra* ‘balloon’ or ‘b’loon’ in baby talk; *bra-bra* for ‘ducks’.

Slurred speech from the boy who tried to hit on Sunna the night of the party: *Ka e sona fyndið* for *Hvað er svo fyndið* ‘What is so funny’.

Other challenges included:

- *The voice of the text as it pertains to naturalness:* The text must read as if it were being told by a sixteen year old girl. Ragnheiður did this in Icelandic, but would that voice make it through to the English translation? For example: Was the attitude in the translation evident when it was called for? Did the fear and trepidation show through as Sunna went through her ordeal? When Sunna told Brynja that, if she could have, she would have had an abortion, the words burned her mouth. There was the fear she felt when she thought she might lose the baby, even though it was an unwanted pregnancy. There were the feelings of having let her dad down when he found out about the pregnancy. There were the all the emotions that went through her when Biggi's mother phoned; her broken heart over Biggi; her feelings for Steini; the excitement over the party; how she wanted the evening of the party to never end.
- *Repeated words:* The words that translate as 'just', 'then', 'no doubt', 'in fact', 'of course', 'definitely', 'tremendously', and 'what's more' are used repeatedly by the author in the SL text, but when translated into the TL text tend to sound awkward and unnatural. Newmark says that although each and every word must be accounted for when translating, it is not necessary for these words to appear in the finished product as long as the intended meaning of the passage is left intact (37). The translation was re-read several times, each time removing one or more of the above repeated words. A perfect example of this is *Nú eru þau laus við okkur úr skólanum og rifja bara upp góðar minningar, rétt eins og gert er í*

minningargreinum. In this sentence, both *bara* and *rétt* are translated as ‘just’.

‘They are now free of us in this school and just bring up the good memories, just like in the obituaries.’

There were many instances in the translation where the original word choices did not satisfy the level of naturalness as they sounded stuffy, old-fashioned or too literal, and therefore, did not sound like something a sixteen year old girl might say. Examples of these words and their replacements are:

- ‘gangly’ was a word used in the first drafts of the translation to describe Sunna’s classmates when she was talking about how most sixteen year old boys looked. ‘Gangly’ was replaced with ‘skinny’.
- ‘buttock’ was changed to ‘butt’ to describe the placement of Biggi’s hands on Sunna’s body.
- ‘rambunctious’ was replaced with ‘full of energy’ as Sunna was talking about Brynja’s younger brothers and sister.
- ‘emanates’ was used in the description of Sunna’s Amma Sigga and was changed to ‘flows’ as in “warmth flows from her”.
- ‘write a text’ was changed to ‘answer’ in the translation when Sunna and Brynja are exchanging text messages.
- ‘hell bent’ was changed to ‘determined’ when Sunna was talking about her dad’s plan on taking the family hiking in the mountains.
- ‘in breathless suspense’ sounded far too literal and was changed to ‘holding my breath’ as Sunna waited for the colour to change on the pregnancy test strip.

- ‘cosmetics bag’ was changed to ‘makeup bag’ as it sounds more like what a teenager might say.
- ‘awfully dowdy’ was used to describe the maternity clothes that Sunna saw in the stores and was changed to ‘so ugly’ which is more in line with what a young person might say.
- ‘flippant’ was changed to ‘smart remark’ and was used when Sunna met with Biggi to tell him about the pregnancy and she decided not to be sarcastic in one of her replies.
- ‘secretly looked at them’ was too literal a translation and was changed to ‘steal a glance’ to describe Sunna looking at her family during the Christmas concert.
- ‘taken aback’ was changed in several places in the translation and was replaced with ‘shocked’.
- ‘let the good feelings out’ was too literal and was changed to ‘celebrate’ to describe the feelings after the exams were done.

It is necessary to constantly look up words in the SL, even when the meaning seems to be obvious. This is perhaps most important when it comes to the challenge faced by ‘false friends’ which are words or expressions that have the same or similar form in two or more languages but convey different meanings. Two examples from the novel are:

- *töff strákana* – ‘tough boys’. The problem with this translation is that Biggi is not ‘tough’ as in the sense of rough or mean. He is very good-looking, dresses stylishly and is a good student. If anything, he seems to come across as aloof and brooding. The translation of ‘cool’ was more appropriate.

- The word for ‘curtains’ is *gardínur*. This was translated immediately as ‘garden’, which made absolutely no sense in the context in which it was used. Sunna was taking stock of her room, trying to figure out how she would be able to fit all the baby’s things in with her own things. She notes that the walls are peach-coloured and that this colour is also on the flower pattern on the curtains. Substituting garden here for curtains made no sense and caused confusion.

There were challenges with words and phrases where the given or even literal translation appeared to fit neither the context nor the circumstances, affecting naturalness and equivalent effect. Examples are as follows:

- *mannskrattinn* ‘rascal’ This translation did not work because in English the description of the principal by the students in a situation like this would probably be much stronger. A ‘rascal’ implies someone impish, even cute. ‘Idiot’ was used instead of something harsher like ‘bastard’ or ‘prick’, which might be heard from some students, but did not seem to be words that Sunna would use.
- *stelpa* ‘girl’ Sunna is describing the way Brynja’s mother dresses. ‘Girl’ seemed to be too general; ‘young girl’ sounded like someone in grade school; ‘teenager’ was a more appropriate choice.
- *þetta er flott, alveg í stíl...* ‘this is smart, completely in style’. Sunna is describing the makeup that Brynja has applied. The translation ‘it’s cool and totally in style’ was more in line with what a teenager would say.
- *útangátta* ‘absent-minded’ Sunna is describing one of the boys in the group as usually being shy and even a little ‘absent-minded’, but now he was in very good

spirits and happy (because of what he was drinking). Based on the context, it didn't seem that this translation fit. 'Outsider' was used to describe his usual place in the group.

- *frá útlöndum* 'from a foreign country' was originally used to translate this phrase, but it should have been 'living abroad'. Biggi's family was Icelandic and had been living abroad for a few years. This phrase is used by Icelanders to describe fellow countrymen who have returned after having lived outside of Iceland.
- *saman* 'together' and 'together, as in seeing one another' Sunna responds to Brynja's question about what she and Biggi did after the party by saying they were together for a while after that "Við vorum *saman* lengi fram eftir...". Then Brynja asks "Og? Eruð þið *saman*?" in the sense of Sunna and Biggi dating one another.
- *Nú eru þau laus við okkur úr skólanum og rífa bara upp góðar minningar, rétt eins og gert er í minningargreinum.* 'Now they are free of us in this school and just recall only the good memories, just like in the obituaries.' 'Go over the good memories' was used at first instead of 'recall' and the first attempts at finding a translation for 'minningargreinum' gave the awkward sounding 'ceremony program'.
- *gamli grís* 'old pig' This translation was too harsh and is not what was meant in Icelandic, so in order to take the edge off, 'old fart' was used to refer to the principal.
- *Unnur umsjónarkennari kemur til allra úr bekknum á eftir og faðmar okkur innilega, örugglega himinlifandi að losna við okkur.* 'Unnur, the assistant teacher,

comes to our class after and gives everyone a hug, definitely very glad to see us go on.’ Unnur is glad, as in pleased or proud, to see that everyone in the class passed and not glad to see them gone, as in get rid of them. The intention of this sentence was misunderstood in the first draft.

- *rok* ‘storm (wind force of 10)’ *rigning né rok* ‘... neither raining nor windy’
When used in this way, *rok* just meant ‘windy’ and not ‘stormy’.
- *búðarbrosið mitt* ‘my store smile’ Sunna is referring here to the smile she puts on to greet customers when they enter the store. “Store smile” is set in quotation marks.
- *Bitur, gömul og skorpin, sem engin hefur nokkurn tíma litið við...* ‘Embittered, old and shriveled, whom nobody has ever looked at...’ This had been translated as ‘who has no time to look...’ which did not make sense.
- *vinan* ‘girlfriend’ This word, although it does mean girlfriend, in the context in which it is used by an older woman and one of the doctors when speaking to Sunna, is more appropriately translated as ‘my dear’.
- *En ævintýraffaran mín er öðruvísi í dag.* ‘The shore of all of my life’s adventures looks different today.’ This sentence was problematic because of the compound word for ‘the shore of her life’s adventures’ meaning the same shore she had played on and explored over the years.
- *manneskja* ‘human being, person’ Sunna uses this term very sarcastically in her mind when referring to a cashier in the drug store where she is buying her pregnancy test kit. The term was omitted altogether, as was ‘man’ and an italicized *you* was chosen, as in “What do *you* think?”

- *Það var skrítið að koma inn í skólabygginguna og eiga að vera þar, eiga þar heima.* ‘It was strange to come into the school building, knowing that it would be the place where we would belong’. Sunna is talking about the first day in the new school and how it had felt so big and strange at first, but she knew that before too long it would feel like ‘home’. This sentence proved to be very challenging.
- *Ég sé samt út undan mér að það er allt fullt af skærlitum fötum, ...* ‘Still, I see from the corner of my eye that the stores are full of brightly coloured clothes...’ This sentence proved to be a challenge because of an error and an assumption. *Sé* was translated as the subjunctive form of *vera* ‘to be’ instead of the present tense form of *sjá* ‘to see’. *Vera út undan* is a phrase meaning ‘be passed over, left out’ while *sjá e-ð út undan sér* is a phrase meaning ‘see something out of the corner of one’s eye’.
- *Íþróttadálfinum* ‘sports elf’ This is a word that Sunna uses to describe Arnar, Sara’s fiancé. This implies that he is crazy about sports but wouldn’t make much sense in English, hence ‘sports addict’. It was thought that neither ‘sports fanatic’ nor ‘sports maniac’ would fit the intended use here.
- *... þá kom þetta honum einhvern veginn ekkert við lengur.* ‘then this was somehow no longer his problem’ Sunna was talking to her amma and referring to the past. It was difficult to find a natural sounding translation.
- *Það á enginn að ónáða þig nema þú viljir það sjálf.* ‘No one is to bother you, unless you want to talk to them.’ Sunna’s amma tells her this after Biggi’s mother calls and upsets Sunna. This sentence was difficult to translate since it sounds

awkward to say that one would let someone bother them so ‘to talk to them’ was added to clarify the situation.

- *Svo kallar Auður á okkur að hljóðfærinu ...* ‘Then Auður summons us to the piano...’ Sometimes a meaning is so obvious that it can elude the translator. The choir was getting ready to perform and *hljóðfærinu* was translated as ‘instrument’ instead of piano, which made no sense.
- *Ég veit að ég hef minnst fyrir prófunum í íslensku, ensku og dönsku ...* ‘I know that Icelandic, English and Danish will be the easy exams for me ...’ This was translated as ‘I know that I recall a lot for the exams in Icelandic, English, and Danish...’ which sounds awkward and is too literal a translation.
- *... svo þær vilja að ég ráði ferðinni.* ‘... so they want me to decide where to go.’ Sunna’s friends have picked her up to go Christmas shopping. They have finished their shopping, so they let her decide where they will go. This clause was translated as ‘... decide where the trip takes us’ or ‘... want me to control the trip’ both of which are far too literal and awkward.
- *Andrésblöð* ‘Uncle Joachim’ This was the name of a publication the older children were reading at Christmas. This is an example of something that is very cultural and was translated as ‘Andrew’s paper.’ The translation of this word required assistance.
- *Tertur* and *bombur* Fireworks are a major part of the New Year’s Eve celebrations in Iceland. *Tertur* and *bombur* are mentioned and literally mean ‘pies and bombs’. These are different types of fireworks and an italicized English

translation was used rather the English names of fireworks, as many of the names appeared to be brand names.

- *Það er hörku gangur í þessu...* ‘It is difficult going through this...’ The midwife says this to Sunna after she checks to see how the dilation is progressing. ‘Everything is going so well...’ was used, after some consultation, as it seemed to fit the context better.
- *duglegur* ‘energetic, hard-working, efficient’ This word shows up many times in the text. It is used on this page by Sunna’s mother to describe Sunna’s efforts during the labour. The translations given in the dictionary did not seem to fit or sound right and ‘brave’ was chosen to fit in this context.
- *Meðan á hriðinni stendur er eins og ekkert annað en þessi tilfinning sé til í öllum heiminum, bara þrýstingurinn út.* ‘While the contraction lasts, it is as if no other feeling exists in the whole world, just the pressure out’, meaning the urge to push. The challenge with this sentence was to find a translation that sounded natural.
- *svartur kollur* ‘black head’ This refers to the baby’s black hair. ‘Dark’ sounded more natural than black.
- *stelpa* ‘the girl’ The choices were ‘the baby’ or ‘the little one,’ as ‘the girl’ is awkward and impersonal in English.
- *Svo kem ég mér eins vel fyrir og ég get...* ‘Then I get settled as well as I can...’ ‘I make myself as comfortable as I can...’ was used as it fits the context and sounds less foreign.
- *vestur* ‘west’ This refers to the western part of Iceland, which is where Sunna’s grandmother was from. In the translation, ‘home’ was used. Sunna had asked her

grandmother if she'd gone west, meaning 'home'. The same applies to *norður* 'north', referring to Sunna's family's trip to Akureyri. The geography of Iceland wouldn't have much meaning for the average teenage reader in North America.

- *En fyrst stelpa fæddist á þessum degi var ekki hjá því komist.* 'But as the first girl born on that day, nothing could have been done differently' or 'this could not have been avoided.' This sentence refers to the fact that Sunna's younger sister Lilla was named after her paternal grandmother, even though Sunna's mother did not like the name Sigurlaug, but there were customs and traditions to follow. This sentence was a challenge since this custom was unknown prior to doing the translation.
- *Hérna...* 'Here...' This word is used frequently in Icelandic, much the same way as 'Tell me...' or 'say...' is used in English.
- *Vertu nú dugleg* 'You have to be hard-working now' or 'you must work hard now'. Sunna was talking to her baby and telling her that she had to at least try and take milk from the breast. 'Please, you have to just try it' was more appropriate for the context.
- *Í dag á dóttir mín afmæli í fyrsta sinn.* 'Today my daughter has her first birthday.' Sunna is referring to her baby's one month birthday. '...of sorts' was added to this sentence because it would sound confusing to refer to the baby's one month birthday as a first birthday.
- *brauðterta* 'layered sandwiches' or 'ribbon sandwiches' The literal translation would be layered torte.

- *Mamma er búin að vera ómöguleg í marga daga.* ‘Mom has been impossible for several days.’ This translation does not fit the context and did not really explain the way Biggi’s mother was acting or feeling; for example, was she upset, or just being miserable or mean? It was changed to ‘Mom has been beside herself for several days’ implying that she had a lot on her mind and was struggling with a decision.

X. Conclusion.

It is important to note that although the methods and processes of Peter Newmark, as they applied to this translation, were followed as closely as possible, in the translator’s ‘real world’ this likely would not happen due to gained experience as well as time and budgetary constraints. The descriptions and discussions of Newmark’s methods and theories were not comprehensive, but an overview was necessary in order to describe the translation process which was used and which proved to be appropriate for the translation of *40 Vikur*. The methods and their descriptions, as well as the suggestions to the translator as to how the translation project should be approached, were meant for students who were new to translation. Clear and concise explanations were provided throughout. As mentioned above, not all of the methods and suggestions were used as they did not directly apply to this particular translation project, namely popular fiction. However, there is the knowledge gained from this project that the methods and processes are easily accessed for other types of translations, such as scientific or technical translations, academic translations or the translation of propaganda or advertising copy. In addition, the Translation Studies courses illuminated the fact that there is the whole discipline of

Translation Studies itself, with its many branches of study, and its scholars and theorists available to turn to and research with respect to problem solving.

As previously noted, the journey through the translation of 40 Vikur to 40 Weeks followed the steps as recommended by Peter Newmark in his book A Textbook of Translation. Although the theory of communicative translation was the theory followed, it was not a simple matter of just applying it. The translation process can be likened to peeling away the layers of an onion – it is necessary to get through the layers before reaching the usable part of the onion itself. The first drafts of the translation were translated quite literally, in fact too literally, nearly word for word in some cases, and the word order of the SL text was faithfully adhered to. This resulted in an unnatural and foreign-sounding text. These first drafts were necessary in that the essence of the novel was there right from the beginning, and as each layer was exposed, it gradually became easier to move farther away from the SL text to the more familiar and natural sound of the TL, with the integrity of the story intact.

The question as to whether it is possible for the translator to deliver to the TL reader what the author intended for the SL reader is not easy to answer and can truly only be gauged by the TL reader's response and reactions. Naturalness and equivalent effect both play a major role in this evaluation.

A translation is never done and the translator is never completely satisfied with the final product. This holds true for even the most accomplished translator. There will always be the feeling that a translation can be improved upon and reworked, and the right word or phrase is waiting, but there is no such thing as a perfect translation – satisfactory

but never perfect. However, it is the thrill of the hunt for just the right word or phrase that will always keep the translator in pursuit of 'the perfect one'.

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40 Weeks

Translated by

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40 WEEKS

The light trickles under the door at the end of the hallway and forms little puddles on the thick carpet. I look at my bare toes peeking out from under my nightgown and feel the soft carpet beneath them. It seems like such a long way from my eyes down to my bare toes. Almost as if they do not belong to me. Yet, they are the same toes as I've always had.

It's also an unusually long walk down the hallway where the bedrooms are, from my bedroom door, past the bathroom, past my sister Lilla's room and to the end of the hallway, to mom and dad's bedroom. It's usually only a few steps. Now the hallway stretches endlessly into the twilight. It's so high and narrow, mixed up, bent out of shape, like in a horror movie when people lose their way in a frightening maze. But I'm not lost. I'm at home.

I push the door and it opens slightly. Mom is sitting up in bed and reading. She glances up and looks at me over her glasses.

"Sunna dear! Is everything all right?"

I open my mouth to answer, but the words won't come out. Mom lays her book down and pats the edge of the bed for me to sit down beside her. It's like I'm frozen. I shudder and automatically wrap my arms around my shoulders to warm myself.

"Are you sick?"

Mom lifts the quilt off her knees and gets out of bed. She looks worried and feels my forehead to see whether I'm hot. Just like when I was little.

Mom takes her hand from my forehead and suddenly my head is so heavy that I can't hold it up any longer. I let it drop on mom's shoulder, and she hugs me. There is both a surprised and a worried tone in her voice when she says:

"You aren't hot, dear. What's the matter? Has something happened?"

There. Now she's said it herself. When I was rehearsing in my bedroom, I always started like this: Mom, we may have a little problem. Or: Mom, some little thing has probably happened. Then I nearly started to laugh, this was so silly. Little. So little. This was not something so little.

The shiver that grips me could have been from either laughter or tears. I have no control over it, it just comes. I feel my knees shake and hear my teeth chatter. This is absurd. But I can't stop. Mom grabs my shoulders and looks at me.

"Sunna, what's the matter with you? You have to tell me what's the matter!"
And then I tell her.

September 5th

I sleep late and when I wake up my head is heavy and it aches behind my eyes. I'm awakened by mom talking on the phone. She is calling the school to tell them that I am sick. A white lie. Not feeling great might be the way to put it.

I wait until mom is gone down the hallway and into the kitchen before I go to the bathroom. I don't want to face her again right away. I flush the toilet and wash my hands, splash cold water on my face and then look at the face that stares back at me in the mirror.

Have I changed in any way? Is this not the same person that I'm used to greeting every morning by making a face and sticking out my tongue? The same hair, neither blonde nor red, curly and wild? The same eyes that can't decide what colour they are, sometimes green and sometimes grey? The same nose, a little turned up; the same skin that refuses to become a beautiful brown, but instead breaks out into freckles in the summer? The same girl? Sunna. Sunna Guðmundsdóttir, sixteen years old. No. This is Sunna Guðmundsdóttir, sixteen years old, pregnant.

This girl came into being three months ago. The evening after the last exam. But I didn't know that then. I did feel different that night. Not the same Sunna, the totally reliable, hard-working, quiet and good Sunna. Rather, a new Sunna, who dared to take a risk, dared to lie to her mom, dared to wear a low-cut t-shirt, dared to drink from a bottle without knowing what was in it, dared to talk to the boys. Not only with Gunni and Stebbi and the guys, the usual boys, but with the cute boys. The cool boys. With Biggi.

May 18th

The last exam is finished. It was Danish and I know for sure that I did well. I can't understand why the kids are always complaining about Danish. I've never found it difficult. But I don't say anything; they'd think I was bragging. But now it's done; the last exam before high school. I feel the exhilaration flowing inside me, boiling and bubbling like a hot spring about to erupt. I feel that I could just burst with joy!

"Did you hear the news?"

Brynja tugs on my sleeve and looks really worried.

"Hear what?" I ask.

"The trip is off."

"Who said that? And why?" I ask, astonished.

There has hardly been any other topic of conversation in school lately other than the trip that takes place as soon as the exams are done. It happens, of course, so that we don't wander around downtown or Kringlan Mall in big groups and cause trouble or get drunk. Most of us plan to go and are looking forward to it.

"It has to do with Siggi and Gummi in Class L. They cheated on the math exam," says Brynja. "They'd never done well in math, so the teacher went to have another look at their answers because they had done surprisingly well. They had the same answers, those idiots. Some more tests were checked, and the teachers suspect that someone had gotten the test while it was being prepared. The principal is furious and plans to cancel the trip."

I stare at Brynja and can't believe what I've heard. Could she be lying just to tease me? But judging by the look of disappointment and annoyance on her face, I have to believe her.

"And the idiot plans to let us all pay for the stupid boys' cheating?" I ask and can feel the anger boiling up inside me. Brynja nods her head and I see tears in the corners of her eyes.

"He plans to call us all into the assembly hall to tell us. We'll get a letter to take home," she says. "He has already talked to the kids in Class L. He went into their exam."

The plan was that we would meet again at the school at one o'clock with our stuff for the trip and leave about one-thirty. My stuff is ready. I just have to run home, get something to eat, get my bag and walk back to the school. It's barely a five minute walk to school from home and dad and mom are leaving for the summer cottage with my sister Lilla. They are undoubtedly packing the car now.

"What can we do?" I ask Brynja.

"Do?"

"We can't just let them take the trip away from us," I say. "We have to do something. Make the principal understand that this isn't fair."

Brynja looks at me sympathetically.

"Do you really think that it's possible to make him understand what's fair?" she asks and I know that she's right. I know that he'll overrule us. We can't trust you if you're not trustworthy. Blah, blah, blah.

I feel tears of anger in my eyes. I was so looking forward to it. Now I have to go up to the summer cottage with dad and mom and Lilla. A great weekend or what.

“Come home with me,” says Brynja. “There’s no one home this weekend. Danni is at sea and mom is going up north with the kids.”

I think about it for a moment. But not long. Mom would never agree to Brynja and I being alone at her house. She’s not very fond of Brynja, especially not since she dyed her hair bright red and black. But I don’t need to tell them that the trip isn’t happening. If I wait until twelve-thirty to go home, they’ll be gone. I smile at Brynja.

“Ok,” I say.

The kids have started to gather in a group in front of the school and loud unhappy voices can be heard. The boys who were caught cheating have had the sense to make themselves scarce, otherwise they would certainly have been told off. That will no doubt happen later. Everyone agrees that they are idiots, but the anger is still directed more towards the principal’s decision.

“Well, they won’t succeed in stopping us from getting drunk tonight,” someone says. More join in, mainly the boys. It’s clear that the mood has changed. The anger and disappointment in me gives way to increasing anticipation and a rebellious feeling. All right, I think, if you feel we’re impossible teenagers, then we’ll just be impossible teenagers.

I jump when my phone rings. It’s mom calling – the ringtone is the one from home or mom’s cell phone. I answer.

“Sunna, dear? Aren’t you coming? We have to pick up amma. She decided to come with us after all.”

“You go ahead,” I reply. Completely calm. Brynja looks at me and winks, laughing.

I assure mom that I have my key and all my stuff is ready. She promises to leave money for me on the kitchen table. I wish them a good trip and she does the same to me. I feel a very small pang of guilt when I put the phone back in my pocket, but not much. All of the grownups can go to hell. At least for tonight.

Brynja and I go to my house when we’re sure that everyone is gone. We have no intention of meeting at the school again to get a lecture about irresponsible teenagers. I get my stuff and the money and we take our time walking over to Brynja’s. There is no one home and we can do as we please. We make microwave popcorn and watch music videos with the volume turned on as loud as it can go, with our feet up on the coffee table in the living room. We are on vacation.

By evening, we start to get bored and decide to go to Kringlan and get something to eat. There’s a movie playing at the theatre that neither of us has seen that we can go to. We also heard some of the kids talk about meeting at the mall.

We’re still wearing the same clothes that we wore to the exam this morning, very school-like and respectable. I don’t want to dress like that now, but the only clothes I have with me are those in my suitcase. Brynja opens her closet and starts throwing clothes on her bed. She’s smaller than I, and thinner, so I can’t get into any of her jeans or skirts, but my jeans will do. It’s mainly my sweater that’s impossible.

“Try this,” says Brynja and throws me a t-shirt... It’s turquoise blue and the deep v-neck is decorated with sequins.

I try on the t-shirt and look in the mirror. It's too tight on me and just comes to my navel so that my stomach is bare between the t-shirt and the top of the jeans. But I must admit, it looks so cool. The colour suits me. This is a totally different Sunna than the one that was in the mirror before, modestly dressed in a light grey sweater. But I actually like this new one better. Brynja puts on a black tank top and a nearly see-through skirt of her mother's.

"I must say that she has excellent taste in clothes, the old lady," says Brynja.

I laugh. Brynja's mom is anything but old. She is only thirty something and dresses like a young girl. In many ways she is like a girl, except that she has four kids. I can barely imagine mothers that are more unlike than Brynja's and mine. Her mom doesn't nag her about studying or complain that she goes to bed too late or eats too much junk food. She yells a bit at the little kids and fusses when everything gets messy, but then is in a good mood before too long, rents a movie and orders pizza. Mom, on the other hand, always needs to have everything perfect; the orderliness, the homework, mealtimes, everything.

We put makeup on each other and do our hair before we set off for the mall. Brynja puts much more makeup on me than I've ever worn before; thin black lines around my eyes and both lipliner and lipstick. But she has a knack for applying it and it's cool and totally suits the t-shirt. It's not possible to do much with my hair; it sticks out in all directions as usual. But now it's actually a little stylish and wild.

We catch the bus to the mall and take a little time to decide what we want to eat. We finally decide to treat ourselves by going to the Hard Rock Café to celebrate the end of the exams. We have enough money, the trip money. We feel we certainly deserve it.

The mall is gradually filling with kids. When we're done eating and walk over to the theatre, we see that there are big groups everywhere. Security guards wander around, but don't interfere since the kids aren't causing trouble.

"Sunna! Brynja!"

I turn around and see Tóta and Sigrún standing with more kids in a group. Among them are a few of the boys from our class.

"Hi!"

Laughing, the girls hug us and drag us into the group. We stand together in a tight bunch while we talk and laugh. The anger from earlier in the day is completely gone, and has changed into something else, excitement, anticipation, fun. I feel like I'm a pop bottle that's been shaken; the pop foams and bubbles up inside me and could erupt from the happiness.

Of course, I know these boys. I've gone to school with most of them for years. Gunni and Stebbi have been in my class from the time we started school and Stebbi and I often played together when we were younger. Lately, I've hardly talked with him or the other boys except when we needed to work on some assignment together. Gunni has always been pretty shy, even a little bit like the outsider in the group. Now suddenly he's in amazingly good spirits and cheerful and it takes me a moment to realize that there is something other than pop in the bottle that he sips from now and then.

Arni and Biggi are also in the group. Arni joined our class when we were twelve years old and I have never gotten to know him. He was a little tougher in seventh grade, mouthing off to the teachers and was a frequent visitor to the principal. The others boys

admired him, but he never had any particular best friend before this winter when Biggi joined the class.

Biggi didn't start with us until a few days after school had begun. He was supposedly living abroad. He walked into the classroom with the assistant principal, who introduced him to the teacher and the class. I have never experienced such silence in the classroom as that. You could have heard the proverbial pin drop. He seemed completely oblivious to the atmosphere, nodded to the teacher, looked around for an empty seat and sat beside Arni. Since then they have been inseparable.

Fifteen and sixteen year old boys are not particularly good-looking. Seriously. On the one hand, they are either small and weak or extremely tall and skinny; some are covered in pimples and most have a nose that's too big. They don't look at all like movie stars. Except Biggi. All the girls thought that the day he came in. It was as if he had walked out of some movie and into our class.

And now he stands there in the group, right across from me and he looks at me. In fact, I feel as if all the boys are looking at me. I'm a little surprised at myself that I'm not shy with all these quick glances, but I'm not. They only add to the excitement and the butterflies in my stomach. As I meet Biggi's dark eyes, I look straight into them.

"Should we go somewhere?" asks Arni. "We can't hang around here much longer."

"Let's walk downtown," says Sigrún. She turns to look at Brynja and I. "Do you want to do that?"

I look at Brynja. I no longer want to go to the movie and I read the same look on her face. We're more than willing to go downtown and the group slowly moves off.

It's not late, only around ten and the sun is still shining. It's a little cold and I know that I should button up my thin jacket, but then no one can see my low cut t-shirt, so I leave it. There are a lot of kids downtown since final exams are finished in most schools now. Most of them just stand around in groups and talk, and a few of the boys are obviously getting drunk, staggering around and mouthing off or trying to hassle the other kids. They're in the minority, though, but a few of them are starting to bother us.

We stand huddled together and listen to Gunni tell jokes. Who would have believed that he could be so funny? He's been drinking out of the bottle and all shyness and reserve have disappeared. He must study a joke book in his spare time because the stream is endless, and they are funny and he tells them so well that we roar with laughter.

"What's so funny, baby?" I hear a voice mumble right beside my ear. I jump and when I turn around I look into the bloodshot and watery eyes of a guy who can barely stand up. He grabs me around my waist with one hand and sways so that I nearly fall on him. I smell his gross breath and I push him from me with disgust. But he's so unsteady on his feet that he stumbles and falls against the wall of a building.

"Are you pushing me, you crazy bitch?" he yells and comes rushing in my direction again. Without thinking, I step back and Biggi walks in front of me and grabs the collar of the boy's jacket.

"You let her be," he says coldly and calmly. The boy stops dead and looks at him, as if undecided about whether he should attack or run away. Then he straightens himself up, loosens his collar from Biggi's grip and says as formally and respectfully as he possibly can, all nervous and mumbling:

"Sorry, I didn't know she was taken." He turns and moves away slowly.

The kids in the group stand dead still, shocked, but then burst into laughter all at the same time and it echoes between the buildings. I feel my knees start to shake and my teeth start chattering. It's awful because I can't control it and I just shiver as if I'm freezing. Then I feel a weight on my shoulders and see that Biggi has taken off his jacket and has laid it over my shoulders. He adjusts the jacket and keeps his arm around my shoulders. I look up at him.

"Thanks," I whisper.

He says nothing, but smiles at me and the smile is in his eyes, too. I have never before in my life seen such beautiful eyes. And the warmth flows all through me, from the heavy leather jacket, but more so from the feeling of his arm around me. I take the bottle that Gunni passes me and sip from it. The taste is bitter and bad, but the drink warms me, running like fire down my throat and into my stomach, spreading out through my body. I am no longer cold.

"Let's go to my house," says Arni all of a sudden. "There's no one there and my folks won't be home until later tonight."

We wander off again in the direction of Arni's house. I feel as if I could walk forever, close up against Biggi, who still holds me. We walk behind the group.

"Aren't you cold?" I ask. He's just in a little t-shirt and it's getting cold.

"No, no," he answers. Still, I see goose bumps on his arms.

"Seriously, I'm not cold anymore," I say carefully. I don't want to offend him or let him think that I don't appreciate his kindness.

"You warm me up then," he whispers and turns me to face him. He slips his hand under the jacket and presses me up against him. Without thinking, I reach my face up to

his and close my eyes. I know what's coming now. The kiss. And it does. First lightly on the lips, an electric current, a tickling sensation. Then hard, firm, the mouth half open, the tip of the tongue searching. Finally our mouths open, thirsty mouths, tongues. Our bodies press together. Nothing else exists in the world.

"Are you coming or what?"

It's Brynja, turning to us and calling. We loosen our hold on one another, still holding hands and catch up to the others. We feel a little awkward and distracted.

"Wow, that was a fantastic Hollywood kiss," whispers Brynja to me, laughing. She squeezes herself in between Gunni and Stebbi, tucks her arms in theirs, and starts to sing rather loudly. The other kids join in, all except Biggi and me. He puts on his jacket again, but holds me tight against him to keep me warm.

Arni's house is a beautiful home that sits at the end of a long driveway with a yard in front of it. A car sits outside. Arni opens the door with a key and shows us into a huge living room that looks as if it's been cut out of a home decorating magazine; sparse, simple contemporary furniture, big paintings on the walls. Arni opens the liquor cabinet and takes out bottles and glasses.

"Are you crazy?" asks Tóta. "What will your mom and dad say?"

"They won't notice," answers Arni dryly and professionally pours into the glasses.

"Martini for you, young lady?" he says and winks at me as he passes me the glass.

I take a sip. It's bad, but still not as bad as the drink out of Gunni's bottle.

"Shaken, not stirred," says Biggi in James Bond style and sips out of his glass.

Arni puts on the music and soon everyone is dancing.

I've always been rather shy about dancing at school dances, feeling that everyone was watching me and I never dared to move like I felt the music wanted me to. But now I don't feel that way at all. All of the moves that were inside of me before come out now. I use not only my arms and feet, but also my hips, breasts, head and neck. I allow the music to flow inside me and the beat becomes my own heartbeat. I dance mostly with Biggi, and sometimes we're together in a big group. When the music slows down, I feel Biggi's arm around me and we dance close together, barely moving and our mouths search for one another.

The others have stopped dancing and we get another drink. Arni mixes something together in a pitcher, it tastes weird, but I get used to it and it's quite good when I get my glass filled again. I feel like I'm becoming a little confused and unsteady on my feet so I sit down on the elegant, light coloured leather sofa. Brynja plops herself down beside me, so hard that her drink splashes out of her glass onto the leather upholstery.

"Damn!" Arni rushes off and returns with a damp cloth and starts to rub the spot with all of his might.

"I'm sorry," Brynja slurs. "Lemmee help you..."

"I'll do it," Arni says between clenched teeth.

Suddenly Gunni dashes off with his hand over his mouth and we hear the door slam shut in the guest bathroom. The sounds that follow are not especially pleasant.

"I hope he hits the toilet," says Brynja, sounding worried, and then starts to giggle like a fool.

I'm feeling a little numb and mixed up, but still know enough that it might be better if we all leave before everything gets out of control. I look at Biggi and see that he

is thinking the same thing. All at once we hear the outside door open, a car door slams outside, then loud voices and noisy laughter.

"Shit," says Arni. We rush to collect the glasses and squeeze the bottles into the cupboard, but don't get a lot done before a very tall man, red in the face, comes into the living room and close on his heels is a woman who must be Arni's mother. She has the same auburn hair and blue eyes. We hear more people out in the hall.

"No way, is this a party?" says the woman in a slurred voice. "God, don't let us disturb you. We can just join you, can't we?"

"They were just leaving," says Arni.

We all mumble some sort of good-bye and thanks and hurry out. Stebbi goes into the guest bathroom and drags Gunni to his feet. He lays there with his head nearly in the toilet bowl. No jokes coming now. As we walk down the driveway, we hear the noise from inside the house. The music is on full blast, just as loud as before. Loud laughter and party noise. Arni says good-bye to us on the stairs.

It's strange to come out into the cool night air. It's twilight, nearly dark. I try to see the time, but it's difficult to read it, the numbers all run together. As far as I can tell, it's a little past one.

We stop on the street corner and discuss our options. Stebbi plans to drag Gunni home. Tóta and Sigrún live on the same street and offer to lend a hand. They discuss how they might get him there with the least amount of carrying. It's good that his room is down in the basement and it is possible to come in through the basement door, through the storage room and the laundry room. Stebbi has been there a lot and hopes that will

help the situation. After a trip into the garden to throw up, Gunni starts to feel a little bit better and he staggers between the kids in the direction of his house.

Biggi and I watch them go. He holds me around the waist. Brynja comes over to me, kisses me on the cheek and says:

"I think I'm just going home to bed. Are you coming later? I can leave the door open downstairs."

Biggi's hand searches downward over my butt.

"I'll come later," I answer. "Later on. You just go home to sleep."

What am I thinking? Nothing. Nothing at all except to be with him longer, walk with him in the stillness of the night, kiss him more, again and again. And not let him go. Nothing exists in the world except this one night and I want to own it. Maybe tomorrow I'll once again be the Sunna who was; the little girl who no one looks at twice; the girl who no one would ever think to kiss or make out with. At least not Biggi.

Brynja walks off towards her house, a little unsteady. We stand again on the street corner.

And then I say it.

"Should we go to my place? There's no one home."

He presses me close to him without saying anything. Then we set off for my house.

It's strange coming into an empty house. It's so unreal, so quiet and deserted. We kiss in the entrance, in the hallway, in the doorway to my bedroom. Before I know it we are lying on my bed. If I open my eyes, the ceiling spins around above me, so I close them again.

Our jackets are on the floor, we kick off our shoes. Biggi slides his hands under my t-shirt and pulls it up over my head. He kisses me on the mouth, throat, and breasts. I know I should ask him to stop now. I know that, but it's not what I want. I want to know what comes next. And then after that.

The regular world has no meaning now. That which is allowed, that which is not allowed; it no longer exists. It's not me who lies here and is suddenly naked, feels his naked body on top of me. I'm in a book, a movie, a dream. But the pain is real, if only for a short time. Then it is he who does not exist. Just the dark hair on my cheek, a rough cheek up against my throat. His weight on me. The breath that slows and slows down some more. His heartbeat on my heartbeat.

When I wake up again I'm cold. I'm ice cold and he's gone. No clothes on the floor, no shoes. Only an imprint in the quilt beside me, a spot on it where we had been. A bloodstain, dampness. Oh my God, the quilt. Mom.

I sit up suddenly and get so dizzy that I feel the vomit in my throat. I have to wash the quilt. I move carefully as I sit on the edge of the bed. I go into the bathroom. The house is silent, strange, unreal. I go into the shower and turn on the tap, and stand under the running water for a long, long time.

How long will it take for the quilt to dry? It's cotton wool, patchwork, a girl's quilt, with flowers in light pastel colours. Cute and innocent looking. I gather it up and take it down to the laundry room. I spray the stain, put it in the washing machine, put detergent in the holder and turn it on. It has to dry. They won't be home before tomorrow.

There is a strange smell in my room. An alcohol smell and something more. I pull back the curtains and open the window wide and suddenly notice that I'm only in my underwear. I hurry and put on jeans and a t-shirt, take the hairbrush, and look in the mirror. The eye makeup has run down my face in black streaks and smeared out onto my temples and cheeks. Suddenly I feel nauseous again and I have to run to the toilet right away and throw up.

When I'm done washing my face, brushing my teeth and combing my hair, taking the quilt out of the washing machine and hanging it up and opening the window to air out the room, it's like my head feels normal once again. I look at the clock and see that it's not even seven. Then I hear a thud at the front entrance. The newspaper is here. It's a regular morning, a regular day.

I don't go to Brynja's until around nine. The downstairs door is locked and I have to ring the doorbell several times before she answers and lets me in. She's pale and looks sick, but we get coffee and she feels better after that. I have fortunately thought to bring the turquoise t-shirt with me and I offer to rinse it out, but Brynja tells me to just put it in with the dirty laundry. She suddenly comes to life.

"What happened?" she asks. "You have to tell me."

I don't know for sure how I should answer. What happened? Somehow I am no longer sure. We went back to my place and we – did it. Was that what happened? The spot on the quilt was real. I feel pain, I'm hurt and miserable. That is real. Still, the night is like a dream that I want to both hold on to and forget.

"We were together for a while after," I then answer.

"And? Are you going out?"

I shake my head.

"I don't know. He was drunk. And besides he has never...had an interest in me."

"Don't be like that," says Brynja. "He'll definitely call you."

But he doesn't call. Not that day, not the day after. But the quilt is nearly dry and it's getting close to the time for dad and mom to come home. The spot has completely washed out.

May 25th

It's the last day of school today. The graduation ceremony and the end of middle school.

Dad and mom are ready to go, but I'm still standing in front of my closet in my underwear as if I don't know what I'm doing.

"Hurry up, dear," says mom impatiently. "Put on the suit that I bought in London. You look so good in it."

Suit. Jacket and skirt, mom, not suit.

"I'm not graduating from high school," I protest, but still put on the jacket and skirt that mom bought for me for my aunt Solla's wedding. I think I look too dressed up. Some of the girls will definitely be in jeans.

There are chairs set up in the big assembly hall in the school and most people are seated when we arrive. I run my eyes over the group to check whether I am too overdressed. No, fortunately there are more girls in skirts or dresses. The boys are mostly in shirts and dress pants; Gunni is even in a suit jacket and tie. Still, some are in their regular jeans and t-shirts and sit, looking defiant, beside their parents.

Biggi sits beside a slender woman in a light coloured suit. She has dark hair like his. A tall man beside her must be his dad. He is also dark-haired but is going gray on the sides. Biggi is in a beautiful jacket made of soft leather, not the same one he was in the other day. That night. Light gray shirt and dark pants. Well groomed. He looks straight ahead.

The principal gives a heartfelt speech about the life ahead of us, responsibility and obligation and all the usual stuff. He doesn't mention anything about the exam scandal and the trip being cancelled. It's probably not appropriate just now. They are rid of us in this school and bring up only the good memories, just like they do in the obituaries.

It's time to present the awards. Mom sits in her chair beside me, tense and excited. I know she hopes I'll be called up. Her Sunna, who is so studious. Dad is totally calm, and looks at me with a little smile. Of course he'd also be very proud if I got an award, but he's not so caught up in it like mom.

"Sunna Guðmundsdóttir," says the principal. I barely notice it and mom nudges me with her elbow. I have received the award for Icelandic. Now I have to squeeze past everyone in the row and walk up to the podium. The principal hands me a big book — probably the poetry of Jónas Hallgrímsson or something like that. He bends down and kisses me on the cheek. Old fart. Everyone claps.

Mom is beaming when I return to my seat. Dad leans over to me and squeezes my hand. I feel warm inside. It's good that they are so happy.

"Birgir Örn Grímsson."

Biggi gets the English award. There's nothing strange about that. They lived in England for many years. He doesn't smile when he walks up to the podium. The

principal doesn't kiss him, of course, but shakes his hand and gives him a thick dictionary.

I know that I could get the Danish award, and I'm excited when it comes up. It appears that Sigrún and I are pretty much tied, and as a result, we both get it. It's easier to go up to the podium this time having Sigrún beside me. We receive Danish dictionaries and congratulate one another and then I slip into my seat again. I think mom is about to burst with pride now and the smile on dad's face has broadened, too.

A girl from Class N has the highest marks and a boy from Class L gets the award for the best results in the sciences. Then we all go up, one by one, and receive the envelopes with the grades. Unnur, the assistant teacher, comes to our class after and gives everyone a hug, definitely very pleased to see us go on. Maybe she wasn't so bad, the poor old thing.

Out in the corridor in front of the assembly hall, a table has been set, and the parent council invites everyone to have coffee and dessert. I get myself a plate and go in line so that I can get a piece of cake. All at once, my heart jumps. Biggi is on his way from the table with his piece of cake. He has to walk past me. But he looks straight ahead, a serious look on his face.

"Congratulations on your award," I say just as his jacket brushes up against my arm.

"You, too," he mumbles, his voice low and unclear. Then he is gone.

My hands shake so badly that I nearly drop the slice of chocolate cake off of the spatula. It still lands on the plate and I rush away from the table. I head toward the

outside door. It's open and I breathe deeply in the cool outdoor air. The tears burn at the back of my eyes. Now I'm sure. It was only that one night. Never to be anything more.

"Is everything all right, Sunna dear?"

It's dad. I look up at him, smile, and hope the tears haven't run out of the corner of my eyes or that my eyes aren't red.

"Yes, of course. There are just so many people."

"We should hurry. We'll get amma and Lilla and go out to eat. Is that ok? Just to celebrate your awards."

He kisses me quickly on the cheek. His good, hard-working little girl. I force down the chocolate cake, swallow and smile. This is the reality. Everything else was only a dream. And now it's over.

June 17th

It's the seventeenth of June today, the national holiday. Brynja has promised her mother to take the little kids downtown and I'm going to help her with them. She needs the help; they are usually full of energy and more so when there is the hope of ice cream, hot dogs and balloons. We plan to head back downtown when we've taken the kids home.

The weather is quite good, almost uncharacteristically good; neither raining nor windy, as it usually is. The downtown is swarming with people. We start by buying balloons for the group and Birna, Brynja's little sister, loses hers up in the air after five minutes. The screams that come out of her are truly unbelievable.

"I think she has the makings of an opera singer," I say to Brynja when she stops only long enough to catch her breath. People turn and look at us.

“Everyone thinks that we’re abusing the kids; we should probably buy her another balloon,” sighs Brynja and counts out her money again.

“You can have some of my money,” I say. Dad slipped me some money before I left, but I don’t feel like having a hot dog or candy. I have, in fact, very little appetite these days. Brynja is reluctant to accept the money that I pass her, but gives in when the screams start up again with renewed energy.

We buy a new balloon for Birna and tie it tightly to her stroller this time. Birna has her nose wiped, tears dried and is happy when we discover that her brother Sævar is gone.

“He was here a second ago,” says Brynja. “Wasn’t he?”

We’re not sure, when we come to think of it. Birna’s screams took all of our attention from the others. When I think about it, I don’t remember having seen Sævar since his blue eyes followed Birna’s balloon up to the sky, so I can only assume he was there.

“Where is Sævar?” we both ask in unison and turn to look at Siggi. He is four years old and the most laid back of the group. In fact, I think he’s unnaturally laid back; it’s as if he’s in a world of his own.

“What?” he asks, without taking his eyes off his balloon.

Brynja takes him by the shoulders and shakes him.

“Wake up, kid,” she says harshly. “Where did Sævar go?”

Siggi finally tears his gaze away from his balloon and looks at Brynja with big, blue eyes. Then his mouth trembles and tears start to form in the corner of his eyes.

“Oh, Jesus, now he starts, too,” says Brynja in a frustrated tone.

We look around us, at a loss as to what to do. The sea of people seems endless.

“There!” shouts little Birna happily. There, Sæ gets the b’loon!”

She stands up in her stroller and points in the direction of one of the tents. There is Sævar on the way up one of the large poles that holds up the tent. He climbs like a little monkey and is nearly up to the edge of the tent roof. A large bunch of multi-coloured balloons sways in the breeze, tied tightly to the pole that Sævar holds on to.

“Wait here!” calls Brynja and squeezes through the crowd as fast as she can toward the tent. I lose sight of her for a moment, but then I see her arms as she reaches out for the little boy, and pull on his pants and jacket. Then he falls. Shortly afterwards Brynja drags her brother, dirty and sobbing, back to me as I wait with Birna and Siggi.

“He just wanted to get a new balloon for Birna,” she says angrily.

“The kid is going to start school in the fall and he thinks he can just do what he wants,” she says and gives Sævar a little shake.

“There were so many balloons there,” hiccups Sævar, between sobs. “And they didn’t belong to anyone. They were just there on the pole.”

“We just bought a new balloon for Birna,” I say and dry off his face. “And someone always owns stuff like that. Anyone can’t just come and take it. Now, we should buy some hotdogs for you guys.”

Brynja and I look at each other and shake our heads, half laughing over the kids’ heads as we set off in search of a hot dog stand.

“Kids,” groans Brynja. “I don’t plan on having any.”

I feel a little stab of pain in my stomach but I don’t say anything. I must be going to start soon. I’ve often been a little irregular; this can’t be any different now.

The kids gobble up the hotdogs and pop with great appetites, little Birna even finishes a whole hot dog. Brynja is surprised that I don't want anything, but I feel nauseous just from the smell of the hotdog stand. The kids get quite messy from the hotdog break, with ketchup all over their faces and the napkins that Brynja brought with her are gone. I look at the clock.

"I know what you're thinking!" Brynja laughs. "We can get rid of them soon. We'll just walk down to the Bandstand Park; there's supposed to be some rides there we can let them go on. Then I'll call my mom and she'll come in the car to get them."

We walk along The Pond and Birna points excitedly at the ducks. When we are just getting to the Park, I suddenly hear a low, deep boom and feel the earth shake as if something heavy had fallen to the ground with a great crash.

"God!" I call out, looking above me. "Some rides must have fallen down!"

We look at each other, frightened, but continue on to the park. There is no sign of an accident, but people stand around in groups looking a little confused and surprised. I hear words like shock and tremor and look at Brynja.

"Was that an earthquake?"

Neither of us is completely sure about what's going on, and it isn't long before Brynja's mom calls her, extremely worried, to ask whether everything is all right and could we tell her what happened. This was probably the big one that everyone had been waiting for. The poor kids didn't get to stay long at the playground; we soon left with them to go to the Nordic House where Brynja's mom waited in the parking lot. I go home to eat at about seven and see on the TV news where the earthquake was the strongest. There is no doubt about what has happened. I have an upset stomach and

hope that it's only because I am going to start my period. But not even the big earthquake in the south is enough to make me start this time.

June 26th

"Hello! Can I help you?"

Two customers come into the store, two middle-aged women, who smile back when I put on my "store smile" and walk toward them. They are looking for a gift and look at nearly everything in the store before they say thank you and they'll think about it. My face aches from smiling and I'm completely out of patience. I definitely don't plan to work in retail any longer than I have to, but I'll do this for the whole summer or almost all summer; first here in mom and dad's store while Halla is on holidays, then in the neighbourhood 10-11 convenience store in July and over the August long weekend, the Merchant's Weekend. Then, at least, I'll be working with Brynja, who is a cashier there all summer. I'm mostly working in this part of the store now, mom is in the furniture department and dad is out running errands or in the workshop.

Mom and dad opened the store ten years ago or so, right after I started school. Before that dad had operated a furniture workshop and mom worked in an import business office. Then they got the idea to start importing antique furniture and all kinds of stuff that looks like it's from the olden days. Some of it needs to be fixed up and repaired and dad works at that in his workshop. Most of the merchandise in this part of the store where I work is new, but looks old-fashioned, stuff like bed linens and patchwork quilts, lamps, candlesticks and such. Some goods are real antiques and are, of course, more expensive.

I was really keen on everything in the store when I was younger, but now I've become somewhat bored with all of this old stuff, lace trimming and fringes and tassels and so on. I think I'll choose another style altogether when I get my own place. Something plain and contemporary. If I ever get a place. No, when I get a place. The time has to come when you move away from home, whether it's to make a home with someone else, or just out on your own.

I don't plan to be just an old spinster who lives alone with her cat, I think, while I arrange the bed linen that the ladies were looking at on the shelf. Embittered, old and shriveled, who nobody has ever looked at ...

"Hi!"

I jump and quickly turn around. A lanky boy about my age looks at me, smiling. I hadn't noticed when he came into the store with his parents. They are obviously and clearly American tourists.

I smile and greet them and the parents look at the shelves and the display tables. The boy, on the other hand, doesn't budge. He just stands right in front of me and smiles with his whole face.

"Darryl, honey, come and look at this! Isn't that cute?" calls his mother over her shoulder, but the boy still hasn't taken his eyes off me.

"It sure is," he answers, and gives me a look that makes me blush all down my neck. Then he walks over to his parents who are looking at a pillow with a picture of children on it, with a striped cat in a basket that is reminiscent of days gone by. The woman comes to me with one of the pillow cases.

“Is this made in Iceland?” she asks. I have to answer that it is not, since it is obviously has Made in China or some such thing written on the sticker. They stay a short while after they realize they won’t find anything Icelandic here and politely say goodbye when they leave.

I run to the bathroom to splash cold water on my face. It’s awful to blush like that. But there is nothing I can do about it.

When I look at myself in the mirror, I can’t help but notice how my breasts have grown. They push my blouse out so that it’s close to being unbuttoned. Yet, I have not gotten fat. Quite the opposite, in that I’ve lost weight recently, since I have no appetite.

No. That cannot be. It was only one time. That thing that happened — if it happened — can’t have turned my whole world upside down. I cannot be ... I force myself to form the words with my lips. To say it out loud in front of myself in the mirror. Pregnant. I cannot be pregnant.

I hear the truck outside and dad opens the big door into the workshop. A shipment arrives. I run to the outer door.

“I can help you carry it!” I call to dad. “Is it ok if I go for a little while?”

Mom says she can look after my department, somewhat surprised at the burst of energy. I go and help dad empty the truck. I struggle with a heavy box, and move a heavy chest of drawers with him. I take a big armchair alone, then a gigantic mirror in a wood frame.

“Take it easy now, Sunna dear,” says dad anxiously. “It’s not good for your back to carry such heavy things.”

But it's not my back I'm worried about. I clench my teeth until the sweat pours from my forehead. When the truck is empty I go into the bathroom. Nothing. But maybe nothing happens right away; maybe it takes a little while after some exertion. Maybe.

July 3rd

It was a nice change to switch jobs and be on the cash register at the grocery store, but I must admit that the work itself is totally boring. All it has going for it is that Brynja and I work the same shifts and we can talk when it's not busy and at lunch time. It's just good to know that she's there at the other cash register. Sometimes it takes only a small smirk or a glance for us to start giggling like fools, and we have to pull ourselves together for the next customer in line.

We're finished early today and had decided in advance to go swimming after work. The weather is good, the sun shines brightly, although the breeze is cool, and it is fantastic to be outside, as we walk slowly to the swimming pool. People are everywhere out on the lawn and the air smells of freshly mown grass. Soon this smell will definitely change. This is a typical day for barbequing and if anything at all is an indication of the purchases made in the store today, it will be the lighting of a few hundred grills in the neighbourhood in a little while.

Of course, the pool is full of people, mainly kids. Many women with small children are on the way out; they need to go home and make dinner. An old woman with breasts down to her waist and fourteen creases on her stomach is drying herself on the bench where Brynja and I are undressing.

“Your breasts have grown a lot,” says Brynja all at once.

“Be quiet, you,” I say abruptly and Brynja laughs. I don’t think anyone has heard her, but just then the old woman with the wrinkles tries not to smile. Sometimes Brynja has to be more careful about what she says.

When we get to the hot tub, there are two boys of about twenty in it, and I sense that they’re really looking at me. I know that I look good in a bikini now, but I wish I could be more excited about it. The anxiety that started at the beginning of this month gnaws at me more and more. No bleeding has started yet. I should be starting soon according to when my period started last month, but I still don’t feel any of the discomfort that I always experience in the days leading up to it. Except for the breasts, of course. It’s obvious that they’ve grown and they are firm and sore, just like when they were starting to grow when I was younger.

In the movies, pregnant women are always running to the bathroom to throw up, especially first thing in the morning. I also remember mom saying that she couldn’t bear the smell of coffee when she was pregnant; that was enough to make her throw up in the first months. But I haven’t thrown up, although I don’t want anything in the morning and I am nauseous sometimes. That has happened before, though. It doesn’t have to mean that anything...has happened.

“What’s the matter?” Brynja looks at me with a concerned look on her face.

You are somewhere very far away. Is anything wrong?”

I shake my head.

“No, no. Not at all.”

I lean back again in the hot tub and let the sun shine on my face. The tub is absolutely perfect, just hot enough so that it feels wonderful when a cool gust of wind lifts the steam for a moment from the surface and cools off my face and shoulders. All at once I remember that I've heard that a boiling hot bath could make a period start and that pregnant women have to be careful when going into hot water. I stand up.

"I'm going into the hottest one." I say. "Are you coming with me?"

Brynja stares at me.

"Are you crazy? I wouldn't put my big toe in there!"

"Ok." I get out of the tub and go over to the hottest one. 40 – 42 degrees is written on the sign. I take a deep breath and walk slowly down the steps.

The water is boiling hot. Two men and one middle-aged woman sit in there. They look like they've been there from the time the tub was built, as if they're rooted in it. They squint at me, their eyes against the sun, and amazed expressions on their faces. Many don't come in here, only the hardest.

The water burns my calves, knees, thighs. When the water reaches my waist, I gasp. One of the men snorts like a horse.

"Yes, this is hot," he says. The woman says kindly:

"Go carefully if you are not used to this much heat, my dear."

I hold my breath while I sit down on the bench, and have to gulp down the cool air in order to get some relief. The woman looks at me again with pity.

"Do this," she says and lifts up her feet so her big toes stick up out of the boiling hot water. I follow her advice and find to my great amazement that I do get some relief

and the heat isn't so unbearable any longer. As a matter of fact, it's almost comfortable. Maybe too comfortable for it to work.

"Are you trying to boil yourself alive?" Brynja stands behind me, a shocked expression on her face. "This can't be good!"

"Yes, it's great," I sigh, and just at that moment feel that I've almost had enough. I rush up out of the tub; run past Brynja and dive into the swimming pool. I swim back and forth as fast as I can until I'm exhausted. Brynja doesn't know where this insanity has come from.

"Are you developing some kind of exercise program or what?" she groans. "We came here to relax!"

We sunbathe a little while and then walk home. I say good-bye to Brynja at her apartment building and then start to run when she is out of sight. I run all the way home and am dripping with sweat and panting when I get to the door. But neither heat nor exertion have any effect and I go to bed unusually early and sleep soundly all night.

August 9th

Brynja and I both work over the August long weekend. I want so badly to go to the celebration in the Westman Islands, but know that it's no use discussing such a thing with mom. Brynja might be allowed to go, but she decides to stay home with me.

"We'll just go next year," she says. "Then we'll be seventeen and even your mom has to let you go then."

I'm not sure. My sister Sara actually got to go when she was seventeen, but she was going to be with Arnar and I think that dad and mom felt that it was better that they

were together than if she had gone alone with her friends. They thought that Arnar would protect her from all of the crazy drunk guys. Mom is so dead scared of drunks and parties; she probably thinks that every other girl is going to get raped at that huge outdoor party. The week before the long weekend, she had already prepared her refusal by talking about what this event would be like. I let her babble on for a while before I finally interrupted and said:

“Mom, I have already told you I plan to work this weekend. Aren’t you ok with that?”

She stopped dead and looked at me.

“What? Yes, of course that’s ok,” she then said. I almost pitied her. She had prepared herself so well for the fight that would come when she said no.

Still, there’s something a little weird about that outdoor celebration. It’s as if you long to go because you should go. Or something like that. I don’t like sleeping in a tent, and to tell the truth, I’m kind of scared of the idea of several thousand people being blind drunk. But there’s a kind of thrilling feeling that goes with the thought; a nervous tension, the freedom. Next year Brynja and I will go. Hopefully.

I haven’t started yet. I try pushing it out of me, but by now I’m nearly positive that something has happened. I have tried telling myself that it’s only stress, but I don’t believe that any longer. There are no other symptoms that go with the fact that I haven’t started — except that my breasts have grown. But I’m not nauseous or anything like that, in fact I have a good appetite again. Maybe everyone doesn’t get morning sickness. I still think that I should be feeling unwell in some way, that I should actually feel sick.

There wasn't much to do in the store over the weekend, just a lot of tourists who were wandering around aimlessly in the half-empty town. In the days before, people had shopped as if Christmas was coming. Brynja and I had enough time to gab and more than once I was nearly ready to confide in her about my worries. But before I could decide how I should do it, someone would come to the cash register or we needed to help someone in the store.

Now we are heading up north to visit amma and afi. I don't plan to work any more this summer since I have enough in my bank account and plan to slack off until school starts. We'll stay up north for a few days as usual in August. When I was little, I got to stay with amma and afi for a month or so. They would come down south to pick me up, or both Sara and I, and then mom and dad picked us up before school started. Now they've given up the drive south altogether as afi's eyesight is poor and amma doesn't want to drive that far. Lilla gets to stay with them and then she'll get a ride home with dad's sister Magga at the end of the month.

Dad and mom are settling things at the store, our bags are in the car and I have half an hour to rush over to Brynja's and say goodbye. I'm ready to go and they plan to pick me up there when they leave. As I walk to Brynja's, I decide how I should tell her about my fears. Or whether I should tell her anything now, just when I'm getting ready to leave. Maybe it's better to wait until I get back. Maybe there'll be no reason to say anything then.

Brynja is alone at home. Her mom is on holidays and went downtown with all the kids. Everything is upside down in Brynja's room; she's tidying her closet.

“God, do you remember this?” she says and holds up a pink t-shirt that has Spice Girls written on it in shiny letters.

“Can you believe I wore this to school in the fall?”

I try not to smile at the thought. But the tiny, tight t-shirt reminds me of the low cut t-shirt I wore that evening in the spring. The turquoise blue t-shirt. I clear my throat.

“Brynja, I need to tell you something.”

Brynja looks at me with surprise, at the same time as she throws the Spice Girls t-shirt in the heap of clothes on the floor.

“Is something wrong? You’re so serious.”

“Yes, actually,” I answer. “— Or — maybe. I don’t know yet. I think so.”

“Are your mom and dad getting a divorce or something? Or Sara?”

“No, nothing like that,” I say. “There is no divorce. It’s just...”

I hesitate, and gather my courage and look right at Brynja.

“I think I’m pregnant.”

Brynja stares at me with an open mouth. For a long time she doesn’t say anything and I see how the thoughts are swirling in her head. Then it comes:

“How could you be...but you haven’t ... have you? Were you with Biggi that night? You slept together? And you didn’t tell me? Why? How could you...?”

I know how she feels. I would also feel betrayed if my best friend didn’t confide in me about something so ... big. I have to try to explain how I felt. If only I could understand that myself. . .

"I didn't mean to lie to you, or hide anything from you. It was just ... like it had never happened. Not for real. Like it had been some kind of dream or something. It was like it would only become real if I talked about it. So I didn't say anything. I'm sorry."

Brynja puts her arms around me and hugs me tightly. I feel the tears start to run down my cheeks. I can't start crying, mom and dad are coming shortly.

"Are you sure?" Brynja takes me by the shoulders and looks in my eyes. "Are you completely sure? It was only one night, only one single time ..."

"Don't you remember what the nurse said at school?" I sniffle and laugh through the tears. "Pay attention, my girls, it only takes one time! And it's not true that you can't get pregnant the first time!"

Brynja laughs, too. She passes me the pink t-shirt.

"Here, blow your nose with this, it's going in the garbage anyway!"

I dry my eyes but don't blow my nose with it.

"It could go in the museum. An example of how girls dressed at the end of the twentieth century," I say and throw the t-shirt onto the pile again. I stand up.

"I have to go," I say. "They're coming and I have to go downstairs."

"I'll come with you." Brynja stands up, too. "You have to tell me more."

I tell Brynja all that I can in a hushed tone while we stand on the corner in front of the apartment building and wait for dad and mom. It's raining and there's a little breeze and I hope that all signs of any tears will disappear in the outside air.

"I've missed two periods. I should have started about mid-month, approximately. Then my breasts have grown, you said so yourself at the pool the other day. But I'm not sick or anything, so I was hoping that this was just stress or something..."

I see the car coming around the corner. Brynja hugs me and whispers:

“Call me when you can talk in private.”

Then I get into the car and in the backseat beside Lilla. Brynja stands on the stairs and waves to me until the car is out of sight. I lean back and close my eyes. I am so tired; I feel like I could sleep all the way.

August 10th

Everything is the same as it has always been at amma and afi's house. The house and the yard, the street, the town, the pier. Amma waited with cocoa and crepes even though it was nearly eleven when we arrived. It was good to sleep in my old bed. It was just as good to wake to the smell of coffee in the morning and come down to the kitchen, get toast with jam and pat the old cat that curls up and purrs beside me on the chair.

Dad is helping afi fix the basement stairs and mom goes with Lilla to visit the neighbour lady whose daughter is the same age as Lilla. Amma and I are alone. I eat more toast at the kitchen table while amma mixes the spice cake that will be served with the coffee today. Meanwhile I have amma's red currant jam on the bread. Yum!

“It's good to see that you have an appetite, my dear,” says amma Sigga. “You have to put on a little weight; your face is awfully thin. But that's how young girls probably want to be these days.”

Amma smiles at me as she reaches to get the cake pan down from the shelf in the kitchen cupboard. Warmth flows from her where she stands, so small and plump, in the good smelling, blue-painted kitchen, dressed in her flowered dress with a white apron around her waist. She had four children and they grew up here in this house. Maybe she

had sat right here at the kitchen table with her cup of coffee and wondered whether a new baby was on the way. Was she always happy? Did she want all of them? Would she at one time have been scared and unsure, wished solemnly and sincerely that the bleeding would start, that there would be no baby?

No, of course not. She had undoubtedly been ecstatic each time, hurried to tell afi the news and they had been happy together. They were a married couple and loved one another, and definitely wanted to have a house full of children. She wasn't sixteen the first time she was pregnant.

I feel a lump in my throat and the last piece of bread doesn't want to go down. I feel my eyes waiting to fill with tears and I want nothing more than to throw myself into amma's soft embrace and cry on her shoulder. She wouldn't scold me. She'd know what I should do.

Amma Sigga puts the cake pan into the oven and closes the door.

"There," she says with satisfaction and dries her hands on her apron. "Now we have something to have at coffee-time today. I'll show you the pictures I got from Jóna. He is awfully cute, that little one."

Jóna, dad's sister, lives in Denmark and her son just became a father. The pictures show Jóna and her husband whose name I never remember, proud and smiling over a little bundle in a light blue blanket. You only see a red and wrinkled face between the folds of the blanket. I don't know how amma finds the kid to be cute. Jakob, Jóna's son, is also in a picture with the bundle and his smile goes from ear to ear. The mother is with them in one of the pictures, rather pale and tired-looking, but grinning broadly as well.

“Aahh, you are all becoming so grown up,” sighs amma and looks at the picture from Jakob. “It seems such a short while ago that he was coming here in the summer, little Kobbi. And now he is a father.”

She pats my hand where it lays on the blue checkered oilcloth on the kitchen table.

“Don’t be in a hurry to grow up too fast, Sunna dear. Enjoy being a child as long as you can. No, excuse me, a teenager,” she says and laughs. Then she stands up and checks the cake.

I quickly say thank you and set my cup and dish in the sink. Then I run out, all the way down to the shore. There I sit on a rock right down by the water’s edge. It’s windy and there are little waves and I feel the ice-cold water spray my face when the waves slam onto the rocks, extinguishing my hot cheeks and the burning behind my eyes.

The sea is not blue today, rather a grey-green or dark grey. The water gleams wet and smooth in the black sand between the rocks. Far in the distance the dark sea becomes one with the bank of grey clouds behind it. This is the same shore that I’ve played on countless times, the same sea that glittered blue and green in the sunshine and washed up treasure in the sand to me, worn pieces of glass and logs, conch shells and sea shells. The shore of all of my life’s adventures looks different today.

I’ve become quite cold from sitting down here, and I walk slowly home again to amma. Lunch waits and a long day with family and friends, coffee and bread and cake. But tomorrow we will go to Akureyri and then I have to go to a drugstore. The time has now come for me to know for sure.

August 11th

It takes some effort on my part for me to be alone when we get to town. Mom wants me to let Lilla come with me while she goes with amma into the shops. Lilla also wants to hang out with me and I can tell that she's ready to start whining if she doesn't get her way. I manage to pinch her on the arm and send her a deadly look behind mom's back so she doesn't dare to start whining and she says she'd rather go with mom and amma.

Fortunately, there's not much of a chance that I'll run into someone I know here in town. I've often come here with amma and afi and know my way around quite well. I go straight to the drugstore to do my shopping while mom and the others are in the grocery store. That should take them at least a half an hour. If they were to go into the shops right away, we could bump into one another or they could see me go into the drugstore.

Luckily, I can look around the shelves myself and don't need to ask for help. What is it called again? Pregnancy test. After some looking around I find the package. Home pregnancy test. That must be it.

The girl at the cash register seems to give me a weird look when she takes the package and reads the price on it. I wish she'd hurry so that the box doesn't need to lie there for everyone to see while she punches the price in, takes the money and gives me change. It feels as if the package is shouting for attention to everyone in the store while it lies on the counter: "Hey, here's a girl buying a pregnancy test kit! And she's only sixteen! What do you think about that?"

“Would you like a bag?” asks the cashier and I could swear that a brief smirk appears on her face.

“Yes, thanks,” I answer, but want to hiss instead: “What do *you* think?” I stuff the bag down in my backpack. There is no way that this little package can be seen through both the plastic bag and the black backpack. Now there’s nothing to do until amma and mom meet up with me.

August 12th

I got ready for bed early last night and had to wait until Lilla was asleep before I could sneak a look at the package. Then I waited until all was quiet in the house. It seemed as if the rattling of the coffee cups and all the chattering down in the kitchen would never stop. I finally heard the creaking of the stairs when amma and afi went up to bed, then again when mom and dad came up.

I carefully get out of bed. Lilla sleeps quietly in the bed that Sara always slept in when she came here with me in the summer. They are the old beds that dad and his brother Halli slept in when they were little. Magga and Jóna slept in the next room where mom and dad are sleeping now.

The house is old and afi built it when he and amma moved here nearly fifty years ago. At that time there was no bathroom in the house, but he eventually added a hallway and the bathroom. I need to go down the old, steep and creaky wooden stairs in order to get to the bathroom. I take the package carefully out of my backpack and put it under my pajama top.

I have walked and ran up and down these stairs many thousands of times and now when I need to remember which stairs creak the most, I can't remember at all. I step down carefully and jump back at the first sound that seems to echo through the house. Maybe it's not better to go so slowly. Maybe it's better to just run, they're less likely to wake up from a noise that'll be over quickly than from a long and drawn out creaking. I decide to just run down quickly when I become aware of a movement behind me and I stiffen up.

"Sunna, dear! Is that you? Is anything wrong?"

It's afi. He stands in the doorway, squinting at me in the darkness, down on the landing.

"No, no," I quickly answer. My voice is thin and distant and sounds weird. "I just need to go to the bathroom."

Afi says good night and closes the bedroom door. I walk quickly down to the bathroom.

I sit on the toilet and read the package once more. Then I get myself ready to follow the directions. I take off my pajama bottoms and straddle the toilet bowl. I need to hit the strip that is later used to read the results. It would be easy for boys to do this test. If they had to do it.

A few drops go on my fingers and a few on the toilet seat. I wipe up after myself and wash my hands and put my pants back on. Now I need to wait five minutes. I put the toilet seat down and sit on it. Of course I forgot my watch. How stupid can I be. How am I supposed to know when the time is up?

I start to count in my head. One thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three...No, now I'm mixed up. I have to count out loud. Twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty... I whisper as quietly as I can, but make sure that I can still make out the words. Outside the window the red currants gleam in the twilight. Soon amma will pick the currants and boil the fruit juice in a big pot, the house will smell of them, and there will be red berry pulp in the cheesecloth when she filters the juice, the blood-red juice that runs into the glass jars. Fifty-nine, sixty. One minute.

I will go home again when the blueberries are ripe. One thousand and seven, one thousand and eight. I can almost sense the aroma from the heather and remember how it was to see only berries and heather when I closed my eyes after picking all day. Then I'd eat berries with cream and berry skyr in amma's kitchen. Thirty-two, thirty-three. Lilla is lucky to still be little. She gets to stay here a while longer. Stay in the blue kitchen, by the blue sea. Berry blue. Two minutes.

I try not to look at the strip, it's supposed to change colour. There's no sign yet. But only three minutes have passed when I sneak a peek. No, nothing. I feel my heart jump from joy and try to tell myself that the time isn't up yet, but that sense of satisfaction doesn't go. It's so strong that I don't believe my own eyes when I see a stripe form on the strip. First it's very faint, then gradually it gets darker right before my eyes. Finally it appears in front of me, a beautiful blue. Triumphant. Yes, positive. You are pregnant. **YOU ARE PREGNANT!**

August 13th

I don't fall asleep until it's nearly morning and I wake up with a headache just before ten. It's the beeping of my phone that wakes me. Brynja is sending me a text message. **IS THERE ANY NEWS?** she writes. I answer immediately. I just write **POSITIVE**. She'll understand that.

I don't mention anything about the headache when I come down to the kitchen. There is bright sunshine outside and mom and dad are determined to rush out on a car trip. Amma Sigga is, of course, about to butter about a half a ton of bread at full speed for our lunch and afi peers at the map with dad and reminds him about the old walking paths. Then the car is loaded with Icelandic wool sweaters and rain jackets, travel blankets and lunch bags and coffee thermoses. You'd think that we had planned for the end of the world and not a day trip.

My phone beeps again when we're on our way. **POSITIVE???** asks Brynja. Yeah, I guess you could interpret this in two ways.

"What does positive mean?" crows Lilla beside me. She's managed to stretch far enough in my direction to read the phone screen.

"Why do you ask that?" asks dad and smiles.

"It's on Sunna's phone," answers Lilla. Damn brat.

"You totally know what it means," I hurry and say. "It's the opposite of negative.

It means that all is good, everyone's in a good mood, and so on. Everything's positive! people say".

“I’ve never heard it used that way,” says mom. “But that’s good. It’s better than always using a foreign word in English, to say cool and so on.”

“That is totally going out of style,” I say. I want to scream, strangle Lilla and burst out laughing, all at once. But I just look out of the window, at mountains and hills and hayfields and farms rushing by and try to find a way to let Brynja understand what is going on without saying it. Secret code.

$1+1=3$. Nothing better occurs to me so I send that to Brynja. Lilla pulls on my arm to catch a glimpse of the screen.

“That’s crazy!” she shouts triumphantly. “Sunna doesn’t know how to add!”

“Mom, tell her to leave me alone,” I say, irritated. “It is impolite to bother people when they are sending messages.”

Mom hushes Lilla and tells her to be quiet. Then she nags a bit at me about the phone use, saying that it is unnecessary to be always talking and texting. But her tone isn’t annoyed and she smiles at dad when she turns back to him. He smiles back at her. It’s like they are sending each other a message: Oy, these kids. A little tiring, but still...

We soon arrive at our destination and eat our lunch before we set off on our hike. Dad plans to show us some place where he sometimes went with afa when he was a boy. It’s about an hour’s walk each way and Lilla is starting to complain about being tired before we get to the end of the trail. Poor kid.

Dad is in fine form and points out landmarks to us; he knows what every single tussock is called. When we get to the bottom where the valleys meet, he rattles off the names of all the mountains, hills, and hillocks in sight. It all goes in one ear and out the other. I’ve never understood why it is so important to know what they’re all called. But I

see the sun shining and feel the heather twigs, see the colours of the moss, lichens and stones, and hear the birds in the stillness.

We sit and rest for a little while before we set off again for the car. Lilla forgets about being tired and runs off to look for berries and mom and dad lie down on the grassy slope and turn their faces up to the sun with their eyes closed. I sit on a stone right above them. There is peace and quiet. I could tell them now.

They lie there so peaceful and content. In the countryside with their girls. Life is secure and unchanged. And now I'll destroy it all. Break in on that happiness and ruin it all. Tell them that good little Sunna is pregnant. No, I can't tell them that now. Not while we're here. Later, when we're home again.

Mom looks up at me and smiles. Then she stands up and dusts off the grass and heather.

"We should maybe start heading back again," she says. And the happy little family gets ready to walk back to the car.

August 17th

The letter from the school was waiting for me when we arrived home from the north. It was an announcement about when and where I should show up and all the new students were welcomed.

The sales are in full swing and Brynja and I go downtown to have a look and see whether there is anything that we can get for school this fall. Brynja asks me the same question as she does everyday:

"Have you talked with your mom?"

I just shake my head. I'm always waiting for the right moment. Yet I know I can't wait much longer. Not if I have to have an...or do something about this. I prefer not to think about that in any more detail. I just know that I have to do something. I can't have a baby. It is not possible. I'm starting high school.

Brynja holds up a tight, low-cut black t-shirt. I nod my head.

"Excellent for school, especially when it gets cold," I say. She laughs.

"You have to try and show off a little now," she says. "A school full of cute guys instead of pitiful, pimple-faced fools!"

Then she looks away and says thoughtlessly, far too thoughtlessly:

"Do you know what school Biggi goes to?"

"No idea," I answer. "Undoubtedly Verslo or something. Maybe MR. That's none of my business."

Brynja rummages through the pile of sweaters and says without looking at me:

"I just asked. Sorry, no offence."

"I'm not offended," I answer. "It doesn't matter to me. I don't care what school he goes to. I don't care if I never see him again. I mean that."

And I do mean it, too. Biggi is none of my business. And when my heart skips a beat when I see the back of a dark-haired boy in a leather jacket, it's not because I want to see him again, I'm just somewhat infatuated with him. I only feel regret and anger for having been such an idiot. I'm ashamed of myself. Nothing else.

September 5th

School has started. It was strange to come into the school building, knowing it would become the place where we would feel at home. We went there for the Information Days presentation when we were in tenth grade, totally looking like idiots, gaping and staring. It seemed as if the school was so huge and overwhelming. It was a little difficult to find the classrooms the first day, but after a few days everything became familiar.

I am with Brynja in Icelandic and Danish, but nothing else. I knew no one in the first English class, and I obviously had a stupid look on my face because a smiling, chubby girl sat beside me and introduced herself.

“Hello, my name is Anna,” she said. “Are you just starting school here?”

Isn’t that obvious, I thought, but answered with just a yes and introduced myself. Anna was very talkative and talked non-stop until class started. She said she was in the choir and asked whether I enjoyed singing.

“It’s great to be in the choir,” she said. “The kids are fun and it’s a good environment. We are probably going on a concert trip to Portugal next summer. You should go to the audition.”

She hurried to add that you don’t usually get into the main choir right away; many girls have to sing with the girls’ choir the first year. The boys, on the other hand, generally get right in, since they are always in short supply.

I wasn’t going to tell her that I had sung in a choir almost all of elementary school; I would wait and see how the audition went. I enjoy singing; I was just a little embarrassed to admit it the last two years of elementary school, so I quit the choir. But now I feel tempted to start again.

The choir director had a very stern look about her and was a little intimidating. But when I started to sing, her mood seemed to brighten.

“Great!” she said. “You have a clear and beautiful soprano voice, high pitched but it fits and what’s more, you know how to read the notes. Welcome to the group!”

With that, I was in the choir and started to practice immediately. There was to be a concert in December.

In December. The time passes all too fast. It’s September and I know that I have to talk to mom now. Or else it will be too late. This first term in high school will also be the last, at least for now. I am due to have the baby sometime in February or something like that. No school, no choir, no trip, no dances, no friends. No life.

It’s different, of course, when someone wants to have kids, like it was with Sara, for example. I remember when she came and told us she was pregnant. She and Arnar brought a bottle of sparkling wine and opened it at the table and it foamed all over the dishes and mom and dad stared at them in amazement. Then when they finally figured out what was going on, shouts, laughter and congratulations began. But Sara was also twenty-two, finished with high school and started in university, engaged and living in her own place.

Fortunately there’s not much to study today, a little bit of math that I finished during my spare and then only English and Icelandic, which I can look over tonight. I have promised to babysit for Sara and Arnar so they can go out to a movie and I’m going to eat with them first at their house.

All is in perfect order in Sara’s apartment as usual. She has always been so insanely organized. She says hello and then runs into the kitchen to stir the pasta sauce.

The aroma fills the little apartment. Aron Smári sits in the playpen on the living room floor.

“How do you always manage to have everything so nice?” I ask. My room would always be upside down if mom left me alone.

“I can’t stand a mess,” says Sara. “Arnar is also very good about helping me. When he’s home.”

Help you, I thought. Can he really find time between the body building and the football to help his wife wash his sports uniforms? But of course I don’t say anything; I just smile. I have never understood what Sara sees in this blonde, broad-faced muscle man, who in fact now appears at the door and blows a kiss to Sara, as she stands rosy cheeked over the stove. How sweet.

“Hi, Sunna,” says Arnar as he strides past me and into the living room to say hi to his son.

“Can you maybe change him?” calls Sara to the living room and then smiles proudly at me when the answer comes:

“No problem, love!”

Wow, I think. He knows how to change a diaper. And it’s not a recognized sport. But then I hear from the living room:

“He pooped! And it’s not little!”

Sara smiles apologetically at me as she runs to the rescue.

I sit on the couch in the living room when Arnar and Sara are gone and Aron Smári is finally asleep in his bed. The TV is on and I have my English book open, but I can neither focus my attention on my book nor on the movie. I’ve never pitied Sara

before. She was always so perfect, the most hard working and the cutest of all. I envied her, wanted to be as cute as her. But now she's in prison. Tied to a screaming baby, laundry, dirty diapers, cooking. But still happy and content, blinded by love for her sports maniac and their little monster.

I don't want it to be like that. I want to be independent, study, travel, and enjoy life. Get to be by myself, only me, alone. For a long, long time yet. I have to talk to mom. Now, tonight. She's alone at home with Lilla, and dad is on a buying trip for the store in England. When I get home tonight I'll talk to her.

"I'm pregnant."

"What are you saying, child"? Mom holds me by my shoulders, at arms' length, and stares in amazement at me. "How can you be pregnant? Has someone...?"

I shake my head.

"It just happened. There was no one to blame. It just happened. Don't ask me about it."

Mom lets go of me and sits on the bed. She covers her face in her hands for a moment. Then she looks up.

"I have to ask. You must tell me. When did this happen? Do you know? And how do you know for sure that you are pregnant?"

"I'm positive." I say. "I did a pregnancy test. And it was in the spring. Last May."

Mom looks at me, horrified.

"But that's three months ago! It could be too late..."

She doesn't finish the sentence.

"You have to go to the doctor right away in the morning," she says. "Then we'll know whether you are right. And how far along you are."

Then she stands up right in front of me. We are the same height, but I feel so much smaller than her. Her voice trembles with anger, fear, disappointment, sorrow.

"I never would have believed you could let this happen, Sunna dear. Not you."

I turn and run out of the bedroom. Down the hallway, dark and silent. Into my room, where I throw myself on my bed and cry; cry with the corner of my pillow over my face so no one hears me, cry and shake with sobs. Finally I fall asleep.

September 6th

Mom is on the phone when I come out of the bathroom. She's ending the conversation, says thank you and hangs up.

"Hurry and get dressed, Sunna dear. I got an appointment with a gynecologist. He's going to get you in just before noon."

I get dressed and comb my hair, and then get myself some tea and toast in the kitchen. Mom is on the phone again. She says she needs to run to the doctor, no, nothing serious, and sees whether or not Halla could look after things at the store until noon. Maybe a little past noon.

Mom doesn't say anything while we drive to the doctor's office. She parks the car and we walk into the building and take the elevator up. Not a word. She speaks to a woman who sits behind the glass, gives her name, and says she has spoken with the doctor this morning. Then we sit down in the waiting room. I flip through an old gossip

magazine with stories of long past weddings and divorces and parties. People with big smiles on each page. Suntanned silicone girls in bathing suits.

“Kristín Hansdóttir,” says the woman in the glass cage. Mom and I both stand up.

“You don’t have to worry, he’s a very nice man,” whispers mom and pats me quickly on the shoulder. Then the door opens and a man in a white coat with graying hair looks out. He nods at mom and says in a low voice:

“Do you just want to wait out here, Kristín? I’ll call you later.” He opens the door to let me in and mom is left to stand there alone in the corridor.

The doctor offers me a seat and takes a pen and pad of paper. He asks me my name and age and about other matters related to the state of my health. Then he looks right at me.

“You think that you are with child?”

I nod my head. With child. It sounds so formal.

“And do you know when this could have happened?”

“May 18th,” I answer. He lifts his eyebrows.

“For sure?” he asks. I answer with another nod of my head. He stands up.

“It’s best that we examine you,” he says. He opens a door into another room. It’s gleaming white and bright.

“You can go behind there,” he says and points to a partition made of white material. “Take off everything below your waist, there is a robe in there.”

I take off my jeans, socks and underwear. I have never in my life felt as naked as I feel now, standing here, bare below the waist, and wearing a heavy sweater on top. I take off the sweater; I have a t-shirt underneath. That somehow feels a little more normal.

I put on the robe. It's huge and I can't figure out how to tie it together, so I wrap it around me and hold it together in the front. I walk hesitantly into the room.

The doctor stands in front of the examination table and gestures for me to lie down on it. There are some things made out of stainless steel sticking out of the end of the table, high bars or something, that look like they should support the legs or knees. No. That can't be. But when I lay up on the table, the doctor asks me to put my feet up in them. They are at least a kilometer apart. The doctor lays a white sheet over me so I don't need to see myself lying there all stretched apart. But it doesn't change the fact that I'm there. The steel feels cold on my feet. And I wish that I were dead. Or at least that it was a nightmare that I could wake up from. I look straight up at the ceiling, up at the painful white brightness of the florescent light.

"Just try to relax, my dear, this shouldn't be too bad." says the doctor reassuringly. Then I feel ice cold steel go into me and widen inside me. It's as if he is spreading me apart with some tool. Then his gloved hand goes into me, farther, farther in. All of my muscles contract and I clench my teeth. But the doctor's movements are sure and fast and the examination is done quickly.

"This is finished," he says. "You may get dressed."

He turns his back to me at the sink while I wriggle down and hurry and get dressed again. When I come into the outer room again, the doctor offers me a seat.

"I want to talk to you alone first, before your mom comes in," he says. "You had it right. You are pregnant." He falls silent and looks at me.

"You are fifteen or sixteen weeks along. I'm afraid that affects the possibilities that you have."

I look into his eyes, grey and tired looking, but kind, behind his glasses. What is he saying?

“You are too far along to have abortion as an option. You are very young but you are a healthy girl. You also have a family who will most certainly support you. Your mom and I went to school together; I know her and I am convinced that she will help you through this. Are you in contact with the baby’s father?”

I shake my head.

The doctor sighs.

“That’s too bad. But you must not go through this alone.” He stands up, opens the door and calls mom.

Mom comes in smiling uncertainly, but it fades as soon as she looks at me. She sits on the chair beside me and I watch her and the doctor in turn. This is weird. I see them, but I don’t hear what they are saying. It’s as if I’m watching a movie with the sound turned off. But mom’s face can be read without words. Disbelief. Shame. Sorrow. Anger. Pity.

The doctor tells us when I have to have another examination and when the baby is due. The baby. It’s like I now feel something in me, some foreign body. Something heavy, like a lump of lead or a stone. But it’s all my imagination, of course. It’ll be a long time yet until I feel anything. But it’s still there.

On the way home the thoughts are turning circles in my head. I think that this must be something bad, something horribly bad that I deserve since I had been so stupid. And I thought that no one else needed to know except mom and maybe dad. And the

doctor. But now everyone will know. And in school... But not Biggi. He shall never know about this. This is none of his business. He does not exist.

September 12th

I walk all the way home from school instead of taking the bus. It's good to be out and walking in the cool fall air and I'm in no hurry to get home.

Dad came home last night. Mom waited to talk to him until later in the evening, when Lilla was asleep and I was in my room. Mom has spoken little to me these past few days since we were at the doctor's. She's been unusually quiet and a little distracted.

I found it difficult to face dad. It was as if I was lying to him while he didn't know what was going on. He brought gifts as usual: doll stuff for Lilla, perfume for mom and Sara and a CD for me. Then he told mom about the trip while we ate dinner. He must have felt that something was wrong, because I saw the questioning look he gave mom when he thought we wouldn't notice.

Their voices carried down the hall even though the door was closed. I couldn't make out the words when mom was talking. Then came silence.

"Who did this to her?"

Dad's voice was hoarse and it sounded as if he was in pain. Mom answered in a lower tone but I still made out what she said:

...nothing like that...just happened...will not say...

Dad's voice lowered, calmed. They spoke together a long time and I wasn't able to make out what they were saying. I lay down on my bed and stared up at the ceiling. The last thing I wanted to do was to hurt dad and be the cause of any disappointment. He

has always been close by, quiet and comforting, smiled at me secretly while mom grumbled, and patted my hand with his big, rough hand. He let me get him pieces of wood and tools at the workshop when I was little, and he taught me to nail and saw. It was good to be near him, hear the pound of the hammer and the smell of the wood shavings, and get a smile as a reward when I straightened up his tools. I have never seen him angry.

Then he came into my room, sat on the bed beside me and took my hand in his. He didn't say anything. But when I started to cry, he took me in arms and held me up against his shoulder and rocked me back and forth as if I was a little child and just let me cry for a long, long time. When I stopped, he stroked the damp hair off of my forehead and kissed it, then went out into the hall. Without saying a single word.

I know that mom waited to talk to amma and Sara until after she told dad. She's probably called them this morning when I was in school. I can imagine how Sara took the news. I think that I know her well enough to know that she'll be surprised with me. She'll scold me in a know-it-all tone about how I have behaved like a fool. Then she'll become caring and want to do everything for me. She's also capable of showing mercy. She's never gotten into trouble like this. Miss Perfect.

I open the door and walk in and go straight to the kitchen. Amma is sitting at the kitchen table with a coffee cup.

"Hi, Sunna dear," she says. "Would you like coffee? I was just making it."

I shake my head. I just want to mumble something about homework and rush into my room. But amma's eyes tell me to stay put.

Amma Dóra is as different from Amma Sigga as it's possible to be. She is as thin and sharp-featured as Amma Sigga is chubby and plump-faced. Amma Sigga just smiles, regardless of what happens, patient through and through. She never says a bad word about anyone. Amma Dóra shows her displeasure clearly if she finds reason to; she has seen it all and tells it like it is, to whoever it may concern. Amma Sigga has looked after afi and her kids and the grandchildren full time, her life revolves around them, and she lives for them. Amma Dóra is recently retired from a dressmaker's shop where she has been for thirty years, and for the last ten years, she managed it. She worked all day and was not like a children's storybook amma who waited with hot chocolate when the kids came home from school. But both of the ammas do the same thing when something bad happens. They make coffee.

I sit in a chair at the kitchen table, by the window, not across from amma, and look out into the yard instead of meeting her gaze.

"Your mom told me the news," she said. Her voice is not accusing, but rather it is gentle. I look at her in amazement. I expect a scolding.

"You are not the first to have this happen, my dear," she says. "And you certainly won't be the last. It's no reason to despair. The main thing now is to take care of yourself and stay healthy. You should finish the term; you're not expecting until February, right?"

I nod my head, no words come out. Amma stands up.

"This is all together quite different now than it was in the old days. You don't need to worry about finances. Are you sure that you don't want a cup of coffee?"

“Yes, thanks anyway,” I stammer. I watch amma’s agile movements as she stretches to reach a cup in the cupboard and pours the steaming coffee into it. I don’t know her as well as I thought.

September 30th

Never before have the days on the calendar been so important. I’ve often counted the days when I was waiting for my birthday, Christmas or an upcoming trip. The days were crossed off one after the other and the growing anticipation gave me butterflies. But now the weeks and the days in my journal stir up feelings of dread inside me. The days are steps I must take even though I don’t want to. Estimated due date. First examination. Ultrasound.

Ultrasound is written in today’s date. Whatever that is. I’ve seen something about it on TV shows, but I didn’t really pay attention to it. I’m fairly sure that you don’t feel any pain, at least. And no one needs to go inside of me with any instruments.

Of course, I could just ask Sara since it’s not that long since she went through this herself. But I don’t want to do that yet. It’s enough having to deal with the pitying tone in her voice. Poor little Sunna, to have gotten herself into this mess. Poor, stupid Sunna. The worst is that both she and mom feel that it’s great practice for me to look after her kid. I try to avoid it as much as I can; I generally have an awful lot of homework to do when she asks me. I don’t need to practice changing dirty diapers.

Mom wants to come with me to the appointment. The fathers usually do that. Mom has tried to get out of me who the father is, most recently yesterday evening.

“I don’t understand why you don’t want the father to take some responsibility,” she said. We were alone in the living room, some ridiculous program was on TV, and dad was reading to Lilla. I didn’t answer.

“Are you sure that he wouldn’t want to know?” she asked. “Maybe he would want to know about the baby and keep up with what’s happening, even though you’re not... in a relationship, of course.”

“He does not want to know,” I answered. “He is only a boy. A sixteen year old boy. Why should he want to know about this? I don’t even want to know about it myself.”

Then I went into my room and shut the door behind me; there were no slammed doors or screaming or anything. I wasn’t angry. Only full of regret. I wanted only to fall asleep and not wake up until this dream was done.

Now we’re on our way to the ultrasound. I have to be there at two-thirty, so I skip my last two classes. Gym and math. At least there’s something good about the day.

The hospital is big and smells of cold disinfectant; people dressed in white are busy in brightly lit, endless hallways, everyone seeming to know where they are going, except us. Mom asks the way and by chance we stumble upon the right place and take a seat. We’re way too early; mom always wants to be everywhere in good time. I flip through a very old newspaper with articles about healthy living.

The door finally opens and a man and a woman appear in the doorway. They turn around and say goodbye to someone in the room, cheerfully, as if to a friend. When the woman comes through the door I see the biggest belly that I have ever seen in my life. The woman has to waddle with her feet far apart and her back bent back so that she

doesn't lose her balance and topple over. Good God, will I be like that? I'll die if I end up like that.

The man carefully leads his wife to a seat and she sits while he puts on his jacket and gets her coat for her. Her face is swollen and she looks tired, but smiling, and she leans against him and whispers something to him as they walk down the hall. He has his arm around her. How cute. Mom follows them with her eyes and smiles.

"They must be having twins. If not triplets," she says quietly, so they don't hear.

Twins. Triplets. I haven't even thought about that. I feel the puke rise up in my throat. Then the door opens and one of the people dressed in white looks out.

"Sunna Guðmundsdóttir?"

White lights. White walls. Tables with white sheets over them. Chairs on wheels, machines and screens. The woman in white takes our hands, and asks me to lie down on the table. I lift up my sweater and unbutton my pants so that my stomach is bare. It's still nearly flat, but no longer flat between my hip bones when I lie down. She puts something cold and runny on my stomach.

A young, blonde woman with glasses comes in and says hi. She sits beside me and puts something that resembles a computer mouse on my stomach. She moves it back and forth. I look at the screen that is in front of her, but can't make out what it shows. There are shadows and streaks in black and grey tones. I hear a weird noise, like a heavy murmur.

"There," she says. Mom comes up beside me and peers at the screen.

"There is the fetus," she says. "There's the head and the spine. You can see the heart beating."

I see some blurred form that flickers on the screen. Something black that moves rhythmically. Then I see an outline of something circular and something oblong. She moves the instrument on my stomach and the outline disappears and another form appears.

"Here you can see it clearly," she says and points at the screen. But I can't see anything clearly. Mom, on the other hand, seems to understand what she sees. She nods her head, smiles.

"Everything is in the right place and all looks good," says the blonde.

"Is there definitely only one?" I ask. I see the fat woman in the hallway before me.

"Yes," answers the blonde. "Only one."

The gunk is wiped off of my belly and I stand up and fix my clothes. The woman walks over to a printer and pushes a button.

"Don't you want the pictures?" she asks. "The first picture for the album!"

"You take them," I say to mom.

Mom takes the printed pictures and puts them in her purse. She says goodbye and I nod my head. We go out into the hall, down the white corridor and out to the parking lot. When we're sitting in the car, mom opens her purse and takes the pictures out.

"You didn't look for anything in the pictures, Sunna dear," she says. "You can definitely see the outline of the head on these, see here..."

I look at the pictures she passes to me. A little speck. A frog. A fish. Isn't that what it is at this point? The fetus?

"You can have them," I say. We drive home in silence.

October 12th

Life goes on according to the timetable. Icelandic, gym, English, German, history, Danish. Choir practice. Homework. Long evenings at home in front of the TV. Sometimes a trip to the movies with Brynja. I don't feel like putting up with the glances.

It's longer between events on the other timetable. The appointments are only once a month. The weeks pass slowly, yet too fast. I no longer fit into regular jeans and have to wear pants with elastic; some horrible-looking pants that mom bought me before but were too baggy then. I can no longer wear tight t-shirts and sweaters, which is good since the sweaters barely cover my growing belly.

I notice the looks from the other girls in the shower after gym class. I don't know any of the girls that are in my gym class and haven't been trying to get to know them either. It's tempting to skip the shower, now that no one keeps an eye on us as when we go into the bathroom, like they did in elementary school. But I find it disgusting to get dressed and be all sweaty and smelling, so I try to pretend that I don't notice the looks. I hurry and get dressed and get out of the change room and know for sure that all the gossip starts as soon as I close the door behind me.

It's cool out but not cold and not at all uncomfortable to feel the cool breeze in my damp hair. I have a spare and so I go out to the store on the way from the gym. I buy

myself a sandwich and a pop and sit on the bench outside the store. It's peaceful here in the middle of the morning and I'm alone outside the store.

The shrubs and trees in the gardens all around are turning yellow and red, brown and orange. I find it so beautiful in the fall when this last burst of colour comes, all burning like fireworks before the dark and cold get the upper hand. I dread the darkness of winter, but love the summer when it never gets dark. I always find it strange to be abroad in the summer when the hot darkness suddenly pours over everything. Dark and cold go together, light and warmth go together. That's just how it should be.

I lean my head back again and look up at the turquoise sky. All at once I feel a peculiar feeling inside. Like a small poke, sort of like a hiccup inside me. It's so faint that I think it could just be my imagination. Then I feel it again, stronger this time.

Movement. I feel movement. I know it's supposed to happen at about this time, the nurse asked me at the last appointment whether I had felt movement. When I answered no, she was quick to reassure me that it was completely normal not to feel it right away. As if I was holding my breath, waiting to feel this movement.

When it moves, then it exists. One more bit of proof. It's still as if I have not completely grasped it yet, like I'm still hoping that this is something altogether crazy. A bad dream. But this is not a dream. My stomach grows, the nurse hears a heartbeat. The shapeless spot on the ultrasound picture. And now this.

The movement inside of me feels as if it's coming from somewhere far, far away. Like some other world is inside of me, something huge. Outer space or a sea. And the movement is a radar signal, a sign that someone is trying to make contact from inside this far off dimension. Life out in outer space. Life in the abyss. Is anyone there?

Nonsense. I stand up, empty the pop bottle and throw the plastic wrap from the sandwich into the garbage can. I have to be in my German class in fifteen minutes.

November 10th

I walk past the stores without looking in the windows. Tight t-shirts, skirts and pants don't concern me now. From the corner of my eye, I see that the stores are full of brightly coloured clothes, mostly pink and purple. Those colours really suit me well. Will they be out of style when I can wear regular clothes again? If I can ever wear clothes like that again.

In the window of a shoe store I see fantastic, shiny, purple patent leather boots with high heels. For just a moment it occurs to me to go in and try them on, but then I see myself in my mind's eye, tottering in them, with my belly sticking out, and I decide not to go in. It's probably better to stay close to the ground now. There are other boots, also made out of shiny stretchy material, black and nearly flat-heeled, but still trendy looking.

I go in and try on the black boots, but find that they are far too tight for me to pull on. I try others that have a zipper and put them on, but suddenly I don't feel like being in there and I leave.

That has certainly never happened to me before. To walk around the mall with money in my wallet and not want to buy anything! I look at the clock. Mom is coming in about half an hour. I'll just go up to the food court and get myself something to eat while I wait. Mom usually drags me with her into some stores when she comes; she won't give up until I've bought something.

I wander over to the escalator. It'll be good to sit for a little while, my feet are so tired. The mall is full of people and they all seem to be in a rush, and I feel like I'm in some empty space outside of the crowd. In a glass bowl. Maybe it's because I'm not used to being here alone. I want Brynja or Tóta or someone to chat with and fool around with and laugh with. The fatigue pours over me again and I look around for a place to sit and rest. I only sit down for a moment, breathe deeply a few times and feel better right away. There is a children's clothing store that mom and I went into to buy a baby gift when Aron Smári was born. Mom went completely crazy and bought half the store. Maybe I should look in there and see whether there's anything for him for his birthday. In just over a week he'll be a year old. The brat. He would look cute in a sky blue sweater; he's so blonde and blue-eyed.

The window is full of beautiful clothes and I go in to have a closer look. At the front of the store are clothes for older kids and farther in the back are shelves and racks with clothes for little kids. I look for a blue sweater for the monkey, but find nothing in the colour that I have in my mind. Would Sara want to dress him in red? The sports addict would undoubtedly find that too girly.

On a shelf beside the sweater rack is a display of baby clothes. They are unbelievably small. Above a velvet-soft white outfit lay the smallest shoes I have ever seen. They are dark red, made out of soft suede, with a strap over the instep and are done up with tiny little buttons. I pick them up and stroke the soft surface with my fingertips. They remind me of doll shoes I had once – what was the doll's name again? She was dark-haired and blue-eyed and could cry and say mommy if a string was pulled – oh, what was it? Then I feel a sudden stab of pain inside me that makes me sway and I have

to grab the shelf so that I don't fall. As soon as I do that, I bump the rack and everything shakes and the woman who is looking at the sweaters turns and gives me a quick look as if she's going to scold me. But the look on her face changes and she grabs my arm.

"Are you all right, dear?"

The woman's voice sounds as if it comes from a distance and her face comes right up to me, unnaturally big and white, like a full moon. I don't feel sick, it's just so weird, like the surroundings and noises are all either too close or far, far away. I realize that it's the woman and not my feet that are holding me up and just then I feel something warm running down my thigh. I open my mouth, but no sound comes out and it's the woman who calls:

"Help! Can somebody help me here?"

Then everything goes black.

"Sunna!"

The voice comes out of the darkness. I don't recognize it and I don't want to answer, but it won't leave me in peace.

"Sunna! You're name is Sunna, isn't it?"

When I open my eyes, I see a circle of faces above me. There is the moon-faced woman and the woman whom I saw at the counter earlier. She's the one who's talking. She holds my backpack and my wallet.

"We've called an ambulance," she says. "Do you want us to call someone else for you?"

"Mom," I say and my voice sounds weak and thin like a small child.

“Do you remember her number?” asks the saleswoman, but a girl in a bright pink sweater bends over me as she takes my cell phone out of a pocket in my backpack.

“Is she in the phone?”

I nod and the girl smiles at me as she finds the number and calls. She passes the phone to the saleswoman.

“Hello,” I hear her say. “Your daughter has suddenly fallen ill. We’ve called an ambulance.”

I hear mom answer but I can’t make out the words and close my eyes. I hear the saleswoman tell mom where I am. She puts the phone back in my backpack and says that mom is on her way. All of a sudden I’m so cold that I start to shake. The girl in the pink sweater gets a baby quilt and spreads it over me. She kneels down on the floor beside me, takes my hand, and says quietly:

“It’s going to be all right. The ambulance is on its way.”

The minutes seem endless, but the girl sits beside me and it’s good to feel her hand holding mine; the blanket warms me so that the shivering eases. The salesgirl shoos away curious onlookers, and the crowd decreases somewhat, but when the paramedics put me on the stretcher, I still see all the faces in the store window and the doorway. The girl in the pink sweater squeezes my hand reassuringly and puts my backpack on the stretcher beside me.

The ambulance attendants’ grasps are quick and sure as they wrap a blanket around me and roll the stretcher out the door. Lights and faces fly by and then comes a cold gust of wind when the door opens. The stretcher is put into the ambulance and again a crowd of curious faces presses around. Then I see mom come running towards the

ambulance with her coat open and flapping. She presses through the throng of people and shouts to the men who are just about to close the door.

Mom sits in the ambulance beside the stretcher. She tries to appear calm, but I see the fear in her eyes. Her hair is ruffled from the wind and her face, which usually appears so strong, is now so open and sensitive. I want to hug her and tell her that it's all right, but I can't. I don't know whether it is all right.

"I wasn't far from here when the woman called. Thank God," she says.

"I am so cold," is the only thing I can say.

Mom takes my hands to warm me up. Then I discover that I still have the little red shoe in my closed palm. I can feel that my underwear and pants are damp and stiff. At the same time I feel the tears run silently on my face, along my nose, down my cheeks, down my neck.

At the hospital, they quickly remove my clothes. I'm washed and dressed in a hospital gown and pajama bottoms that are far too large and then they take down my information. Or maybe it's all taken from mom, because she is always the first to answer, blurting out my name, address, social insurance number, phone number and all that. The deluge of information from her doesn't stop until they start asking about how far along the pregnancy is. She hesitates for a moment and the woman who asked looks at me. This woman's face looks like a question mark: her eyebrows are high and arched and her eyes are big and round and stare, waiting for an answer. Clever of them to put it this way, I think, and answer the questioning face with the date of my last period and tell her what date I had been given from the ultrasound. The due date.

The question lady starts to examine me, takes my pulse and blood pressure and listens to my stomach and then feels it. She has soft and warm hands and I sense that she has done this a thousand times before. She looks at me, gives me a quick smile and says:

“The heartbeat is fine and the size is normal according to the gestation period. Everything will be all right, dear.”

She pats me on the shoulder as she walks out. Right away I hear a trembling sigh from mom and when I look at her I see that the tears are starting to run from the corner of her eyes. She pulls out a tissue and blows her nose and dries her eyes, as if she doesn't want me to see the tears. But I'm not scared by the tears. Mine are just below the surface, behind my eyes, but I'm waiting to be left alone.

“I'm going to go out and call your dad,” says mom and stands up. She pats my hand which is still clenched around the shoe. Then I remember it again.

“Mom, will you also call the store; you know the one,” I say and open my palm so mom sees the shoe. “I took it with me by accident and I don't want them to think that I planned to steal it, or anything.”

“I can return it tomorrow,” mom says and reaches for the shoe, but I close my palm again.

“I want to keep it with me,” I say. “I have money in my wallet...”

“I'll take care of it,” says mom and hurries out. I hear her blow her nose again out in the hallway.

Now I let the tears flow freely. But these tears are not cold like before in the ambulance, they are warm and I am warm inside. I put the little red shoe on my stomach and put my palm over it.

“Kick it now,” I whisper. “A tiny little kick, you can do it.”

And I feel it. Not quite a kick, but like a little wave in my stomach. What would it be like to float around in the water in there? In this tiny little sea inside me? The sound carries in there, I remember having heard that. And what’s more, a child knows its own mother’s voice when it’s born. And I whisper again into the deep, into the twilight in there:

“Everything is going to be all right. It will be all right.”

November 11th

I stay in the hospital for the night and am examined and prodded again and again. Finally they roll me in for an ultrasound, which confirms what they have been talking about, but no one says anything directly to me until after the examination. Loose placenta, says a young doctor who sits down to talk with me and he draws a picture on his pad of paper to explain what it means. A small piece of the placenta has loosened from the wall of the uterus and that caused the bleeding. I must stay put for the next few days so that the site can heal, then everything should be all right.

“You are very young,” says the doctor. So what? I think to myself. You look like you’re in high school. But I don’t answer. I’m young — so what?

“You’re healthy and everything should go well if you take care of yourself. Take it easy. No excitement.”

“Ok,” I answer. What does he think I’m going to do? Jump around and do aerobics, or something? But I just smile and he turns to the woman in the next bed. It’s a long time until visiting hours and I have nothing to read. First I just lie there and stare at

the ceiling, and try to remember which class I should be in and wonder whether mom has called the school this morning. Should she maybe have called Brynja? I can't use my cell phone in here and I can't go out to call right now. Anyway, she's still in school. If she went.

I toss and turn in the bed and face the night table. The little red shoe is there beside the water glass. No flower vase. The woman in the next bed has a big bouquet on the night table, beautiful orange roses. What could be wrong with her? She is well along in her pregnancy; her belly lifts the quilt high, and she crochets something little and light blue. I try to prick up my ears when the doctor talks to her, but can't understand what he says. In the compartment in the night table is my makeup bag that mom brought last night after it was decided that I would be spending the night here. She also brought chocolate and some Topas licorice candy. In the night table drawer is a copy of the New Testament, nothing else. I get a piece of chocolate and start to leaf through it. I haven't read mine since I was confirmed. Maybe it's possible to find some names in it; biblical names are in style now. I remember what amma snorted when Sara and Arnar chose the name Aron. I guess we can be thankful it wasn't Moses or Nebuchadnezzar, she said. It was only men from the west who were named that way in my youth.

I didn't find a lot of funny names. They're probably mostly in the Old Testament. But it's all right to read this when you know you won't be tested on it and I'm absorbed in the Sermon on the Mount when I jump at the sound of a stifled cry.

"God!"

It's my sister Sara standing at the end of the bed, deathly pale.

"What is it?" I ask, astonished, as she points to the New Testament.

“Is everything ok? I mean — you are reading...”

I burst out laughing.

“Did you think I was reading the Bible because I’m going to die, or something? I have nothing else to read; everything is ok, I’m all right!”

Sara sits on the bed beside me and hugs me.

“God, I’ve been so worried about you,” she whispers and then she starts to laugh, too. We are laughing like idiots when mom and dad come in the door. Dad holds a big bouquet. He bends down and kisses me on the cheek.

“Thanks, dad,” I say. “But I’ll probably get to go home tomorrow, so I don’t need any flowers.”

“You just take them home with you,” mom says as she carefully arranges them. She has brought the book that I’m in the middle of reading and she also bought a new magazine, more candy and pop. She also promises to call Brynja this evening and asks me what clothes I want to go home in.

They stay a short while. Sara needs to pick up Aron Smári at her in-laws place and dad and mom have promised to drop by amma’s, who of course sends her best to me. They all kiss me goodbye, dad the last. He notices the little red shoe on the night table and looks into my eyes without saying anything. Then he strokes my hair and follows mom and Sara out the door.

I am immersed in my book when I hear a light knock on the half-open door. I look up at a girl of about twenty standing in the doorway and think at first that she is coming to visit the woman in the next bed. She smiles at me and I realize that this is the

girl in the pink sweater. She's not in a pink sweater now but rather a black coat with a big, striped scarf around her neck.

"Hi," she says and comes hesitantly to the bed. "Do you remember me?"

"Yes, of course," I answer.

"Your mom called this morning about the shoes," she says. "I was so glad to hear that everything is all right. I couldn't stop thinking about you last night, but I didn't dare call the hospital, I thought it would be pushy because I didn't know you..."

"Thanks," I say. "Thank you for coming. And thanks for yesterday. For helping me."

"I didn't do anything," she says. Then she takes a little box out of her bag and passes it to me.

"Here's the other shoe. You need to have them both," she says smiling.

I sit up to reach for my backpack in the bottom compartment but the girl says quickly:

"No, you don't need to pay for them. They are a gift — from us in the store."

"Thank you," I stammer, totally amazed and reach for her hand. She takes my hand and smiles again.

"By the way, my name is Margrét," she says. "Call me Magga. I hope that you drop in some time if you're in Kringlan. It would be fun to keep up with what's happening with you. And Kristín says hi. You know, the woman who called the ambulance. And do you know what — the woman who grabbed you, she came into the store again this morning and asked whether we knew anything about you. She bought a t-shirt, but I'm sure she came just to find out whether we had heard anything!"

Magga closes her purse and walks to the door. She turns and waves goodbye.

“Bye,” she says. “And good luck.”

Good luck, everyone says. As if a you’re going to take a test. Maybe this is some sort of a test. But I’ve always done well on tests — almost always anyway. And we shall do well on this one. Both of us.

I take the red shoe from the nightstand and put it in the box with the other one. They are so tiny that it’s almost funny. I feel all warm inside looking at them. And now comes a clear and distinct kick, up underneath my ribs on the right side.

“Cute shoes,” says the woman in the next bed. She looks at me over the light blue crocheting that has increased in size unbelievably today. Before I know it, I start telling her the whole story about the trip to the store and the shoes and the bleeding and she tells me why she is in. There is a risk of eclampsia, she says and smiles at the scared look on my face. It’s not as bad as it sounds, she just needs to be well monitored and maybe have the baby delivered by caesarian section before it’s due. The worst part about the hospital situation is that she — Birna is her name — is from the eastern part of Iceland and her husband and two children are there and she of course misses them.

Birna also shows me what she is crocheting. It’s a blanket with crocheted circular pieces that look like flowers and it looks really complicated. She has a big bag of yarn and knitting stuff in her nightstand because she is also knitting a sweater set, which she shows me a picture of in a knitting magazine. It’s good to have a lot to do, she says, since it gives her some variety. Then she starts knitting and the sound of the clicking needles is like peaceful background music when I begin to read my book again.

November 12th

I sleep soundly and feel peaceful when I wake up and there hasn't been any more bleeding. Breakfast is not very appetizing and I want to get dressed and go home. The friendly senior doctor peeks in on me around eleven and says that I'm allowed go home about noon. He also says that I have to be careful and asks whether I go to school or work. I tell him about the attendance rules in school and he promises to write a letter saying that I was not skipping and that I must take it easy for the next few days and may not attend full-time. He also says that I must quit gym class. Hurray, I think in silence, there is an upside to being pregnant after all.

"The best of luck to you, dear, and hopefully you won't be in here again until February," he says and pats my hand as he turns to Birna in the next bed.

I go out in the hallway and call mom, who comes right away with my clothes. I get dressed and gather my stuff and say goodbye to Birna and the nurses. It's good to be out in the cool air and I sit in the front seat with the bouquet from dad in my arms.

Dad and Lilla wait at home and then Sara and Arnar come with the little worm. He starts to climb up on me right away, but mom takes him in her arms and says that I mustn't be lifting him. Another bright spot — no more babysitting!

I lie down on the sofa with a blanket and Sara gets a pop for me to drink. When Arnar offers to run out and rent a movie for me, I can barely keep from bursting out with laughter. I feel totally fine, but it goes without saying that a person must enjoy being a little spoiled when the opportunity presents itself.

I'm treating myself to a tuna fish sandwich and snacks and watching a movie when the doorbell rings. It's Brynja. She sits on the sofa beside me and I can tell she

wants to hug me. Hard. But the living room and the kitchen are full of people and she makes do by messing up my hair and pinching me on the cheek.

“Ow!” I say. “Do you have to hurt me?”

“That’s what you get for driving a person crazy with fear,” she answers. Then she finds a place for herself on the sofa with her feet in my lap and gobbles up the snacks. When the movie is over, we go to my room to talk and everything is back to normal. Almost, that is. Amma comes for dinner and everyone is all over me as if I’ll going to break, but this will all pass soon enough.

I’m a little tired, but that’s just because I was woken up so early in the hospital. I go to bed early and mom looks in on me and asks how I’m doing. I tell her that I am fine and ask her to wake me for school. At first she doesn’t want to hear of this in the least, but thinks it’ll be okay if she gets to drive me and pick me up and I have to promise to call her at the store if I want to go home before school is done. I don’t mention that it’s a long day tomorrow, with choir practice after school, and I wouldn’t think of missing it. When I’m done reading and turn out the light, I lie awake for a little while and carefully stroke my stomach. There’s an unusual amount of activity in there. Somersaults and a lots of movement.

“Now we’re home,” I whisper. “This is my room. Our room.” Then I start to think about where I can put the crib and where I should store my clothes and the other things that need to be done and among those thoughts, I fall asleep.

November 13th

I didn't notice anything unusual in the first class, but as the day goes on, the gossip spreads around the school.

"Is everything all right?" whispers Anna to me in English class. "Don't you need to stay home longer?"

Brynja has definitely blabbed and held nothing back, if I know her. The English teacher calls me when I'm leaving after class and tells me not to worry about the assignment that I have to hand in tomorrow; I can put it off for a week if I want. The story has obviously spread to the teacher's staff room, too.

I'm getting a little tired around noon. I'm convinced that you can get sick from just lying around in a hospital. I get Brynja to skip one class and we go to the store and then sit in the library where there are comfortable chairs.

"Isn't it time to decide what the little creature is going to be named?" asks Brynja and gets a book of Icelandic names.

I tell her about the name search in the New Testament in the hospital. Then she gets a big thick Bible and we look for weird names in the Old Testament. We laugh until we cry and the librarian has to tell us to be quiet. Brynja closes the book and we try to control our laughter, but the giggling starts up again as soon as we look at one another.

"Ananias," whispers Brynja. "Or Ezekiel."

All of a sudden I feel so tired. I pull another chair towards me and put my feet up on the arm, lean back again and close my eyes.

"Bathsheba Birgisdóttir," says Brynja. But I can't laugh any more.

"Have you said anything to Biggi?" asks Brynja.

“No,” I answer, without opening my eyes.

“You should tell him.”

“Why?” I ask.

“What do you mean why? It’s his baby, too.” says Brynja.

“I don’t think it’s any of his business,” I answer. “He has no interest in me. Why should he have any interest in...the baby? He is just a boy who wants to be left alone with his friends.”

“But he is going to be a father and he doesn’t know anything about it. Would you want that?” asks Brynja.

“I wouldn’t be opposed to becoming a mother without having to know about it,” I say and we start to giggle again. Then Brynja pulls me to my feet and we rush to our next class which is just starting.

I shouldn’t miss choir practice although I am getting tired and mom has already called twice to ask whether she should come and get me. We are practicing for the Christmas concert and are learning something new at each practice, so I can’t miss out on that. Everything is all right while we warm up and sing through the first songs. But then I feel dizzy and a little unsteady on my feet. Anna stands beside me and takes my arm. She must have felt me sway a little. And of course nothing gets by Auður, the choir director.

“Will you please take a seat, Sunna,” she says firmly.

When Auður gives an order, it is obeyed, so I sit on a chair and rest until the break. I know that I should call mom to pick me up, but I want to stay longer. I could at least follow what’s happening and learn the songs even though I don’t stand and sing.

“Would you like a drink?”

I look up and see Steini standing beside me. He passes me a can of pop and smiles.

“Yes, thanks,” I answer and take the can. Steini gets a chair and sits down beside me.

“Are you sick or something?” he asks.

“No, not really,” I answer. “I just need to rest and not get tired.”

That sounds really stupid. I feel that I need to explain it better, although it’s none of his business.

“I’m pregnant.”

“I know that,” he says, as if nothing is more obvious.

“Who told you?” I ask, somewhat agitated, but he just smiles.

“I can see it,” he answers. “Do you think no one can tell?”

Maybe he thinks I have a strange look on my face, because he rushes to add:

“It doesn’t show that much on you. How far along are you?”

I hardly know how I should answer this. I’m not accustomed to talking about this so matter-of-factly, especially with a boy I barely know. But he’s so nice and down to earth and it was sweet of him to come with a pop for me. So I tell him when the baby is due and he tells me about his sister who has just had twins.

“Fortunately, there is definitely only one,” I say and we both laugh.

Then Auður comes over and is of the opinion that it would be best for me to go home and rest. Of course, I don’t dare to do anything else except obey her and stand up with my folder and can of coke.

“We’ll see you,” says Steini.

“Yeah, see you,” I answer and feel that I’m blushing a little. I hurry out and call mom, who must have been ready to go, because she is there to pick me up as soon as I put on my coat and get out onto the sidewalk.

November 24th

Two weeks have now passed since the bleeding and everything has been okay. I took a few breaks in the first week, but I have gone to all the classes since — except gym, of course, the wonderful doctor saw to it that I’m excused from it. I’ve just had another examination and everything is fine. I’m also suddenly starting to balloon out — I can no longer fit into any of my clothes except for some longer sweaters and shirts. All of my t-shirts are too tight and they go down no farther than the middle of my belly.

Mom has dragged me downtown twice to look for clothes, but it’s horribly uncomfortable to go into stores that sell maternity clothes. It’s even worse because mom is with me. I feel as if the salesgirls look at us so strangely, but maybe it’s just my imagination. Maternity clothes are also ugly and old-ladyish. I feel like some other person when I try them on. Mom didn’t give up though until I agreed to buy two pairs of pants, one black and the other grey. Of course, I do have to have something to wear if I’m going to go to school.

I also had to buy a bigger bra because my breasts have nearly doubled in size. I flat out refused to let mom go into the store with me and she waited out in the car while I went in. The woman in the store got me to buy some underwear, too, and I will admit it

is much more comfortable to wear them than my old ones, which were starting to roll down into a band under my belly.

It's Friday and I'm done school early since the Icelandic teacher is sick. The house is empty and quiet as I sit down at the kitchen table with crackers and milk. It's good to be alone, because I feel as if I'm much more aware of the baby's presence. I feel it wriggle in there like a little fish in water. I can whisper to it without anyone else hearing.

I know that Brynja is right. I have to get in touch with Biggi. He is becoming a dad, the poor guy. I can't help smiling at the thought, and picture macho Biggi pushing a baby carriage — no, that is too unreal. I stroke my belly and stand up to look for the school phone book from tenth grade.

My heart skips a beat when I dial his home number. I'm not sure what I should say. I can't tell him this on the phone, right? Shouldn't I ask him to meet me? — But it's a woman's voice that answers.

"Hello," I say. "Is Biggi home?"

"No, he's not," answers the woman. The voice is friendly, a little curious. Is she not used to girls calling Biggi?

"Can I take a message for him?"

I hesitate. Should I identify myself? Ask him to call? Or — the laughter starts to build down in my stomach — should I say yes, would you tell him that he is expecting a baby in February and ask him to kindly get in touch?

"Have you tried his cell phone?" asks the woman.

I manage to stammer out that I don't have the number and she rattles it off and says goodbye. I scribble it down in the school phone book beside his name. Birgir Örn Grímsson. Then the laughter comes to the surface, but it's changed to something else on the way, and I have to run to the bathroom and splash cold water on my face to stop the flood of tears and the runny nose.

Luckily there is no one home to ask me what's wrong. The cold water refreshes me and I dry my face so hard that it's bright red. It's good that picture phones aren't in use. Biggi would hang up if he saw me like this.

I clear my throat and test my voice before I try the number. One two, one two, I say out loud and have to bite my lips so I don't start to laugh again Or cry. Or something. I take a deep breath and dial the number.

The phone rings a few times and I'm just about to hang up when there is an answer.

"Hello."

The voice is rough, hoarse. At one time my heart would race if he said hi to me. Now my heart is in my throat. It's like the beating wings of a little bird that thrashes about and tries to fly away.

"Hi," I answer and am surprised at how natural my voice sounds. "This is Sunna."

"Sunna. Hi."

What is that tone in his voice? Not joy over hearing it's me, it's totally confident. Maybe remorse? Fear? Does he know something?

"I need to talk to you," I say.

“Okay,” he answers.

“Can you meet me?”

“When?”

“Just...in a little while?”

What am I saying? It’s as if I’m observing the conversation but don’t take part in it. This calm voice is not at all my voice. I’m not ready to meet him now. Still, we decide to meet at a coffee house downtown in half an hour and say goodbye. Very calm. No problem.

I write a note to mom and put it on the kitchen table. I look in the mirror and comb my hair before I put on my coat. I’m no longer red in the face, but I certainly wouldn’t win in any beauty competition these days. I would look a little better if I put on a bit of makeup, but I don’t intend to. Why should I be making myself up for him?

I just get to the bus stop when a bus drives away. I try waving, but it drives off and I don’t dare to run. I have to wait ten minutes for the next bus, so a half-hour becomes nearly three-quarters of an hour when I arrive at the coffee house.

I stand in the doorway and look around and don’t notice him right away. Maybe he got tired of waiting for me and left. Or maybe he didn’t come at all. But then I see him, sitting at a table farther back in the room. He has a coffee cup in front of him and is reading a paper. He’s in a light wool sweater with a rolled collar and has hung a black leather jacket over the back of the chair. As soon as I see him he looks up and his dark eyes look straight at me. I feel a pang in my chest. Why does he have to be so good looking? And me — so like I am.

“I’m sorry,” I say as soon as I get to the table. “I missed the bus.”

He mumbles something about it being all right. When I take off my coat I feel his eyes on me and I look up and straight into his eyes.

“You knew about this,” I say.

“No — I didn’t know whether it was true,” he answers. Then he stands up and asks whether I want coffee.

Biggi gets himself one, too, and we sit for a few minutes over the steaming cups without saying anything. Then he says without looking up:

“Árni saw you at the mall. He noticed...noticed you were...Then he met the girls, Magga and Sigrún. They said that you were...had been sick. They didn’t know whether everything was okay.”

He looks up and into my eyes. His eyes are darker than usual.

“Is everything all right?”

“Yes.” I nod my head. “Yes, everything is all right.”

“Why didn’t you tell me...?” He takes a sip of coffee instead of finishing the sentence. Then he asks so quietly that I can barely hear him:

“Are you sure that it’s...that I am...?”

I feel my face become boiling hot and I push the chair away to stand up. Then I feel him grab my arm.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “I didn’t mean that. Not that you were... you are not like that. Forgive me.”

I pull the chair to the table again and sip my coffee. I still feel red and hot in the face. I take another sip, take a deep breath and look right at him.

“I know that I should have told you about this. I know that. But it was just so unreal. And you — we hardly know one another. Seriously. I felt that in some way it was only my problem. But of course it isn’t.”

“I felt that it was unbelievable, too. Couldn’t be true. That is, until now,” says Biggi and looks at my stomach, which pushes my sweater up into a roll under my breasts. I can’t help but smile.

“No, now it’s definitely obvious,” I say and Biggi smiles, too.

“When...?” he asks then, but can’t finish the sentence. I do that for him.

“When is it due? It’s supposed to be in February.”

“Wow,” he says.

“Wow, what?”

“My mom turns forty-seven in February. Fantastic birthday present. You’re going to be an amma. Enjoy!”

He looks as if he doesn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

“How did your mom and dad take this?” he asks. I look into his big dark eyes. They look serious in his pale face. All of a sudden it looks as if he’s a few years older. I decide not to make some smart remark and answer him seriously.

“They were shocked of course. Mom wanted me to have an abortion. But it was too late. I waited so long to tell her about it. I thought that it couldn’t be true. But now they are used to the idea.”

“They’ll kill me,” says Biggi.

“Hardly,” I say. “I don’t need to tell them your name. I haven’t told mom and dad that. They have asked of course, but I haven’t said anything. I can refuse to declare...the paternity.”

Biggi looks down into his cup for a moment and then looks up.

“No,” he says. “I want to tell them.”

I just nod my head. We don’t need to decide any more now. We don’t talk about meeting again, but when we’re on our way out the door, Biggi asks for my cell number. We say goodbye outside and I watch him walk across the street. His head is bare and a cold breeze blows through his hair as he strides away with his hands deep in his pockets.

November 29th

Not quite a week until the Christmas concert and I don’t know what I’m going to do. Auður has decided that we should all be in black and white, the boys in pants, shirts and vests and the girls either in a floor-length dress or skirt and blouse. I, of course, have neither and everything that I see in the maternity stores is so gross, it’s out of the question. I am tired and irritable when I get home after a trip downtown and barely even say hi to mom and amma, who sit in the kitchen with a cup of coffee.

“Don’t you want to get a cup to perk you up, Sunna dear?” ask amma.

I half-heartedly accept a cup and it does feel good to get something to hot to drink. Amma looks at me over her glasses.

“Your mom tells me that you are looking for a special dress,” she says.

“A dress, or skirt, or something,” I answer and I hear the frustration in my voice.

“But preferably not something that looks like my amma would wear...” I stop dead and

nearly bite my tongue. I didn't mean to be so rude. But amma just smiles in her usual way.

"Then just see what you think about this amma outfit," she says and reaches for a plastic bag that lies on the floor. She pulls something black out of the bag, shakes it and holds it up. It is a dress made out of thin, black material with long sleeves that widen at the bottom. Over the dress is a black sheath with shoulder straps. I catch my breath. This is truly nothing like the old-lady dresses that I've been trying on.

When I hold the dress up against me I see that there is enough room for my belly, and it is cut in such a way that it's not noticeably wide. The material is also so light and soft. I hug amma so tightly that she is almost embarrassed.

"There, there," she says. "I just hope that you can use it."

"That I can," I say laughing and hurry to my room to try it on. It fits amazingly well and I'm turning around in front of the mirror in the hallway while mom and amma admire me when the phone rings. I'm half-laughing and a little breathless when I answer.

"Hello," says the voice on the phone. It is a woman's voice that I vaguely recognize as having heard before.

"Hello," I answer. I see mom looking questioningly at me as I shrug my shoulders to show that I don't know who it is.

"Is this Sunna?" asks the voice.

"Yes," I answer. I see mom and amma go back into the kitchen.

"My name is Pálina," says the voice. "I am Birgir's mother."

My knees suddenly go weak and I let myself sink slowly down to the chair by the telephone table. Now I know where I've heard that voice before. But the tone is different now. Now it's formal, even cold.

"Yes," I say again, like a fool. But what else can I say?

"Birgir spoke with us yesterday," says the woman. Pálína. "He told us what has... how things are."

"Yes," I say once again.

"We are of course very shocked," says the voice. Cold and distant. "I don't intend to pretend that this has been pleasant news. But because of this situation I think that we should meet. Grímur and I will gladly meet your parents. Birgir said that you are ... not together, but we need, of course, to discuss this."

Why is it *of course*? Does my baby's arrival have anything to do with this woman? Why did I tell Biggi about it? Why did he have to tell them? Some strange man and woman who think they need to interfere with me, with us. My baby now gives an energetic jerk and a powerful kick under my diaphragm. I feel a foul taste in my mouth and slam down the phone as I run to the bathroom. I retch over the sink for a little while and mom comes running. I wave her away and run into my room. There I throw myself on the bed and cry like a little kid, with my mouth open, holding nothing back, and I can feel that the pillow is wet from tears and saliva.

Amma comes in after a while, closes the door behind her and sits on the edge of the bed beside me. She says nothing, but rubs my shoulders, which stop shaking bit by bit as the crying settles down. She passes me a paper towel to dry my eyes and blow my

nose and pushes my hair from my face. Then she just sits and holds my hand. Says nothing. Waits.

I think that I can talk to her now. I tell her about Biggi. That he had been the hottest boy in the class. The one. And that night — the night I was at the party and pretended to have gone on the trip — finally, how he looked at me. And how I was no longer shy or scared and wanted to show that I wasn't a little kid.

"I understand, my love," says amma. And I look into her eyes and know that she's serious.

Then I tell her what it was like to meet Biggi again at the school and how I felt that somehow all of it had never really happened. And that when it was no longer possible to avoid facing the truth, then this was all somehow no longer his problem. But I still felt that he had to know about it, now that it was becoming a real baby...

Amma smooths out the dress over my stomach and I see in her eyes that she is blinking back tears. And I tell her that I had gone and met Biggi and then about the phone call. About this cold voice and accusing tone that tore through me and confused me. Making it look as if I was dirty. Guilty.

Amma squeezes her lips together so that her mouth becomes a thin line. She stands up and reaches out her hand to me to pull me up to my feet.

"Take off the dress and hang it up so that it won't wrinkle," she says. "I'll talk to your mom. No one is to bother you, unless you want to talk to them. Sooner or later you'll talk to these people — but not before you are ready to do so."

The determination in her posture when she walks out and closes the door behind her gives me a feeling of security. Amma doesn't let anyone walk over her once she's

decided something. I listen to amma and take off my beautiful new dress and hang it up. Then I lie down again on my bed and am fast asleep before I know it.

December 4th

The Christmas concert is today. We have the afternoon off for a final practice and then have time to rest a little and eat something before we change our clothes. We have to meet at seven o'clock to warm up before the concert starts at eight.

I'm glad to have the time to lie down. I'm always so tired in the evenings now that I never go out after supper and I know that I could never stand through a whole concert if I didn't rest beforehand. I can't sleep; I'm too excited. My dress waits for me, hanging on a hanger in the clothes closet. When I've been in bed for an hour I give up trying to sleep and go to take a bath. I relax better in a hot, scented, bubble bath and am nearly asleep when mom knocks on the door and calls to me that I need to start getting dressed.

I put on my bathrobe, dry my hair and go to the kitchen to try and eat something before I put on the dress. The bathrobe barely comes together in the front anymore.

"Hee hee, I see your belly," shouts Lilla and points to my stomach. Unbearable kid. Mom shushes her and tells her to go and watch cartoons. They are taking her with them to the concert. I just hope that she behaves herself.

I only manage to get down half a sandwich and a few spoons of tomato soup that mom heated up for me. I try to assure her that this will be enough until after the concert and go to get dressed. It is a fantastic feeling to slip the dress over my head and see it fall down into soft folds. I get the beautiful silver necklace that I got for a confirmation gift.

It goes really well with the dress. I put on a little makeup and comb my hair. I give myself a silly smile in the mirror. It's been a long time since I felt so good.

Dad runs me to the concert hall and then goes to get mom and Lilla and amma, who is also coming with us. When I come through the entrance and take off my coat, Anna comes running.

“Wow, great dress! Where did you get it?”

I am explaining to Anna that amma had sewn it for me when I feel a hug around my shoulders and hear whispering in my ear:

“You look like a queen!”

I look over my shoulder and am surprised to see the smiling face of Steini, who plants a kiss on my cheek and then walks over to the boys who are in a group together by the door. Anna looks at me and lifts her eyebrows questioningly.

“Is anything going on?” she asks teasingly.

I shake my head.

“Not that I know of,” I answer in a low voice, and I feel a little red in the cheeks. Then Auður summons us to the piano and we start to warm up. The auditorium is crowded when we walk in and line ourselves up on the platforms. I look directly in front of me and see that amma, mom, dad, and Lilla have just gotten themselves settled near the front of the hall. There is applause when we walk in and again when Auður walks into the hall, and gradually all the murmuring, chair scraping, and throat clearing stops. I feel butterflies in my stomach and I shudder a little, and Auður gives us a quick smile when she gives us our note. Then she lifts up her hand and we forget about everything except for the harmony of the voices and the accompanist. I sing my heart out, more

from happiness than ever before, and enjoy hearing my own voice blend in with all the others in the spirited Christmas songs from the Middle Ages. When we are rewarded with thunderous applause, I remember the audience, remember mom, dad, and amma, and steal a glance in their direction and send them a smile. Then Auður's raised hand gets my attention again and we sing one song after another.

It's so much fun to sing and to feel the admiration of the audience when they applaud that I don't feel tired until, suddenly, just before the end. We are singing my favourite Christmas carol, "Lovely night". I have always found this to be a beautiful hymn, especially the refrain: "I rock your cradle with the sound of quatrain". But as soon as I sing it I feel a wave of dizziness come over me and I'm unsteady on my feet. I have to take a little step ahead with my right foot to straighten myself, and see right away by the look on Auður's face that she notices the movement. I continue to sing and try to show her with a look that I'm all right. I immediately feel someone's strong hands behind me. When the song is finished a voice whispers in my ear:

"I'll hold you up, I won't let you fall!"

It's Hildur, Anna's friend. I can certainly stand myself, but it is good to feel the support of the hands from behind.

The concert finishes with "Silent Night" and the audience sings along. The applause doesn't seem to end and I'm glad when we get the signal to stop the bowing and walk out. I know that mom, dad, and amma are waiting and Lilla is obviously tired and grumpy, but I really have to use the bathroom before I get my coat.

In the past few weeks I have to go to the bathroom more often, it feels like I'm going to explode after two hours or so and sometimes I get a well-placed kick directly

below the bladder, which is not pleasant if it's full! Now I'm about to burst and it's a great relief to sit down on the toilet. I also feel tired now. I close my eyes for a moment before I stand up to wipe myself. When I'm just about to throw away the toilet paper, I'm so shocked that my heart leaps up into my throat. There is blood on the paper. Not much, just a bit. Fresh, red blood. And the water in the toilet bowl is also red.

My knees give out and I have to sit down again on the toilet. What should I do? Shall I call for help? Is it safe to stand up and go out? I feel dizzy and I bend forward so that the blood runs to my head. Then I look straight down into my underwear, which are down around my ankles. There's a blood spot in them.

I carefully stand up, pull up my pants and fix myself up. In any case, I'm not calling anyone while my pants are down at my feet. I turn the latch on the bathroom door and support myself while I peek out. There is no one in the washroom. No one would probably hear me if I tried to call from here. I walk very slowly and carefully to the sink and support myself with the counter while I wash my hands. The face looking at me in the mirror is deathly pale, the eyes dark and staring.

"Don't do this," I say to the face. "It's going to be all right."

Then I start to move slowly along the wall to the door. I hold onto the counter, the towel dispenser, the handle on the door. I think it's better to bear most of the weight on my arms. Not to stand totally on my feet. Maybe it would be best if I crawled?

The girls rushing into the bathroom just about fall over me where I stand, hanging on to the door. They are really startled and they grab me, two of them hold me up while the third rushes off to get help. A moment later Auður comes running in and mom and dad are right behind her. Dad picks me up in his arms and carries me out as if I was a

little child, light as a feather. The front entrance is still swarming with people and I see faces that I know, both kids from the choir and teachers. A woman that I vaguely recall as having seen before clears her way through the crowd to us.

“It’s safe to put her on a chair,” she tells dad, who is still standing with me in his arms. He puts me down carefully, as if he’s scared I’m going to break. Auður asks the people to move away and give us more room and the crowd moves slowly towards the door. I see the worried faces of Anna and Steini in the group and I try to give them a sign that I’m okay.

The woman must be a doctor or a nurse, because she checks my pulse and asks me what happened, when I’m due and so on. She feels my stomach and smiles at me when she feels a powerful kick.

“The baby is certainly doing better than you,” she says. Then she takes her cell phone and calls someone, probably the hospital, and then says that dad and mom should take me up there; they want to see me. She says again that she thinks everything is okay and says a warm goodbye.

When I arrive at the hospital, it feels like a rerun of a movie I’ve seen before. I’m examined and poked; I answer questions, and am put into a bed. Then all of a sudden, it’s as if I don’t want to watch the movie anymore and I fall asleep. My dreams are full of long, white corridors and glaring white lights, so that I hardly know where the waking state ends and the sleep takes over. Suddenly, the night is gone and someone dressed in white tells me it’s safe to go home.

While all this goes on, it seems as if none of it concerns me or it’s as if nothing happened. It’s not until I’m at home and am up in my bed that I sense the seriousness.

When my head is on my pillow and I'm under my quilt, something lets go and the tears start to flow down my cheeks and I feel myself shaking all over in spite of the warm quilt. Amma comes to the door and sees me lying there with my teeth chattering. She doesn't say a word, but rushes off and comes back again shortly with steaming hot cocoa. It tastes a little strange and I make a face when she holds me by my shoulders to help me drink it.

"Get this into you, my dear," she says firmly. "This is an old family remedy."

Whatever it is that she pours into me has the desired effect, because the shaking eases and I feel a calmness settle over me. I reach for the little red shoes that stand on the night table beside me and fall asleep with them in my hand.

December 10th

The second Sunday of Advent. The Advent wreath is on the coffee table and the Advent lights are in the kitchen window. Mom and amma have started the cookie baking and the smell fills the house. Dad dozes off a little in front of a football game on TV and I lie on the couch, bored.

This is definitely the first time that I wish I could be baking cookies. I have always dreaded baking for Christmas, with its endless sheets of cookies in and out of the oven. The smell drives you completely crazy and we're barely allowed to even taste them. No, all of them have to go into a box and wait until Christmas, and then when they are put out, everyone is so stuffed full from the main course, they have no appetite for the cookies. In fact, there really isn't enough time to do all of this baking because there are so many other things to do before Christmas. But seven kinds of cookies there shall be,

no matter what happens and nothing less will do. Only a world war or a major eruption could change this.

I'm getting bored with doing nothing and lying around. I've finished reading all of my texts for the exams, which I may not be able to go to. I stare at the TV day in and day out and eat too many snacks and junk food. Brynja looks in on me from time to time, but she is with Sigrún and some of the other girls who were with us in tenth grade. They hang out with a group of boys and I suspect that Brynja has a crush on one of them, even though she won't admit it.

There hasn't been any more bleeding, but I haven't been allowed to go to school; I can barely leave the house, and even then it's only to get into the car and go down to the hospital for an examination. There they tell me that everything is all right, but I have to continue to be careful. When I ask for how long, I get no answer.

Mom and amma take a small break from the baking to get themselves coffee and they come into the living room with their cups. Amma has a big plastic bag and pulls another bag out of it and passes it to me.

"I think the time has come for you to find yourself something to do," she says. "Since you have to lie here like a bump on a log, you poor thing, maybe you can make use of the time while you wait."

I peek in the bag. It's full of soft, fine balls of yarn in beautiful colours. There are also two booklets with instructions on how to make baby clothes. I can't help but sigh out loud.

"Oh, amma, you know that I can't knit! Don't you remember the hat that I knit in seventh grade?"

Mom and amma both burst out laughing and I hear loud laughter coming from the easy chair where dad sits. That hat probably won't be forgotten by those who saw it. It started out just fine, but then it began to grow larger on one side. After a good tug, it started to stretch in the other direction, into more or less a spiral. From that point, I knit it so tight that the hat, which was light grey when I started, was nearly black from sweat and dirt when it was done because I had to push the needle so hard through the stitches. Then I washed it, but of course didn't understand that since it was made out of wool, it couldn't handle the washing. It was dad who pulled it out of the washing machine and had the greatest laughing fit that I have ever heard when he held it up in front of us, a tiny, little, tight woolen tangle, and no one had any idea that it should have been a hat.

"You've matured considerably since then," says amma. "And now you also have a reason to knit something beautiful."

They go back to finish up the baking and dad stands up and leaves, too. I start to flip through the pages. I have nothing better to do anyway.

I haven't thought much about baby clothes yet. It's been something that's so far from my mind, to think that at some point my little fish would be out of my body, a real person, and would need clothes to wear, a bed to sleep in, and its own room. But the little red shoes are there, waiting. Maybe the time has come to gather more things together. The shoes themselves are hardly enough.

The pages are full of beautiful photographs of tiny little kids in fancy knit pants and sweaters in all the colours of the rainbow. Some of the babies appear to be newborns or nearly so, their faces are wrinkled and they have little clenched fists. Others are a little bigger and lie on their stomachs and look up at the photographer with big eyes, some

blonde and blue-eyed, with a little bit of hair on their heads; others are dark, with eyes like bits of coal, and curls.

Maybe it's a little weird that up until now I haven't actually thought about what my baby might look like. Or — Biggi's and my baby. There is an equal chance of it looking like him as there is of it looking like me. Maybe it will be a mixture of the both of us. That's the way it most often is. Maybe it'll have my eye colour and his hair colour. Or the other way around.

I flip through the pages and all at once I look right into big brown eyes. I'm taken aback when I look at the baby's picture. It could most definitely be a picture of Biggi in his first year! The baby lies on a red blanket and is dressed in a knitted outfit with a cap. The outfit almost looks like a sleeping bag. It closes at the bottom with buttons and is striped in tones of blue and red. All at once I can imagine what it would be like to hold such a little bundle in my arms and I feel warm inside. I call amma.

"This is maybe not the easiest place to start," she says and picks up the knitting and starts to teach me how to cast on. I have, of course, forgotten how to do it. Mom looks at the page and asks whether I think I can really knit this. Naturally, that makes me want to put my heart into it and I am firmly resolved to succeed. Amma watches over me while I knit the first rows and I don't stop until I see the first colour change when the bottom row is finished. I feel as if I've achieved a great deal even though I haven't completed that many centimeters.

My phone rings and I lay down the knitting so that I can stretch and answer it. I'm so certain it's Brynja that I answer in the exaggerated and excited tone that we use with each other:

“Hello!”

“Hi,” says the voice on the phone, a little hesitantly. I’m shocked. It’s Biggi.

“Hi,” I say and feel myself blush. Luckily there’s no one else in the living room.

“How are you doing?” asks Biggi.

“Me? Yeah, all right,” I stammer.

“I hear that you are sick again.”

“No — it’s nothing serious. I just need to take it easy,” I answer, still somewhat embarrassed over the way I answered the phone.

“I just want to say...” Biggi pauses and starts over again. “I feel horrible that my mom called you a few days ago. She told me that she had called. And that you had hung up on her.”

“I didn’t mean to hang up on her,” I stammer in an apologetic tone. “I was just so shocked...”

“You were justified in hanging up on her. She shouldn’t have called you like that,” says Biggi.

I didn’t know how I should respond to this, but I feel myself warming at the thought of him standing up for me and not for his mom.

“Are you sure that the baby is all right?” asks Biggi.

“Yes,” I answer. “It has nothing to do with the baby. I just start to bleed if I try to do too much. So I’m not allowed to do anything.”

“Would you...” starts Biggi, and clears his throat and starts again. “Would you let me know... I want to get to know...I was so scared that the phone call from my mom

had set something off. Made you sick. I heard that something had happened at the concert and..."

"Yes," I say quietly. "I'll let you know how I'm doing. And when...when the baby arrives, I'll let you know."

We say goodbye and I lean back again on the sofa with my eyes closed and feel the baby turn itself in the dark inside me. He had to hear about this from someone who had maybe heard about it from someone else. He thought that the baby was in danger and I didn't tell him anything. What's more, he thought his mom was to blame. I promise myself and the baby that Biggi doesn't need to hear in school that he has become a father.

"Mom!" I call. Mom and amma both come running out of the kitchen. The tone of my voice must have sounded as if something was wrong.

"My baby's father's name is Birgir Örn Grímsson," I say. "His father is Grímur Birgisson and his mom's name is Pálína, I don't know her last name. They live on Asparholt. If something happens, then we should let him know. Biggi. Not his mom and dad."

Mom stares at me with her mouth open, and amma just nods.

"All right, dear," she says and drags mom into the kitchen. I hear them whisper, although I can't make out the words, astonishment from mom, a calm voice from amma. Then dad comes up out of the basement and joins the group in the kitchen. I gather the knitting stuff and go to my room. I'm tired and I'm going to sleep.

December 12th

Hurray! I get to take the exams! I never would have believed that I would be glad about having to go to an exam, but it's just so fantastic to get out and go to school — and to do something. After a lot of whining, mom finally agreed to talk to the doctor and he felt it would be all right if I went to some of the exams as long as I didn't over-exert myself.

I know that the exams in Icelandic, English and Danish will be the easy ones for me and I've read the textbooks once more to be sure. Math can wait and German, too. I've missed a considerable amount of each of them. I'll just wait and see about the history exam; I've studied everything really well for that one, but it's the last exam and I have to take care not to get too tired.

Icelandic is first, then English the day after tomorrow and Danish the day after that. I put on black pants and a blue sweater, the one I can still get into, and gather together writing materials to put in my backpack. I can't button up my coat any longer, so I wrap a huge scarf around my neck so nothing is uncovered. It's really cold out, but calm and beautiful. The neighbours are pretty much finished setting up Christmas lights on the trees in their yards or on the houses, but dad is later than usual this year. He's always busy working down in the basement in the evenings — he whispered to me that he is building a dollhouse for Lilla for Christmas.

Mom drives me of course — I'm not even allowed to walk out to the store any more. She drives me right up to the door and lets me out there with a warning about quitting if I get too tired from sitting, to call her as soon as I'm done, or before, if I decide not to take the exam...

“Yes, yes, all right,” I answer a little impatiently, wave to her and hurry into the school. Brynja waits for me at the entrance just as we had planned and comes over right away. We go to the board to check which room the exam is in; then Anna catches sight of me and runs over.

“Are you all right?” she asks right away and she gives me a hug.

I don’t get a chance to answer, because right away I end up in another hug and hear Steini’s teasing voice:

“A guy can barely reach around you any more!”

Then he looks right into my eyes and says seriously:

“It’s good to see you again.”

More kids from the choir join the group, welcome me back again and ask how I’m doing. I’m somewhat bewildered by the reception and I feel good having all these friends flocking towards me. I’ve barely recovered by the time I get into the room and get the exam paper.

The exam is rather difficult, the grammar section is tricky and I’m not sure how I did on it. I do better with the literature questions; I’ve studied the material well and can write about it. I completely forget to answer the last essay question and the time is done before I know it.

Most people use up all the time for the Icelandic exam and leave at the same time, but I notice that only Brynja leaves first. She’s still waiting for me down at the entrance.

When I get there she takes my arm.

“I need to talk to you,” she says.

I look at her, surprised. The tone of her voice is out of the ordinary. She's also more serious than she has been lately. We put on our coats and walk out onto the sidewalk and go around the corner, into the nook where kids often go to smoke. Brynja takes out a pack and lights up a cigarette. I'm somewhat surprised. I know that she toyed with smoking and got them from time to time, but not that she keeps a pack on her. She inhales the smoke, coughs a little and blows the smoke away.

"I think I'm pregnant," she says.

I look at her with astonishment. Speechless.

"Aren't you going to say anything?" she asks.

"Are you sure?" I reply in return.

"No, not entirely. But I am late," she answers.

"Are you with that guy, what's his name?"

"Ari. Yes, we are together. I think."

"What do you mean? Does he know?"

"No. I haven't seen him for a week." She throws away the cigarette, steps on the butt with the heel of her boot and looks right at me.

"I am so scared," she says.

I put my arms around her. My belly ends up in the way of the hug between us. Brynja hides her face in my scarf and hair. I feel her shoulders shake a little, hear a sob, two. Then she straightens up from the hug and blows her nose.

"How late are you?" I ask.

"A week."

"That doesn't have to mean anything," I say. "Maybe it's just stress. Were you regular before?"

"No, not completely," answers Brynja. She looks at me, runs her hand through her hair to straighten it, and smiles.

"This is definitely insane," she says.

"You can't wait too long to find out about it," I say. "Don't do like I did. Don't pretend that it can't be true."

"I know," she says quietly.

"Have you been with him...slept with him...often?"

"Twice," she answers. Then she looks at me. "What did you think of it? Seriously?"

I didn't know how I should answer. How was it? I was drunk, I was scared, I was curious...what we did? What he did?

"It was not like in the books," I answer and we both start to laugh. Then I become responsible, down to earth. Somehow, this is the way I have to be. It's as if I'm older than Brynja now.

"You have to buy the test kit in the drugstore like I did," I say. "And if you are pregnant, you have to talk to someone. Your mom. Or a doctor. Or the guidance counselor at school, or someone who can tell you what you can do."

"Do?" Brynja looks at me questioningly. "Would you have...done something?"

I look down at the frozen ground, at the cigarette butt and the candy wrappers and think about the Sunna that I was in the summer and fall. When I wished solemnly and sincerely, that I could wake up from the nightmare. Wished that I could just be myself,

without any worries, get to be a girl a little longer. And I think about Brynja's mom and Danni, her step-dad, the little brothers and sisters, crowded in there at home, Brynja with a baby... no.

"Yes," I answer, looking right at her. "I would have done it. I would have had an abortion."

The words burn my mouth and my little fish kicks in the dark. But it's true. She's my best friend and I have to tell her the truth. She puts her arms around my waist — or where my waist once was — and we walk around the corner again to the main door, into the crowd of kids and join the discussion about the exams.

December 15th

Three exams are done and they've gone like clockwork. English was very easy and Danish definitely went well. Now history is the only one left and I can't see why I shouldn't be able to write it, too. There's been no bleeding since I've taken it very easy, for the most part, lying on the couch after I come home from the exams.

I continue to knit between reading and watching TV. I make progress on the little outfit and it slowly gets bigger. Now I'm just about half done the sleeve. I choose different colours other than those shown in the knitting booklet; it's fun to put together the colours myself. I started on the dark blue and bright red that were on the paper, and then I laid down the other balls of yarn beside them that amma brought, one after the other, and decided to add both orange and yellow. They look so good alongside the dark blue. Mom thinks this is far too colourful, but I think it's beautiful. Why should baby clothes always be in sweet pastel colours, or on the other hand, red or blue?

I can't stop thinking about Brynja. We talk together on the phone many times a day, and then we use a secret code, an upbeat tone to mask the situation. No one must suspect anything. She went to a drugstore at the other end of town to buy the pregnancy test kit; she didn't want to chance meeting anyone she knew. She met Ari again and went to a movie with him, but of course didn't say anything. I asked her, for God's sake, not to sleep with him again at least until she's sure about things and we got into a laughing fit on the phone.

My phone is always within reach and Brynja is not the only one who calls. Tóta has called, just to ask how I'm doing, and Anna, too. It's good to know that I'm important to them and they want to keep in touch with me.

There's a lot to do in the store these days and Lilla and I are often at home alone. Lilla refuses to go to daycare at the school; she says she would rather be home since I'm at home. She's often with her friends, but sometimes she hangs around me, wants to watch a video with me or study in the living room beside me. She's also willing to run errands for me, answer the phone if it's not beside me or get me something to drink. She's maybe not so bad, poor kid.

Although I spend most of my time in the living room where there's the TV, a good sofa to lie on, and a short distance to the kitchen, I'm also in my room a lot. I've changed very little in my room since it was completely redecorated before I was confirmed. At that time, I got a new bed, desk and chair, got rid of the toys and children's books and re-arranged the furniture. I have a large old-fashioned clothes cupboard from the store and a chest of drawers with a mirror on it. The bed is also old-

fashioned, with high, ornamental iron posts. My computer is on the desk and the books are on the shelf beside it.

The room is rather large, but the furniture is also bulky. I probably have to change something if I'm going to find a place for a baby's crib and some storage for baby clothes. I sit on the bed and look around me. I try to imagine that I've never seen the room before. What would it tell me about the person who lives there?

It's obvious that this is a teenager's room. The walls are peach coloured; the colour of the flower pattern on the curtains is a similar colour. Romantic taste, my taste when I was thirteen, fourteen years old; mom's taste. The clothes cupboard is half open, jam-packed with clothes. Clothes also lie on the desk chair and on the foot of the unmade bed. Mom has stopped nagging at me about tidying up. All around the mirror above the dresser are photos of classmates and my friends and postcards, too, some of them really old. I've glued them up with teacher's sticky tack and then added more, but have not taken any down. On the desk are piles of books and papers from school. The computer screen is dusty. I haven't turned it on in a month.

I stand up and start to take the pictures down from the walls. Class pictures from seventh grade, eighth, ninth, tenth. Biggi's face appears in the tenth grade picture; he is serious and brooding, black eyes under heavy dark hair. There is a picture of Brynja before she coloured her hair, blonde and innocent looking. The confirmation group on a trip. A postcard from mom and dad when they went to Paris the year before last. A postcard from amma from Benidorm. A card from Tóta when she was in England.

I set all the pictures in a pile on the floor and then start to put all the school papers in order. All those I need to keep go in a folder and up on a shelf, the rest in the garbage can, which is soon overflowing.

Now to straighten up the clothes cupboard. I take each piece of clothing and try to see if I might ever use it again. If not, I throw it on the floor. The pile on the floor grows fast and that makes more room in the cupboard. The dresser gets the same treatment and really old t-shirts, gym clothes that are too small, and old single socks add to the pile on the floor. I call Lilla and get her to help me put the best of them from the floor into a big plastic bag to give away.

Lilla runs to empty the garbage can, pleased with being able to help me tidy up. I don't have the heart to throw out the pictures and I go down to the storage room to look for a box to put them in. There is a full basement under the house, much of it below ground on the street side, but not on the garden side, because the house is built on a slope. Dad has a workshop down there and there's also a storage room and a laundry room. The corner room is a work room where mom has her computer for the bookkeeping and a nice sewing machine which she seldom uses.

I find a suitable cardboard box in the storage room. It's quite unbelievable how much stuff is in here. Mom never throws anything out, and everything is neatly organized in groups and put in order. All the cardboard boxes are carefully labeled so that I can find the one I'm looking for right away: Sunna — toys.

I know that I shouldn't lift the box down from the shelf, but I can't resist it. Fortunately it's light and I set it on the floor and start to go through it. Here are my favourite dolls, the ones that sat up on my shelf long after I had stopped playing with

them. And my old teddy bear. He is torn and tattered, one eye is loose and I've mended it myself with big stitches, and the other eye is missing. I take him upstairs in my arms along with the box for the pictures.

I've barely finished putting the pictures into the box when my phone rings. It's still lying on the desk and I run to answer it. It's Brynja.

"Hi!"

I hear at once in her voice what she has to tell me, but I don't say anything. She has to tell me herself.

"I did the test. It's all right!"

"That's good," I answer. "Excellent."

I'm relieved and I also hear how Brynja feels inside. I want, in the worst way, to run straight to her, rush downtown, go to a movie, do something to celebrate. But I'm stuck here at home. I'm thrilled when she says:

"Is it okay if I come over?"

We decide that she'll bring a video and by the time she arrives, breathless and panting and rosy-cheeked from the cold, I've sent Lilla to her friend's house and popped a big bowl of popcorn for us. Brynja hugs me, so hard that I wince.

"Thanks," she says. Then we spread out on the sofa and watch a movie that is so awful that we laugh ourselves silly.

December 18th

Today I should go to the history exam, but I feel a little under the weather when I wake up so I don't dare go. Mom would prefer to be at home to look after me, but I won't hear of this. There's a lot to do in the store and I'd rather be left in peace.

I lie in my bed, look around me in the bedroom and try to imagine how it would be possible to arrange the furniture. I want to have the cradle or crib right beside my bed, but then it's nearly impossible to open the clothes cupboard. What if I turn the cupboard so that it's along the window wall? Or put the bed under the window?

I sit up in the bed and reach for my clothes. As I do this my old teddy bear falls on the floor. I pick him up and put him beside me on the bed. I want him to sit on the shelf on the wall over the crib or on the chest of drawers with the baby clothes. He looks at me with the one little brown eye he has left, so sweet looking. I remember hugging him in bed when I was going to sleep and burying my nose down into his nearly bare head. Yes, he still smells the same.

The doorbell rings just as I've finished pulling up my pants and I walk quickly to the door while I button my shirt. Anna and Hildur from the choir are standing outside.

"Hi!" says Anna. "You didn't come to the exam, so I thought I'd check in on you and see how you are doing."

"Thanks," I answer, somewhat surprised to see her here. "I mean, everything's okay, I was just a little tired...would you like to come in?"

"Yes, thanks," they answer in unison and start to brush and stamp the snow off themselves. They hang up their coats and come in. I offer them coffee or tea. The girls

would like tea and we go into the kitchen. They sit at the corner of the table while I heat the water and find tea and bread.

“Great house,” says Hildur as she looks around. Anna agrees with her.

“It’s quite nice,” I say. “You don’t really notice it much because you’re so used to it. Then all of a sudden you see everything in a new light when some things change.”

They both look at me with such puzzled and confused expressions on their faces that I blush.

“I mean...now when I need to start thinking about the baby’s arrival, suddenly my room is so impractical,” I continue. “Completely impossible.”

“Do you mind if we take a look?” asks Anna, determined to do it. “I love to change my room around.”

We take our tea cups into my room. Anna sits beside me on the bed and Hildur at the desk, and we bounce ideas back and forth about what would be the best way to find a place for things while we finish our tea. Then the doorbell rings again.

This time it’s Sara standing outside. She has a big cardboard box in her arms and puts it down at my feet and says:

“Don’t lift it!”

Then she runs out to her car in the driveway and fills her arms with plastic bags and struggles with them into the hallway. When she has put them down, she gets the box and carries it into my room. She stops dead in the doorway when she sees the girls and I introduce them to her.

“I was going through Aron’s clothes,” says Sara and opens the box. “Some are maybe too boyish if you have a girl, but you can certainly use a lot of them — some are nearly new, he was so big when he was born.”

The small baby clothes have been packed so tight that they burst out and flow like a stream of lava when the box is opened. The girls swarm the flood of tiny little pieces of clothing and squeal when they see something especially cute.

“My gawwwd!” sighs Hildur and holds up the smallest blue jeans I have ever seen. Anna gushes over a tiny little sweater and hat that I’m nearly positive Aron had never worn. I don’t remember him ever having been so little. Then Sara shows me a tiny, little light blue outfit that she says she dressed him in when she brought him home from the hospital. I suppose I have to admit that I didn’t have much interest in him as a newborn. But of course I don’t share this with Sara and agree that he had looked extremely cute in it.

Sara gets the plastic bags that hold, as it turns out, a blanket and a quilt for the carriage, along with more clothes. I look at the pile that’s like a mountain on my bed. What am I going to do with it all?

It’s as if Sara is reading my mind, because she looks around and asks whether I shouldn’t make some changes. We go over the possibilities again but come to the same conclusion — namely that there’s not enough room.

“Why don’t you move downstairs?” asks Sara all at once. “Mom hardly uses her work room for anything. You could switch with her. Then you could go straight out into the yard — have the carriage on the sidewalk when the baby sleeps outside.”

I stare at Sara. This is an excellent idea. Why hadn't I thought of it? We all race down to look at the room. It isn't much bigger than my room, but still, it's a little different. It's also brighter, with windows on both outer walls. The bedroom door opens into a hallway that leads to the door out into the yard, so it actually has its own entrance. Almost like a little apartment.

Anna gestures wildly and describes where she would put the bed and where it would be possible to put the clothes cupboard and the dresser. Her enthusiasm is contagious and I see for myself how this could all work. I would paint the room a bright and warm colour, maybe light yellow, have airy, white curtains...

No, now I have to sit down... I let myself sink slowly onto the chair at mom's sewing table and take a deep breath. The girls stop talking and look at me with a scared look on their faces.

"Sunna dear! Are you all right?" Sara asks and kneels down in front of the chair.

I nod my head but say nothing. I can't talk right away. It's as if a giant wave moves over me, through me, like the little sea in me is becoming part of the ocean waves that pull together and rise higher and higher...

Sara feels my stomach.

"Jesus," she says. "She's in labour."

I shake my head. Labour is something awfully bad, painful. This is not bad, just so strong. Then the wave abates and I can answer.

"It's all right," I say. "It's nothing bad."

"You had a hard contraction," says Sara firmly. "You come up to bed now."

It is of no use to object; the girls support me up the stairs as if I was at least ninety years old and practically carry me into my room, sweep the baby clothes off the bed and help me in. I don't feel anything and find this to be totally silly, but when I'm lying down I'm again sucked into the wave that washes over me. I put my hand on my stomach and feel that it has lifted up and become rock hard.

"I'm calling mom," says Sara and rushes out. Anna and Hildur gather up all the baby clothes into the box and bags again. They are quiet and worried and I want to tell them that it's nothing, that everything is all right. But I have to wait there until the crest of the wave is quiet and sinks slowly and calmly down again. My stomach is becoming soft again beneath my palm. This is weird.

"Mom is on her way," says Sara, who is back again and starts to help the girls gather the clothes.

"Why did you call her?" I ask, annoyed. "You know how much there is to do at the store now. I'm all right. I just felt a little weird."

"You are in labour, Sunna," says Sara. "You had a really strong contraction. I felt it. I've had a baby; I know what it's like."

"But it wasn't bad," I protest. "I've seen women give birth in the movies. Screaming and yelling."

"This could still be the start of it," says Sara firmly. "You have to lie still. I don't want to rush anything."

Anna and Hildur ask whether they shouldn't go and Sara says that it's probably best, although I would rather they stay. They make me promise to call later today to let them know how I'm doing and Anna puts her number into my cell phone. They both kiss

me on the cheek when they leave and I see that they are reluctant to go. But just as Sara takes them to the door, a new wave comes over me.

I'm getting to know the routine, wait for the wave, the crest, the collapse. When I open my eyes again I see that Sara is sitting beside me and is looking at her watch.

"There are about twelve minutes between them," she says. "God, I hope mom is coming."

And mom arrives, breathless and panting after rushing as fast as she could through the Christmas traffic. She has just called up to the hospital and spoken with the mid-wife, who wants us to call her again after an hour or so, unless the contractions become considerably more regular. But the time between the contractions doesn't get shorter, rather the waves diminish bit by bit and after an hour they are barely noticeable.

Pre-labour pains, says the mid-wife when mom calls again, and advises us that I should take it easy and not be home alone.

I call the girls and assure them that everything is all right and they promise to visit me again. Mom is also on the phone to reassure dad, who waited at the store while she went home; she arranges with amma to come and stay with me when she can't be here. I don't like the fact that someone needs to be with me, but I do feel better that it's amma who is the one to be here. She can help me with the knitting. Maybe I need to hurry if I'm going to get the outfit finished before the baby is born?

December 22nd

Life at home goes on all around me and I feel like some alien being, either just lying on the sofa or in my room. Christmas preparations are in full swing, but I can't do anything. I get the contractions nearly every day, maybe for one or two hours, but then they go away again. That's good because it's still too early for the baby to be born.

The knitting goes better and better, the outfit is coming along and amma says that it's rather good — from her lips that's pretty impressive! She's with me most days until mom or dad come home and she uses this time to bake and knit. Brynja looks in on me sometimes, but she is often on the run. She is head over heels in love and is with Ari all the time, and solemnly swears that they are careful now. I think, in fact, that it would frighten anyone to see me now; I've become so fat that I feel like I'm going to explode. No, of course not fat, but my belly grows and grows and I have feet like sausages. Disgusting. They could use me on an advertisement: Use contraception! Otherwise you could end up looking like this!

I feel that I should be going to the stores to buy some Christmas presents and I could ask amma to go with me to the mall, but it would be more fun to go shopping with some friends. I am half-expecting Brynja to call me to go shopping with her, but I don't want to be the one to ask her. And when my phone does ring, it's Anna who asks whether I'd like to go out.

"Hildur has a car," she says. "Wouldn't you like to check out the Christmas stress?"

Would I! It takes me a little while to assure amma that the girls are very responsible and I will come home immediately if I feel anything or if I become the least

bit tired. When she finally gives in, I hurry and tell Anna that I'll be ready in ten minutes. I put on mom's black overcoat, the only one I can get into now, and am just finished stuffing myself into my winter boots when Anna pulls into the yard. Amma stands on the steps when we leave and calls to me once more that I have to be careful and mustn't be too long. It's fantastic to drive off with the girls, free of mom, dad and amma, as if I've been let out of prison. It must show how I'm feeling because Anna says, laughing:

“Good to be out of prison, isn't it?”

It's totally insane at the mall since it's only two days until Christmas. The Christmas decorations are out everywhere, Christmas songs are playing, and people are on the run, carrying stuffed shopping bags. I walk slowly and enjoy the sights and sounds. I feel as if it's a whole eternity since I've seen something other than the living room at home, the TV screen and my room.

The girls say they have finished buying most of their Christmas gifts, so they want me to decide where to go. I've had enough time to think about what I want to buy, so the gift shopping goes smoothly; a book that I know mom and dad want, a CD of classical Christmas music for amma, Barbie stuff for Lilla — little Barbie bathroom fixtures for the house that dad is building. I still have money from the summer; I've spent so little this winter that I'm able to buy decent gifts. This is the first time that I'm buying Christmas presents with money that I've worked for myself and I want them to be nice. I also find beautiful candlesticks that I know Sara and Arnar will like; then there's just their little monkey left to buy for.

I move slowly and we rest from time to time when we see a free bench or ledge where it's possible to sit for a while. I feel mild contractions, not worth mentioning to the girls, neither strong nor regular and so far they've always passed after a short time.

Suddenly Hildur nudges me.

"There's someone saying hi to you! Do you see?"

She points up the escalator where I see a tall, thin boy standing and waving his arms. It's Steini. We stay put and wait for him to come through the crowd to us.

"Wow! You are looking great!"

"Really great, like a barrel," I mumble in reply. I don't know whether I've offended him, but he hugs me and kisses me on the cheek.

"I mean it, you look great," he says. Then he kisses the other girls, too, wishes us a Merry Christmas and rushes off.

Hildur and Anna grin at me.

"He has been in love with you since the fall," says Anna.

"Yeah right," I say, but feel myself blushing. How can I believe that he could be interested in a girl who is pregnant by another boy?

"I know that he asked your friends from tenth grade whether you were with anyone," says Hildur.

I quickly say that I need to buy something for Aron Smári and the conversation switches to a suitable gift for a one year old boy. I don't intend to start thinking about Steini now or speculate on whether or not he really has an interest in me. That's something too far off in the future to think about now. But maybe later.

I stand in front of the children's clothing store where I started bleeding last fall. It feels so very long ago since that happened.

"Yes, let's go in," says Hildur. "The clothes in here are so cute."

To tell the truth, I'm a little scared about going into the store, but I know that's silly. Why should something happen here rather than anywhere else? And there is a great sweater in the window which would suit the little one well.

"Well, hi!"

The girl at the counter has noticed me and comes over, smiling. It's Magga.

"It's good to see you. How's it going?"

I tell her that all is fine and then she returns to the counter again and the line of impatient customers. I tell the girls the whole story about the incident here in the store.

"We'd better hurry in here so that you don't have to be carried out again," says Anna playfully, but I notice that she's becoming uneasy because we've been gone a long time. At that exact moment my phone rings. It's not amma, but mom.

"I can't believe that amma has let you go to Kringlan," she says. Her tone is both worried and angry. Great. They mustn't get into an argument because of me.

"I'm just on my way home," I say. "And everything is fine. I feel good just being able to get out."

It calms mom down when I promise to be home in a half hour. I grab the sweater for the little guy and pay, say goodbye to Magga and wish her a Merry Christmas and then move slowly with the stream of people toward the door and the parkade.

It's late in the day and now a new flood of shoppers pours in, looking more stressed than the ones that are on their way home, loaded down with shopping bags. I

look at the people who come toward us from the entrance and all at once I meet eyes that I know. And barely know.

Biggi looks at me, but without seeing me. Then he gives a little start and follows me with his eyes. He opens his mouth as if he intends to call out, but says nothing. He's not alone. Beside him is a girl. Blonde, tall, thin. Disgustingly thin.

We walk out to the car and I don't say anything. But Anna must have eyes in the back of her head and is unbelievably fast to put two and two together.

"Who was that?" she asks. "The hot guy, the dark haired one?"

I don't answer right away.

"Was that him?" she asks then. "Jesus, Sunna, is everything okay? You are so white"

I don't feel any different, but the girls support me on the way to the car and help me in as if I'm a brittle old woman. There may be some contractions going on, but I lean back in the seat and breathe calmly and don't feel too bad. I'm only a little tired.

Anna doesn't ask me any more about Biggi and I don't say anything either. The girls start talking about the boys in the choir and the exam results and the air is now a little forced and strained. Now they think I'm in shock because I've seen Biggi with another girl, I think to myself. But I'm not. Do I feel anything? We aren't together, why shouldn't he be with whichever girl he pleases?

When I get home, say goodbye to the girls, calm mom and amma down, who are waiting impatiently in the hall, and am lying up in my bed, I can still picture them together. Biggi in a black leather jacket with snowflakes on his shoulders and with dark hair; the girl, blonde, a lot of eye makeup in a close fitting purple woolen coat, looking at

him and smiling. She was awfully thin. I sigh and lay my palm on my stomach and stroke it lightly with my fingertips until I feel a little kick, a little spark, answer me. Then I go to sleep.

December 24th

Christmas Eve. A day that has always been the same as far back as I can remember. Everything is clean and shiny in the house, but mom is still busy and seems to have a lot to do. Dad is still working on something down in the basement. It must be an amazing doll house. Lilla watches cartoons on the TV.

I lie in the bathtub for a long time, wash my hair and get something to eat. I paint my nails, but just my fingernails; I can't do my toenails any longer. I stroke my hand over the tight skin on my stomach. What will my stomach be like when this is over? Will I ever wear a bikini again? Fortunately I can still get into the beautiful black dress that amma sewed for me to wear to the concert. It probably won't fit as well now as it did then, but it'll still be okay. I don't plan to put it on until right before we leave for the church.

We always go to church at six o'clock, then we eat and after that we open our Christmas presents. The Christmas tree stands decorated in the living room and only the lights need to be turned on. Dad always does that when we come back from the Christmas service. I put on my bathrobe and start to carry out the presents that I bought for everyone and set them under the tree. There is already an impressive pile and it will only get better as the day goes on. Sara and Arnar plan to eat with us this year, last year

they were with his parents. Amma comes as usual, of course, goes to church and then eats with us.

The doorbell rings. It's Magga, dad's sister, who arrives with a bag full of packages and sets them in place under the tree. She's in a hurry, but takes the time to look in on me in my room.

"You are glowing, my dear," she says and gives me a hug. Then she looks closely at me.

"I predict that it's not going to be long," she says. "It won't be long for you now." Then she kisses me and says goodbye. I hear her ask mom to let her know as soon as something happens.

The day drags on. I go and watch some silly cartoons with Lilla before coffee. Mom has a million things to do in the kitchen; everything has to be ready so we can eat as soon as we come home from church. This demands precision planning and it's good not to be around the kitchen while this is going on.

Lilla and I get hot chocolate and cookies and we sit as quietly as possible at the corner of the table.

"Hurry and finish, girls, I need to set the table," says mom. I go with Lilla into her room, help her to put on her good dress and comb her hair. She has just discovered countless shiny clasps and barrettes, and I succeed in convincing her that she doesn't need to use them all at the same time. All at once she leans up against me.

"You are so good," she says. "The little baby is going to get such a good mother."

I get tears in my eyes. Little imp. I, who have never been able to tolerate her.

Now it's time to put on my dress and comb my hair. I also put on some eye makeup. It has been a while since I've felt like doing it. I hold back the hair from my face with a black hair clip. It's been so long since my last hair cut that my hair is nearly down to my shoulders.

Mom and dad and Lilla are putting on their overcoats when I come out into the hall. I put mom's black shawl over my shoulders, but when I bend down to put on my shoes I feel a stab of pain, so sharp that I gasp for breath. Mom and dad half carry me between them into the hallway and sit me down on a chair. Just then, Amma comes in the door, ready to go to church with us.

The pain passes quickly and I see that there hasn't been any bleeding. Everyone agrees that I can't go to the church. Mom says she'll stay home with me, but amma is determined.

"You go to church with the child," she says. "I don't care if I miss one Christmas service. We'll be fine here, Sunna and I."

In the end, it's dad and mom who go with Lilla, and mom sets her phone on vibrate instead of ring and keeps it in her coat pocket. Amma promises to call if anything happens.

When they've gone, Amma and I sit in the living room. Amma looks through the CD shelf and finds Bach's Christmas Oratorio, which mom and dad got at some point, but never play. The music flows through the darkening living room, which smells of the spruce tree. Amma lights a candle on the living room table and pours herself a little glass of sherry.

“This is better than any Christmas service,” she says, leaning back in the chair and lets her eyelids close.

I close my eyes, too, and listen. Peace and stillness move over me. I lay my palm on my stomach. Music is supposed to be good for babies, especially before they are born. Especially Mozart. I should maybe start to listen to more music...

The sound of the doorbell forces itself into the music, so piercingly that we both jump. Amma goes to answer it. No doubt someone bringing Christmas greetings. I close my eyes and try to get my train of thought connected to the music again.

“There is a visitor to see you, Sunna dear,” says amma from the living room doorway.

My heart leaps into my throat. It can’t be. And when I look up, I don’t meet dark brown eyes, but blue ones. It’s Steini.

“Hi,” he says, and smiles. “Merry Christmas.”

Amma disappears into the kitchen.

“Merry Christmas,” I reply. What is he doing here?

“I just wanted to see you...know how you’re doing...”

This is the first time that I’ve heard Steini have difficulty finding words.

“This is for you,” he says and passes me a little package.

“I don’t have anything...any gift...”

“Of course not,” says Steini. “This is just for fun. Open it now.”

I see by the shape and size of the package what is in it before I take the paper and ribbon off of it. A CD. Mozart.

“It’s supposed to make babies smart to listen to Mozart,” says Steini.

I can't help but burst out laughing.

"It's as if you've been reading my mind," I say. "I was only...just before you came..."

A quick kiss on my mouth silences me. Then comes another one, softer, longer.

Steini lets me go as unexpectedly as he kissed me.

"I'm sorry...I didn't intend...yes, actually. I have wanted to kiss you for so long. But I don't know...whether you wanted..."

"I don't know that either," I answer quietly. "I somehow can't...not now. Not right away..."

"I understand that," says Steini. "I shouldn't be saying anything now. I didn't plan to say anything. If I can just be your friend. Then...maybe later..."

"Yes, maybe," I say.

He gives me a kiss on the cheek and stands up.

"We'll see you," he says. And he smiles at me as he leaves.

Amma comes into the living room when he's gone.

"That's a very nice boy," she says tentatively and looks at me out of the corner of her eye.

"No, amma, that wasn't him," I say. "That was just a friend from the choir."

"Friend and friend," mutters amma. "It was obvious that he would gladly have it be something more."

"There now, Amma," I say laughing.

Then we hear the car turn into the yard. Dad, mom and Lilla come in, with hugs and kisses, Merry Christmas. Sara and Arnar arrive a moment later; Aron Smári is

screaming loudly, with a big red Christmas hat down over his eyes. Mom rushes into the kitchen to heat the gravy, the Christmas dinner smells good, dad turns on the tree lights. Christmas is here.

December 25th

I sleep in late on Christmas Day, not waking until mom looks in on me and says that the company arrives in a half hour. Magga, dad's sister, Gunni, her husband, and their kids always come at noon on Christmas Day. I yawn and stretch. My opened Christmas presents still lie on the desk and on the floor where I put them last night.

I received slightly different gifts this year than from before. No stylish clothes. It is, of course, of little use to give me clothes now. No shortage of books, as usual. Amma gave me a book about pregnancy, birth and caring for young children. Very suitable. I am actually looking forward to reading it; it's really beautiful, full of gorgeous photographs.

Mom and dad's gift doesn't come as much of a surprise. I've noticed mom's quick glances recently when I put on my old bathrobe and need to hold it together in the front so that it more or less reaches around me. The new robe is really beautiful, made out of thick and soft velvet velour, dark green in colour. And wide enough. Now at least none of us have to be embarrassed when I go to the hospital. There were also slippers in the package from mom and dad, soft and green to match the robe. Of course I went to try them on, but amma called out:

"You can't take a step in the shoes before the baby is born!"

This is an old wives' tale that I've never heard before, where a new mother should put on new shoes when she stands up the first time after the baby is born. So I only get to try the shoe on my foot, without stepping down. Fortunately, they fit.

I got gloves from Magga and her family. The pregnancy hasn't affected my hands. Excellent choice. I can imagine the discussions. What in the world can we give Sunna? — Amma Sigga and afi didn't need to rack their brains. They sent me one volume of the Icelandic Sagas. They started to give them to me when I was confirmed and always give me another volume on my birthday and at Christmas. I must admit that I haven't read them much yet, but no doubt I will later. Sometime.

Lilla got to give me her own present. It was rose-scented bubble bath that she chose herself — with mom's help. She was in seventh heaven over the present from me, which she opened before she got the dollhouse. Dad went downstairs and got it when she was done opening all of her parcels and started to look under the tree for the gift from mom and dad. He had tied a big red bow around the house, which is huge, with two storeys and an attic. Lilla stared at it dumbfounded, but then her lips started to quiver.

"It's not pink like Alexandra's house," she whispered.

"No, and it's not made of plastic," I quickly say. "This is much better. There is no other house in the world like this, did you know that?"

Then she looked at me with a huge grin and flew up to give mom and dad a hug.

Aron Smári was really quick at opening all the gifts. Or better said, the packaging. He tore off the Christmas wrapping and tried to stomp on it along with all the ribbons and bows and decorations that he could get a hold of. The contents of the packages were not important. But Sara was pleased with the sweater and thought the

candlesticks were great, too. Sara and Arnar gave me a book, a mystery, that I look forward to reading.

And there lay the CD with the other gifts. The CD from Steini. There was a card on it that I read after he left: To Sunna, with sincere wishes for a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. Your friend, Steini.

Sincere. Prosperous. These are such formal words. As if he had thought a long time and took great pains writing on the card. He is an unusual boy, that Steini. I do care about him. And maybe something more, too. Or it could be something more. Maybe.

I hurry and get dressed and get myself ready and make my bed before the company arrives. Then it is the usual: Merry Christmas and thank yous, smoked lamb, leaf bread and white sauce, cake and coffee, the grownups chatting, the small children running around and destroying everything, mom with her formal Christmas smile, determined not to let it get to her, the older kids bored to death in the corner, with their computer games or reading Uncle Jaachim. An authentic Christmas party.

December 31st

The Christmas holidays have passed unusually slowly. I've slept in, eaten too much, watched TV and read. I knitted a little, too, and the outfit is coming along now. Brynja has only been to see me once, otherwise she is always with Ari. Tonight they are going to a party at his friend's house. This evening, I will of course be at home, eat a big meal again and gobble up candy, and watch the New Year's Eve Comedy Show on TV with mom and dad. I definitely don't get to go out, even to one of the bonfires; besides, it wouldn't be cool to go there with my parents or little sister.

I take a long look at myself in the mirror while I comb my hair. Aunt Magga said on Christmas Day that I had the pregnancy glow. What in the world did she mean by that? It's still about five weeks until the baby is due. How can I be getting a glow, whatever that means?

I notice that my face and neck are somewhat thicker than before. It's not fat, I don't think, because I have gained little weight, apart from my belly; rather it's as if my face is swollen. My feet are also swollen; there's a deep imprint on my calves from the elastic in my socks. I'm not denying that the face I see in the mirror is mine, even though I feel that it's not really my face. It's as if this face has some kind of tranquility and peace over it which I've not noticed before. The eyes that look back at me are darker than usual, nearly dark green. The hair is the same but more unruly than before. I should have had it cut. I just can't be bothered with that now.

I don't get dressed until the evening. It's so comfortable to just be in my robe and today I'm even drowsier and lazier than usual. I barely even feel upset about not going out on New Year's Eve. Then there's the black dress to wear one more time — I love that dress, but I am really looking forward to wearing something else!

I play the CD from Steini while I'm getting ready. The music is wonderful, so light and playful, and yet it has a calming influence. I close my eyes and feel my breathing slow down. It's as if it empties out my mind, everything is washed away and nothing is left but the music. A light, fluttering, musical butterfly.

The force of the wave in me starts so slowly and calmly that it seems to be part of the music. Like a deep undertone, that strengthens gradually, bit by bit and starts

sounding more definite and stronger and finally overwhelms everything else. I lay my hand on my stomach and feel it lift and harden under my palm. It's starting again.

The pre-labour contractions have settled down lately, maybe because nearly all I've done over Christmas is hibernated or dozed, been totally inactive. But this contraction is stronger and more pronounced. I put on my watch, which I have nearly stopped wearing. It might be best to keep track of this. I don't say anything to mom when I come out of my room. She's busy in the kitchen as usual and dad is running around with Lilla close on his heels and getting ready for the fireworks tonight. One night each year he becomes a little kid again for the hour that it takes to set off the several hundred kronurs worth of fireworks. Or maybe several thousand. I hear him talk to Lilla, with great enthusiasm, about the fireworks known as "pies" and "bombs", but she's more interested in the ones that are called "starlights".

The meal is excellent, but I don't have much of an appetite. I sneak a look at the clock and try to set in my mind how many minutes between the contractions. It is rather a long time in between them, about fifteen minutes, but they last longer than they did at first and are more definite.

After the homemade ice-cream that mom always makes on New Year's Eve, we sit in the living room with coffee and cookies. Dad drinks one hot cup of coffee and then rushes out into the yard, armed with a big box of matches. Lilla skips after him. Mom and I go out onto the balcony to watch the show, both of us with a wool blanket over our shoulders like a shawl. The weather is good, calm and cold. The neighbours are also starting to set off fireworks and the night sky is full of multi-coloured sparks.

"Look!" call dad. "Now comes a big one!"

Pink flashes spread out in a circle, like a huge flower blooming in the black velvet sky. A new contraction comes at that very moment, this one so strong that I go down on my knees and have to grab the handrail.

“Sunna, dear!” Mom grabs me. “Are you sick?”

I shake my head. I wait for a moment there until I can talk.

“The contractions are just a little stronger now. It’s all right.”

We hear dad call down in the yard.

“Wasn’t that great? Just wait now it’s the “pie”!”

Mom wants to lead me in from the balcony, but I take her arm.

“Let him set it off. It’s okay.”

As the “pie” explodes with tremendous noise and brightness, Lilla shouts and dad laughs. The sound carries through the cool darkness up to us where we stand with the wool blankets over our thin dresses. Mom holds on to me and I lean on the balcony railing. Now a huge flash shoots up out of the “pie” and mom jumps.

“Come in, dear,” she says. “You need to lie down.”

I want to tell her that it’s all right, I don’t want to spoil the fun for dad and Lilla, but then another strong contraction comes and I can’t stifle the moan that accompanies it.

“My good God,” says mom. Then she leans over the rail and calls down to the dark and smoke-filled yard:

“Guðmundur, come quick! Sunna isn’t well!”

Mom half carries me in to the sofa and lays both blankets over me. She looks down at me with concern on her face and I want to reassure her. I want to say I’m sorry

for always making her worry. To tell her that it is definitely nothing, it'll soon pass. But of course something has to come of this, because this time it doesn't pass. Is it time?

"Mom, this is far too early yet," I whisper.

"I know, my dear," she says. "But it should still be all right. You are far enough along. It'll be okay."

Dad and Lilla come running up without taking off their snow boots, but for once mom doesn't notice. She rushes to phone the hospital, and dad kneels down beside the sofa and strokes my forehead.

"I'm sorry," I whisper. "You didn't get to finish setting off the fireworks."

"I'll save the biggest one," he says. "It'll be set off in your honour. When the baby is born."

I hear mom explain that this is something quite different than the pre-labour contractions that had come before. She comes back into the living room.

"They want to get her into the hospital, to be safe," she says. "This can settle down again, they say."

We all go together in the car; dad wants to drive so mom can be beside me. Lilla must come with us, of course. Mom wants to call amma, but she is with an old friend who was just recently widowed and mom can't remember amma's friend's last name so that she can look up the number in the phone book.

"She'll call at midnight," says dad.

Mom calls Sara, who is at her in-laws, and lets her know that we are on our way to the hospital. I sit beside mom in the backseat while she fusses and talks about what

she needs to do and all at once I become dead scared that the labour pains will settle down and that I've ruined New Year's Eve by being a nuisance.

"You missed the New Year's Eve Comedy Show," I say, and just then a new contraction comes, stronger than the ones before.

Mom goes with me into the hospital, and dad goes home with Lilla. Mom supports me on the way in and we go up in the elevator. We are shown into the examination room and mom helps me up on the table. It's good to lie down; the contractions are so powerful that I can't stretch myself out properly and my knees feel like they're made out of jelly.

The midwife comes in and examines me, listens to the baby's heartbeat, feels my stomach during the next contraction.

"Is it starting to get really bad?" she asks.

I don't know how I should answer. It's not bad. Not like when you hurt yourself or when the dentist uses a drill or when you get a needle. But now I'm starting to feel cramps in my lower back, similar to when I'm starting my period. It must be good that I'm feeling something, since it appears that's what we're all waiting for.

"A little worse," I answer.

Mom goes out into the hall while the midwife checks to see if the dilation has started. It's not as unpleasant and uncomfortable to have this done now as it was when I was examined before. Now it's like it has some purpose, it's normal. The midwife has a soft and sure touch, but I'm relieved when she's done. She takes off her gloves, throws them out and says over her shoulder:

“You’re not dilated much yet, only three centimeters. This could settle down again, dear.”

But it doesn’t settle down; the waves continue to wash over me, again and again, and now they are only five minutes apart. Mom sits beside me and holds my hand, rubs my back, wipes my forehead. Once in a while she goes out into the hallway. She calls dad and Sara. There’s a big clock on the wall and I watch the time pass. Tick, tick. Eleven. Ten minutes past. Eleven-thirty. Quarter to twelve.

The New Year’s Eve Comedy Show is over. Now dad should be going out into the yard again to begin setting up the biggest fireworks. Preparing to light up the minutes leading up to twelve, along with everybody else. Mom and Lilla and I on the balcony. The sky lit up in all the bright colours.

The midwife comes in again and checks to see whether the dilation has increased.

“Four centimeters,” she says. “It won’t be this year, in any case!”

“Not this century,” I answer. Isn’t this the way to start a new century? Dad doesn’t think the new century started last year, but rather it’s the turn of the century now.

Mom comes in again and she and the midwife discuss something quietly together. As soon as the midwife opens the door to go out into the hallway, we hear the clock strike on the TV or radio somewhere out in the hall. I can make out a festive voice saying:

“The year 2000 is over, the year 2001 has begun.”

“Happy New Year,” calls the midwife happily over her shoulder as she closes the door behind her. Laughter and New Year’s wishes are carried in to us from the hallway.

“Happy New Year, my dear,” whispers mom and kisses me on the cheek.

“Happy New Year, mom,” I whisper in return.

Mom goes out into the hallway to call dad and is gone for a little while. The time on the clock ticks away. Ten minutes past twelve. When mom comes in again, she brings greetings from amma. She plans to go to our house and wait there for the news. But the news waits. It’s still only five minutes between contractions and when the doctor looks in on us at about one-thirty, she decides that I need to rest in order to be able to continue. I’m given a pill so that I can sleep and mom is told to go home and get some sleep, too.

The tears wait in the corner of my eyes, and I don’t let them fall before mom has kissed me and said goodbye and promised to come immediately after I call her when I wake up. When the door closes, then they fall. I taste the salt in my mouth and take the corner of the sheet to dry my eyes. Then I try to get myself as comfortable as possible on this high and narrow bed. I’m a little cold and I stretch to reach the bell and ask for a quilt instead of the blanket that’s over me. But it’s too much effort, both to ring and to have to talk to someone, to ask for help. I just need to let this night pass, somehow. Then tomorrow I’ll be sent home again.

I whisper to my baby, in the dark, where I feel it move:

“I’m sorry that I’ve been so impatient. I know that you need to grow more. You come when you are ready.”

It’s almost as if I get an answer, because I feel the baby turn itself slowly in the water, settle itself a little better. And we both sleep.

January 1st 2001

When I open my eyes, I'm not sure right away where I am. The night has left me feeling cold and stiff. The clock on the wall says ten minutes past seven.

I have to go to the bathroom and carefully lift myself up on my elbow, shift so that I can swing my feet over the edge of the bed, and feel with my toes for the little footstool that I can step on to get down. I'm dizzy and I hold onto the bed while I get my balance. Just then the door opens and a young woman in a pink smock and pants looks in.

"Well, there, how do you feel?" she asks cheerfully. "Could you sleep?"

I mumble something about needing to go to the bathroom and she opens a door in the room. There's the bathroom. I was worried that I'd have to go out into the hallway. It's so difficult to be standing up.

"Have the labour pains settled down?" she calls to me while I'm in the bathroom. I start to answer yes as I'm getting up off of the toilet, but then suddenly my knees buckle and I have to grab the sink.

"Can you help me?" I stammer.

Something lukewarm runs down my thigh and onto the floor. Am I peeing on the floor? The door opens and I'm grabbed by a strong hand and led out into the room. The girl in pink rings a bell and two people dressed in white appear immediately in the doorway.

"It looks as if her water broke," says the girl in pink.

The water broke? The first thought that comes to my mind is that now I won't be sent home.

“Am I having the baby? Now?” I ask and realize right away how foolish the question sounds. But the midwife who holds me up and helps me out of the wet pants doesn’t laugh at me.

“Yes, my dear, you are having the baby,” she says calmly. “I know it’s a little early, but it’ll be all right. The baby is definitely well-developed and big enough to cope.”

I haven’t felt any more contractions, just a feeling of weakness when the water started to run, but when I lay up on the bed I feel the waves start to crash over me with more force than ever before.

“Just try to relax,” says the midwife. “Breathe calmly. Don’t fight it.”

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. Now the next wave hits. I lie on the shore, a sandy shore, and let a bigger wave crash over me. The water is dark, dark-green and blue and it foams at the top of the wave, high up. I can’t move under the wave, or escape. If I let it flood over me without moving, it ebbs again, slowly, slower than it crashed over me. Then it’s done. When I open my eyes, I look at the midwife. She smiles at me. Delicate wrinkles form around her eyes when she smiles and her hair is steel grey.

“That was fine,” she said. “Let your body do the work. It’s the body that controls the journey.”

I’m wheeled into the delivery room. It’s so bright in there and the brightness hurts my eyes. The midwife dims the lights and helps me get settled.

“Now the main thing is to relax. Breathe calmly and rest between contractions,” she says. “I’m going to call your mom. Guðlaug will stay here with you in the meantime.”

Guðlaug is barely twenty. No doubt a student or something. But she has a beautiful smile and she drags a stool to the bed and sits beside me.

“Wait,” I call to the midwife. She turns in the doorway.

“Would you ask my mom to bring the shoes,” I say. “The red shoes. They’re on my night table.” Then the next wave crashes in. But this time I’m not ready and it’s hard to control the breathing. I also feel pain in my low back.

There’s a clock on the wall and at first I watch it to see how far apart the contractions are. But I can’t do that for long. I’m barely able to cope with what’s going on, as heavy waves keep crashing over me and the pain in my back changes. Guðlaug rubs my back and as I try to change my position in the bed, I start to feel pain in the front, too, as if my whole pelvis is going to expand and burst.

I have to move over again so that the midwife can check the dilation and she smiles at me when she’s done.

“Everything is going so well,” she says, satisfied. “You are almost fully dilated.”

Mom, I think to myself. Hurry. Come.

And she comes. Her face is pale and full of worry above the green robe that she had to put on. She bends down and kisses me and I feel that her cheek is damp.

“You are so brave, my love,” she whispers. Then the next breaker washes over me. And now something new is happening. I can feel the pressure, and without being able to control it, I push down with all my might. I hear some sound, almost like an animal growling, and realize that it’s me that I’m hearing.

“Try not to push just yet,” someone says, as they help me lie down. That’s like asking a volcano to stop erupting, I think, but I try to concentrate on breathing calmly and

am successful in holding off the need to push during the next contraction. But just that once, then I must help a little. I clasp my hands around my knees, and push with strength that I didn't know I had, as long as I can and then even longer.

Mom holds me, wipes my forehead with a damp cloth in between the contractions and whispers words of encouragement while I strain with the labour. The feeling while the contraction lasts is as if no other feeling exists in the whole world, just the feeling of this pressure, the pushing out. Out and into this world, come to me, I think while I rest in mom's arms between contractions. Come to me, dear little baby. Good God, if you are there somewhere, help us both, let everything be all right with the baby, give me strength...

"I see the head," calls the midwife and I fill myself with new strength, gladly welcome the next contraction, and continue to push long after I don't think I can do it any longer.

"Yes, there, once more," the midwife shouts to me.

Coooooome, I think, as the contraction takes me with it, I push, pull so hard against it that my arms ache. Coooooome to me...

"There now, breathe calmly," I hear from someone far away and I feel a peculiar feeling that I can't describe. I feel the head come out, a round slippery head. And then I feel the little body follow, feel an arm and a little hand brush against my thigh.

"It's a girl," says the midwife. "A beautiful girl with lots of black hair."

Mom squeezes my hand as she stretches to see better.

"She is wonderful," she says and her voice trembles.

But I don't hear a cry. Shouldn't my baby be crying? I lift up on my elbows, trying to see.

"Is everything ok?" I ask. "Isn't she breathing?"

Just then I hear it. First a gasp, then a very small snuffle or whimper. Then a stronger sound, a cry. But just for a moment, then silence again. I reach my hands forward.

"I have to have her," I say. "I want her."

The midwife laughs.

"Wait a minute," she says. "We have to suction her."

I feel like a whole eternity passes while they struggle with something there down by my feet, I hear someone count up to ten and then again, say some more numbers. Then I get a bundle in my arms. A bundle wrapped in a white blanket or towel. It's laid on me, above my breasts, up by my throat. And in the bundle I find a soft, downy, damp head.

I push the blanket away so that I can see her better. See her face. Her eyes are half-closed and her forehead is wrinkled as if she is deep in thought. Her mouth is puckered as if she can't decide whether she should cry or not. Tiny little fists. I take out her hand, open her fist. Her fingers are unbelievably tiny and delicate.

"She is perfect," says mom. "I have never seen such a beautiful baby in all my life."

I can't say anything. Not out loud. The feelings that stream forth inside me are impossible to put into words. Or maybe just one word. Thanks.

Suddenly the midwife says I have to push one more time. I don't understand what she means. My baby is born; she's lying on top of me.

"The placenta is coming," says the midwife and I feel a pressure down below as something runs out of me. Of course I know what the placenta is and I see that the umbilical cord is still attached to some bloody lump that's lying farther down on the bed, but I don't sense that it's part of me. Mom is asked to cut the cord and she takes the scissors with shaky hands. She both laughs and cries at once. But I'm busy looking at the world's smallest and most beautiful fingers.

"I'm going to call dad," says mom, sniffing and drying her eyes. She kisses me on the cheek and says:

"You worked so hard, my Sunna. Unbelievably hard."

"Yes, you can sure say that," says the midwife, who comes and takes the baby from my arms. "You worked extremely hard and it went very well. But now we just have to borrow her again, we need to find out her length and weight. And we need to fix you up. Just a few stitches."

I feel a quick sting when the needle is stuck in me and feel somewhat uncomfortable, but it's like whatever happens down there now is very insignificant. I try and stretch so that I can keep an eye on my baby all the time, see when she is weighed and measured. Twenty-five hundred grams and forty-seven centimeters. Then I get her again in my outstretched arms.

The midwife raises the head of the bed so that I can sit up better and helps me put her to my breast. She twists her mouth and sucks at the air when she feels the breast with her cheek and the midwife helps her to find her way to the nipple. Her little mouth closes

on the nipple and she starts to suck. I put my index finger in her palm and her tiny fingers hold on to it, with unbelievable strength.

“Is the milk coming?” I ask, surprised. “She doesn’t get anything right away, does she?”

“No, the milk isn’t coming,” answers the midwife. “But it will come sooner if the baby is allowed to suck right away. It is natural for her and gives her security.”

It also gives me security. It brings me peace and contentment when I see her cheek by my breast, and her soft, downy, dark head on my arm.

Mom comes in again, smiling and red-eyed.

“Everyone sends their best,” she says. Then she gets the details of the birth weight and length and sits at the head of the bed beside me while they finish up with me and tidy up. I have a blanket laid over me and Guðlaug asks whether I want coffee or something else to drink.

“Then you can have lunch when you come down to the ward,” she says.

Lunch? Exactly what time is it? The time hasn’t mattered in this world which we were in, she and I. But now we are in the world where time exists again, where the time is a little past ten on New Year’s Day. New Year’s Day 2001.

“Mom,” I say suddenly. “Do you know what her birthday is? The first day of the first month 2001! That is so cool, don’t you think?”

Mom laughs and agrees with me. She can’t take her eyes off the baby, carefully stroking her head and cheek, fingers and toes. I suddenly remember something else.

“I brought them, as you asked,” she says and lifts up the case with the little red shoes. I open the case and take out one of the shoes and hold it up to the tiny little feet.

"It's way too big yet," I say, amazed. "How can anyone have such little feet? And still be a living human being?"

"She has to grow yet," says the midwife, laughing. She comes and admires the little shoes. Now it's time to move us down to the maternity ward and mom stands up to leave. She kisses us both goodbye, me on the forehead, the little one on the head.

"I'll come today during visiting hours," she says. "We'll all come!"

My little daughter is dressed and laid in the bassinette and I'm helped down from the delivery table. I'm still a little weak in the knees and dizzy, so I'm put into a wheelchair and then we are all wheeled away. Mother and daughter. The midwife who follows us down tells me that my daughter must be under observation at first because she is premature. She assures me that it's only a safety precaution and there is no reason to worry. I will have her with me as much as possible.

It's good to lie down in a cool and clean bed in the room. It's a double room and the woman in the other bed smiles at me when I come in.

"Congratulations," she says. "Boy or girl?"

"A girl," I say. The most beautiful girl that has ever been born, I think to myself, but of course I don't say it.

The midwife starts to roll the bassinette away, but I ask whether I can't have her with me for just a little longer.

"A little while," says the midwife and smiles at me.

The baby sleeps quietly in the bassinette beside my bed and I lie on my side so I can see her better. It's strange to feel an empty belly, like a bag outside my body. Somewhere there is a radio playing and I hear the sound of a hymn. I know the hymn;

I've gone to church sometimes with amma on New Year's Day. 'What proclaims New Year's blessed sun' is sung. I reach out my hand and touch the little clenched fist. Then I sleep.

I wake to the rattle of the food cart in the hallway when lunch arrives. Much to my surprise, I'm starving. I move myself slowly and sit up in the bed. I feel sore and miserable in my whole body, as if I've been running a marathon. It's not as if I've ever done long distance running, but I can imagine that this is what it feels like.

The bassinette is gone. I remember what the nurse said and know that it's best for the baby that she be observed, but it's still as if some part of me is missing. I need to be able to stretch out my hand and touch her, to be certain that she is in fact real. I try to tell myself to relax, I'll get her back again soon, but the uneasy feeling won't go away.

A smiling woman appears in the doorway and asks whether I feel up to coming out to eat or do I want a tray at my bed. I take the tray; I can hardly imagine standing up and walking out, let alone sitting at a table full of women I don't know.

There is smoked lamb, white sauce and green peas on my plate. Good and traditional food for New Year's Day, I think to myself, and heartily eat my meal. What's more, there's ice cream for dessert. Why was Sara complaining about the food in the maternity ward?

The empty tray is collected and right after that an excessively cheery woman comes in and asks whether I would like to take a shower. At first it's absurd to even think I could stand up, but she doesn't let up and hurries me in. When I get under the shower I think that this is just what I needed. It's wonderful to wash off the blood and sweat and the exhaustion flows out of me under the flood of hot water. I feel much better

after I've put on clean clothes and lie down again and I really look forward to seeing mom, dad and amma. I want to receive the congratulations and show off my baby, but that must wait.

Shortly there's a light knock on the door and mom opens it carefully. I see her face, beaming like the sun, in the doorway. She holds my sports bag. She nods to the woman in the other bed and comes in and hugs me.

"Congratulations, my dear," she says.

"Congratulations yourself," I say.

Dad comes in and hugs me without saying anything. Hard and long. He needs to clear his throat before he says to me:

"I have a little something for you — her — you both."

He walks out into the hallway and comes in with a huge package in his arms, so big that he can barely hold it, and puts it on the foot of the bed.

"Open it!" he says like an excited kid. Mom looks at him and smiles.

The package is so big that I have trouble getting the paper and bow off. I can tell right away by the weight and the smell of wood oil that this is a piece of furniture. When the paper comes off, I see what it is. It's a cradle, a marvelous, beautiful little cradle, made out of light-coloured wood, with a heart shape carved out at the head. I have never seen such a beautiful cradle before and I'm positive that it didn't come out of any store.

I look at dad, dumbfounded.

"Did you make it yourself? — When...?" Dad smiles proudly.

“It wasn’t just a dollhouse that I was working on down there,” he says. “I started it some time ago. I started it ... when you went into the hospital in November. It was maybe... a kind of promise. And now she’s coming home, bless her...”

I feel tears coming and I let them flow freely down my cheeks.

“Oh, dear dad,” I say and hug him to me.

Mom opens the bag and brings out some tissues.

“I had a hunch we’d need these,” she says laughing, and blows her nose, too. Dad puts the cradle on the floor and they both sit on my bed beside me.

Mom brings greetings from all of the family. Amma plans to look in on me tomorrow and Sara, too. Afi and Amma Sigga also send their love and congratulations; they are even thinking about making a quick trip south to see the little one. Then there are wishes from Magga and others; mom must have been on the phone until she got here.

“Did you call Brynja?” I ask. Mom looks a little sheepish but saves herself by:

“I thought that you’d rather call her yourself,” she says. “Your phone is in the bag — and also your bathrobe, of course, and your slippers and your cosmetic bag... then I stuck in the book that you were reading and also your knitting stuff...”

I’m not going to get on mom’s case by complaining about her not calling Brynja. Of course it would be much more fun for me to call and tell her the news myself. I don’t ask whether she has called Biggi. That I know I need to do myself. I smile at mom and thank her for bringing all my stuff.

The door opens and the bubbly woman looks in.

“Is this the afi and amma?” she asks smiling. “May I invite you to meet the little one?”

She rolls the bassinette up beside me. The little dark head, clenched little fists. My baby. My heart jumps with joy.

Dad stands up and walks to the bassinette and mom follows him. Dad puts his arms around mom's shoulders and leans on her. Then he strokes his big calloused index finger over the little fist. We all look at the sleeping baby for a while without saying anything.

"She looks just like you," mom says.

I can't do anything but laugh.

"She is nothing like me! She has coal black hair and her eyes are also really dark, she hasn't opened them completely, but I only saw that they..."

"You can't be sure of her hair colour yet," says mom, resolutely. "And all newborn babies have dark blue eyes. The eye colour isn't known right away. Don't you think she's just like Sunna was, Guðmundur?"

Dad looks at me and smiles.

"What makes you think I'd remember that," he says. "She looks just like herself. And now we should let them rest."

Dad takes the little cradle in his arms and they kiss me once before leaving. I lean back in the bed and follow them with my eyes and wave to them as they go out. I see that they stop suddenly in the doorway. Dad sees nothing because of the cradle and nearly crashes into someone who is on the way into the room.

"Excuse me," says dad.

"That's okay," someone mumbles in reply.

My heart skips a beat and I sit up, so suddenly that I feel a flow of blood. I know that voice.

Biggi stands in the doorway and stares uneasily after mom and dad. Then he walks hesitantly into the room. He holds a package in one hand. He's more flushed in the face than usual, and when he sees me, he smiles almost shyly and walks to the bed.

"Hi," he says.

"Hi," I answer.

He stands there with the package as if he has no idea about what he should do next. I stretch out my hand and he pulls himself together and takes my hand and then puts the package on the bed.

"Congratulations," he then says.

"Congratulations to you, too," I say.

He blushes, then smiles broadly.

"Thanks," he says.

I point to the bassinette.

"There she is," I say.

It's as if he didn't dare to look in the bassinette. I don't take my eyes off of his face.

Slowly, he moves close and bends over the bassinette. His facial expression actually shows disbelief, amazement. Then he takes a deep breath, reaches out his hand to touch the baby, but stops and looks at me.

"May I...?" he asks. His voice is husky. I nod my head.

He strokes his finger very carefully over her arm where it sticks out of the blanket, touches her fingers, then the soft dark head, the cheeks. She wakes slightly at the touch, twists her mouth, starts to look for the breast. He jumps and jerks his hand away.

I smile.

"It's all right," I say. "It's okay to touch her."

He looks at me, his eyes are big and black.

"I can hardly believe...that she's real," he says quietly.

I nod my head.

"I know," I say. "I feel exactly the same way, too."

He sits down carefully on the edge of the bed beside me.

"How did you find out?" I ask and immediately feel a pang of guilt about not having called him.

"Your amma called," he answered. "She called me last night when you first went up to the hospital and then right away this morning, as soon as she got the news."

Amma. Yes, I had told them both, mom and amma, that they should let Biggi know if... when something happened. And amma did it. Not mom.

"I was at a party last night when she called," he says, somewhat embarrassed.

"She definitely heard the noise over the phone. I sobered up in a flash."

I could do nothing but laugh.

"It was New Year's Eve," I say, as if to apologize for him.

"I couldn't sleep," he says then. "I walked all over town. Like an ass. I felt somehow that I should be doing something... to help you. But I couldn't do anything..."

I lay my hand on his arm.

"It was all right," I say. "Everything went well."

He passes the package to me.

"I bought this today," he says, uneasily, embarrassed. "I was wandering around and then saw this store with baby clothes. I felt like a fool going in there..."

I take the paper off. It is a tiny, little, soft white outfit with a lace collar.

"The girl in the store said it would be for a newborn," he says.

I hold the outfit up. It looks so small, but when I hold it against the little shape under the quilt in the bassinette, it's huge.

"Thanks," I say. "It's fantastic." There's a lump in my throat and I feel tears in the corner of my eyes.

Biggi stands up suddenly and walks to the window. He turns his back to me for a while, and then comes to the bed again and stands beside the bassinette.

"May I come again?" he asks quietly while he looks down at our sleeping daughter.

"Of course," I answer.

He bends down and kisses the little head, turns to me and kisses me quickly on the cheek. Then with quick steps, he walks out.

The midwife comes in and takes the bassinette as soon as Biggi leaves. She says that I should try and rest before supper.

"Time will go quickly," she says over her shoulder as she leaves with the bassinette. "You can have her with you tomorrow."

It's a good thing that mom brought tissues. I try to convince myself that the tears come because of the pain that I still feel all over my body, but I know better. I lay the little outfit by my cheek where Biggi kissed it and lie down again. I try to sleep for a little while.

January 2nd

I wake up early as the bassinette is rolled into my room. Everything has gone well and now there is nothing to prevent me from having her with me. I can hardly take my eyes off my little daughter who sleeps so sweetly and peacefully in her bassinette, right beside my bed. Now and then I lean over to her to listen for her breathing. She stirs slightly and makes a little sound, without waking. At the same time I feel my uterus contracting inside me. It's such a strange feeling that it frightens me. It's as if my uterus is going crazy inside this now too big and stretched abdomen, trying to find where it belongs. I feel the blood start to flow at the same time and I know that I need to go and change my pad. I try to move as little as possible; it's still a little difficult. When I walk out into the dining room at noon, I feel like I'm waddling like an old goose.

When the baby wakes up and starts to cry, I decide to pick her up myself and put her on the breast. I take care to support her head and neck, and lift her carefully into my bed. I make myself as comfortable as I can and I try to get her to take the breast. It's a little difficult at first, but then she gets a grip with her mouth over the nipple and sucks a bit. I'm so pre-occupied with this that I don't notice when the midwife comes in. She smiles at me and I feel the rush of pride warm me. She helps me change the baby.

There's weird, dark green poop in the diaper, but it's not at all disgusting to wash it off her tiny little bum and thighs.

Mom looks in on me, on the run, at about three o'clock and tells me that Sara can't come until tomorrow. She brings more of everything, reading material, candy and congratulations. Lilla is very offended that she can't come and visit and wants us home immediately.

It's just before six when I realize that I haven't called Brynja yet. I reach for my phone and push her number. She doesn't answer for quite a while and comes huffing and puffing to the phone just as I am about to hang up.

"Hi", I say. "Happy New Year! Where are you?"

"Happy New Year," she answers. "I'm at a family party. I couldn't find my phone; it's in my coat pocket under a whole pile of jackets and coats. Where are you? I tried texting you and calling."

"I'm in the hospital," I answer. I plan to drag out the news.

"God, is anything the matter?" asks Brynja and the tone of her voice changes.

"Not really," I answer. "There's actually nothing wrong, just ..."

Brynja knows me well enough to fill in the blanks. She screams so loud that the whole family must have heard.

"Jesus, did you have the baby?"

"I certainly did," I answer. "The most beautiful baby girl in the world."

"Wow," Brynja just says. "Wow. Sunna. You are a mother. For real."

I rattle off her height and weight and when she had been born and Brynja promises to visit me as soon as possible. I'm not totally sure what the rules are about

visiting, whether only immediate family can come, but I promise to ask and let Brynja know.

Amma comes in the evening and hugs me tightly and lovingly. She stands for a long time and looks at the little one, and carefully strokes the top of the blanket.

“She is wonderfully beautiful,” she says. “Does she look like her dad?”

I’m startled by the question. Then I remember that amma had spoken with Biggi. It was she who told him the news.

“Yes,” I answer. “I think that she’s very much like him.”

Amma sits on the bed beside me.

“I hope that you’re not upset,” she says, “but I called him. I let him know when you went into the hospital and then when the baby was born.”

“I know,” I answer. “He came yesterday.”

Amma smiles, satisfaction on her face.

“That’s good,” she says. She doesn’t say anything for a moment, absent-mindedly patting my hand. Then she says:

“I hope that you don’t think I’m being a meddlesome old woman. But I think that it’s very important for the little one to have both a dad and a mom. I am convinced that you will be a good mother, Sunna dear, and you are fortunate. But she needs to have a dad, too.”

She falls silent again, clears her throat and then continues.

“I don’t know what your mom has told you about her dad. Your afi.”

I’m surprised.

“My afi? I actually know nothing about him — only that he’s dead and that you — were never married. That mom didn’t know him.”

“That’s altogether true, as far as that goes,” says amma. “Your mom never knew him. And he never knew her either. In fact, he never knew that she existed.”

I stare at amma.

“Are you saying he never knew about her? Why not?”

“There was never any contact ... he was engaged to someone else. I heard about it and knew for sure I was pregnant. I never spoke to him again. I went home to mom and dad and had the baby. They didn’t ask any questions about anything. Then I came south again and continued to work. I was proud of my independence, I could support us, raise my child on my own.”

She looks right at me, her expression serious.

“I never thought about what it would be like for her not to have a father. That maybe I’d taken something from her. And him, not to be able to get to know his daughter. Not before it was too late.”

She stands up and reaches into the big bag that she set at the end of the bed when she came in.

“What’s the matter with me,” she says. “Langamma is getting senile. I nearly forgot to give you this.”

In the bag is a package with a pink bow that has a white crocheted wool blanket in it, and another smaller package with a tiny little hat, socks and mittens to match the outfit that I’m knitting. I kiss amma and promise to work hard to finish the outfit so that she

can put the finishing touches on it for me. My daughter should be in it when she goes home from the hospital.

After amma leaves, I lay back and think about what she told me. I want Biggi to know his daughter. I'm also sure that he wants that, too. At least now. But what about his parents, his family? My baby has a family whom I know nothing about and, in fact, by no means want to get to know. And what about when Biggi has a girlfriend — if he isn't already with the blonde girl? What about when he gets married and has children?

I reach over to the bassinette and pull it close to me. The world was so much simpler when we were the only two in it, she and I.

January 3rd

I wake up when the bassinette is rolled in beside my bed. I must have slept soundly, because I didn't even notice when they took it out. I sit up, still half asleep, and get help putting her to my breast. She wakes up and sucks a few times, and goes to sleep again.

I stroke her soft cheek and try to get her to wake up. The milk will come if she works hard at sucking, I'm told. But she doesn't seem to have much interest, and she doesn't get anything, even when she does suck.

She. The baby. The little one. I can't continue thinking and talking about her like that, nameless. As if she were some object or something. She's a human being, a tiny, little, honest-to-goodness human being and she needs a name. And not just any name. She has to have a beautiful name, a beautiful name that suits her.

Dad and mom were no doubt convinced that Sara and Sunna were the most beautiful names in the world when we were newborns. Then Lilla arrived on Amma

Sigga's birthday and was, of course, named Sigurlaug. Mom started to call her Lilla and that stuck with her. Mom thought Sigurlaug was such an awful name. But as the baby girl was born on that day, nothing could have been done any differently.

I stroke my little girl's cheek and try all kinds of names on her.

"Lilja, Rósa, Birta, Fríða," I whisper. "Ásta, Una." I can choose whatever name I want. She was born on her own day; there is no one she has to be named after, right?

I know the answer as soon as the question comes to me. Mom. Of course mom expects her name to be Kristín. Or maybe Halldóra after amma. Halldóra Kristín. Kristín Halldóra. Oh, no. Her nickname would be Stína Dóra or Dóra Stína. That reminds me of a girl from the country with braids and an apron in an old children's book.

The midwife comes in and starts trying to wake the little one to get her to suck. She seems worried and I get a knot in my stomach.

"She could have jaundice," she says. "She's a little lethargic and she looks a little yellow to me."

Yellow? She's not yellow, just beautifully suntanned. It looks natural with her coal black hair. But of course she can't be suntanned, she's never been out in the sun. Is my baby sick?

"Is that dangerous?" I ask and feel the knot in my stomach contract even more.

The midwife smiles reassuringly.

"No, no. It's very common, especially with premature babies. But she needs to go under the lights. They put her in an incubator and you can't have her with you as much."

Instinctively, I squeeze her to me. The midwife reaches out to take her, so I kiss her on the head and let her go. The midwife will do a blood test and promises to let me know and repeats that there is nothing to worry about. Then she rolls the bassinette out.

The tears start to fall even though I try to tell myself that everything is all right; I can't deal with it. It's as if I'm divided in two, sensible and down-to-earth Sunna who thinks logically and says there's no need to worry and then crying and sobbing Sunna, a complete nervous wreck. I don't intend to let this crybaby get the upper hand and blow my nose and dry my eyes. I reach into my bag and pull out the book that mom slipped in there and start to read. At first I need to force myself to concentrate, the lump is always forming in my throat, but I'm determined to swallow it and I clear my throat and read the two sentences again. Bit by bit the story takes me in and I lose myself in the reading.

I feel better after I've read for about an hour. I look at the clock and see that it's only eight-thirty. The days are altogether different here in the hospital compared to outside. Everyone I know sleeps late, except Amma Sigga, who always gets up at seven in the morning, both on weekends and weekdays. Everyone else snuggles down in bed and enjoys the fact that they don't have to get up for work or for school. Now I'll no longer be able to snuggle down in the mornings in the next months — or years.

It's too early to call Brynja or any of my other friends. But I can send them a text. I reach for my phone and turn it on. As soon as I do that I get a signal that I have unread messages. And not just one, a lot.

HAPPY NEW YEAR, Brynja has written at 12:32 on New Year's night. She hasn't forgotten me, even though she was out with Ari. WHERE ARE YOU???? She has asked at 2:27 on January second. She had just gotten out of bed, sleepy and sulky

because she had to go to a family party. I smile at the thought of Brynja screaming at the party when I called. She was happy; glad everything had gone well, but also ... surprised. All of a sudden the baby is born and it became real. She needs to get used to the idea. It's different for me. The birth itself is like a passage from what was to what is. I know that my baby exists. I felt her come out of me, wet and slippery, into the world, to me. And now I want her in my arms.

The midwife from this morning comes in and over to my bed.

"The blood test shows that the baby is quite jaundiced," she says. "She needs to be under the lights, possibly for a few days. But you mustn't worry, this is very normal. Many premature babies get jaundice, and even babies born at full term get it, too."

No worries. No, no. I'm not scared about her, not in that way, but I long to have her here with me. I long just to see her, touch her. I feel my uterus contract into a hard ball inside me.

I wipe my nose and get ready to read my messages again. Another one from Brynja, from last night. CONGRATULATIONS I FORGOT TO TELL YOU HUGS AND KISSES BRYNJA.

Then there's another message from a number that I don't have in my phone: SINCERE CONGRATULATIONS XXX STEINI.

How had Steini heard that I'd had the baby? Brynja doesn't know him. All at once I get the absurd idea that Steini and Biggi know one another, but then I figure out what has probably happened. Steini has either gone to my house or called there and got the news that way. He came on Christmas Eve; he could have also planned to wish me a Happy New Year. I answer him right away and thank him for the congratulations. Then

I write a message: DAUGHTER BORN 01.01.01, SUNNA and send a note to Anna, Tóta, Sigrún and all the others.

It's noon and I go to the dining room to eat. I'm finding it easier to move, but it's still like my body is not my own, rather it's one which I don't completely recognize.

The food isn't especially appetizing, some kind of mysterious stew full of boiled carrots. Boiled carrots are one vegetable that I don't like, so I push them to the side and pick through the meat and pieces of potatoes. The sauce is tasteless and runny. The woman who is in my room sits beside me and eats heartily. She smiles at me and introduces herself.

"I'm Guðrún," she says. "I'm going home tomorrow, and then you'll get a new roommate." We chat together while we eat and it comes to light that Guðrún had her fourth child. Four boys. I would say that she's the same age as Brynja's mom. She doesn't ask me how old I am, nor did I ask her. That doesn't matter here. We are just two moms.

I wash my face and comb my hair and put on my robe after lunch. Someone will definitely come to visit me. I now know for sure that the visits are limited to immediate family, so Brynja can't see the baby until we get home.

Sara hugs me long and hard when she comes. She has a big bag with a fantastic, warm and soft outdoor outfit, in pink, of course.

"You'll most certainly get all pink," says Sara, laughing. "And lots of dresses. That happens like crazy with a baby girl."

Sara can't see the little one now; she has to be under the lights all day. She tries to reassure me by telling me about all of the babies that she knows of that have had

jaundice. I walk with her down the hall when she leaves. It's good to move a little and I feel stronger than I did this morning.

We bump into mom, who arrives with her arms full of flowers.

"I could open a flower shop," she says, smiling triumphantly. She goes to put the flowers in water and then puts the vase on the night table beside my bed. The scent fills the room. There are red roses and these tiny little white flowers — bridal veil, they're called. I sit up in the bed again and mom sits on the edge of the bed beside me. She brings me more greetings from family and friends.

"Some boy called yesterday," she says and looks quizzically at me. "A very polite and nice boy. Thorstein, he said his name was. I told him the news."

Steini. Then he had called home, just as I thought.

"He's my friend from the choir," I say. I just hope I'm not blushing. Mom clears her throat and looks down at her shoes.

"Tell me...when your dad and I were leaving...the boy who was...was he coming to see you?"

"Yes, mom," I answer. And now I can feel that I'm blushing. "That was Biggi. He's the father."

Mom looks up at me quickly. She smiles and is obviously relieved.

"Then there is ...contact between you?"

I pause briefly. How should I answer this?

"We aren't together. Not that way. But he will be allowed to see the baby. To be her dad. To know her and so on."

Mom takes my hand.

“He is an extremely handsome boy, that’s not hard to see. And it’s good that he wants to take on some of the responsibility.”

Then she changes the subject and starts to tell me that afi and Amma Sigga plan to come at the end of the month and whether I thought that would be too soon for the baby’s christening. I find it hard to imagine what things might be like after a whole month, it seems so far off. But I know that mom needs to organize every little detail, and far enough ahead, and I agree to think about it.

“The priest needs to be contacted and we need to know who will be home when, I think that Magga and her family plan to take a winter holiday at the beginning of February...” Mom is on a roll. I see before me a huge party with cream cakes and wreath cakes and people spilling out through the doors. I hadn’t actually decided whether I wanted to have anyone at her christening. And then there’s the matter of her name.

“Your room needs to be thoroughly gone through,” sighs mom. “It has to be done before you come home.”

Yes, the room. I decide to find out whether the idea about the room exchange has been passed on and say carefully:

“Sara actually had an idea the other day. Regarding my room. It’ll be so crowded when the baby carriage is in there. She was wondering...whether you would change rooms with me.”

Best to let this be just Sara’s idea. It’ll maybe work better on mom. But she looks at me and seems not to understand.

“Exchange? Dad and I get your room?”

“No, of course not. I get the room downstairs, your work room.”

Mom looks at me with surprise and shakes her head firmly.

“No, no. That would be impossible. You would be so far away from us. That’s down in the basement.”

“It’s actually not the main part of the basement, but at ground level. It would be possible to put the carriage out on the sidewalk...”

“It sounds as if you and Sara have already decided this together,” mom interrupts, a little dryly, and stands up. She takes the bag with the malt pop and chocolate bars up out of her purse and puts it on the night stand. Then she asks me whether I want something to read or if I want some other kind of candy and promises to come tomorrow. Amma has invited them for dinner this evening.

I’m relieved when the bassinette is rolled in again so that I can breastfeed the baby. I notice that she works a little harder at sucking now, but she still loses interest quickly. I try stroking her cheek; that’s supposed to stimulate the sucking reflex, but she just murmurs as if she’s telling me to stop and leave her in peace.

“Sleepy head,” I whisper into her little ear. Then I try out some more names on her. All of the names that I thought were beautiful when I was little. Names out of books that I’ve read. Names of my friends. Names of family.

I wish that I was going to amma’s to eat as I walk down for dinner. The meat is fat and the sauce tasteless and of course there are boiled carrots. It’s hard to sit and I hurry and eat so that I can get up again. I hear the sound of the TV coming from the lounge. There’s some new movie on tonight since it’s the third of January, the beginning

of the month, but I can't guarantee that I'd be able to sit long enough to watch a whole movie.

I turn on my phone again and see that I've gotten quite a few more messages. My friends have sent congratulations with countless exclamations and questions, they want to know the weight and length and how it went and how I am. It takes me quite awhile to answer them all. I finally fall asleep in my robe, lying on top of the blanket, and I sleep like that until I have to give the baby back again later in the evening.

January 4th

The days drag on. I'm told that everything is going well, but the baby still needs to be under the lights a little longer. Maybe one more day. My breasts are becoming rock hard and swollen, the milk is coming in. But the baby still only sucks a little and I try to squeeze a few drops into her from my sore breasts.

"You'll see that this tastes good," I whisper to her. "Please, you just have to try it."

Does the milk really taste good? It's such a weird colour, thick and yellow. It's supposed to be like this. This is the first milk that the baby needs most. I try to tickle her on the soles of her feet, but she just yawns and is not impressed. Her eyes only open a crack and each time I can see that they are very dark, nearly black. Not at all blue like mom said all newborns' eyes are.

Later in the morning a doctor comes in with a whole team dressed in white behind him. Some are definitely students because they look like they should be in high school.

“Everything is fine here,” says the doctor and I don’t know whether it’s a question or statement. The team of white coats talks together about me and my baby, some of which I understand and some of which I don’t. Then the doctor asks whether I’ve had a bowel movement since the birth. I really want to answer that it’s none of his business. That’s quite the question! But of course that doesn’t matter and I answer yes.

It was, in fact, awfully hard to go to the bathroom the first time but...oh yes, have a bowel movement, as it’s called. It somehow feels all weird down there still, like it’s all inside out. I have a red-bottomed baboon in my mind that I saw at the zoo in Copenhagen. But I feel the changes in my body day to day; my stomach has shrunk even though it’s still looser and bigger than before, and I can move faster and sit for a longer time on a chair.

Guðrún is gone home with her boy and another woman is in the bed. She has twins who were born by Caesarian section and she still sleeps a lot. It must be strange to wake up after an anesthetic and find that you are a mother. I wouldn’t want to have missed the birth even though that would no doubt be difficult to explain to my friends.

“Wasn’t it awfully bad?” Brynja asked me on the phone yesterday.

“No,” I answered. “Not exactly. Not bad like when you hurt yourself. Somehow good-bad. Because the baby was coming and I felt it...”

“Good-bad,” groaned Brynja. “You’re crazy.”

I hear from the conversation in the dining room and the lounge that most women go home after two or three days. But I know it’s no use for me to think about going home for the time being. First the jaundice needs to clear up and then the baby needs to put on a bit of weight.

I don't expect any visitors until this evening and am sitting up in the bed with my robe over my knees, absorbed in my knitting when the door opens slowly and carefully. I assume that it's the husband of the woman in the other bed, he sits beside her most of the day. Because of that, I'm startled when I look up from my knitting and look right at Biggi, standing at the foot of my bed.

"Hi," he says and smiles. He hands me a bouquet of roses. Pink roses.

"Hi," I answer and sit up better, tuck my feet under me and slip under the blanket before I take the roses. I feel so naked in the shorter hospital gowns with just my robe over me. Biggi drags a chair up to the bed.

"Where is the baby?" he asks.

I tell him about the jaundice and the light therapy and try to assure him when I see the scared look on his face.

"It's nothing serious. It just sucks not to have her with me," I say.

He nods his head. Then he looks at me and smiles a little mischievously.

"I'm supposed to say congratulations to you from my folks. Mom is just starting to recover from the news that she's an amma," he says.

I'm not really ready to understand how some strangers are the grandparents of my baby. But I say thank you for the wishes.

"They really want to see her, of course," he continues. "But I said that you would decide when that would be."

But not whether it would be, I think. No, sooner or later they have to get to see the baby. It has to be that way. I take a deep breath and look at Biggi.

“Mom is planning some huge christening party,” I say. “In a month or so. Do you think... Do you want to come? And maybe them, too. Your mom and dad.”

“If you want,” answers Biggi, surprised. “Of course I want to. And definitely them, too. If you think it’s all right.”

Do I think it’s all right? Maybe it’s best to meet these people at a party, where there’s a lot of people. I have to meet them sometime. Show them the baby. I nod my head.

“I’ll let you know when it is,” I say.

“Have you decided on a name?” asks Biggi.

I look at him, a little surprised. Shouldn’t he also have been thinking about names? Why not? This is his daughter. Birgisdóttir.

“No,” I answer. “I’m thinking about it, but haven’t decided anything.”

“It has to be something beautiful,” he says. “Something special. Something that goes well with Sunnudóttir.”

Sunnudóttir? I look at him, surprised. He blushes.

“Of course I totally want her to be Birgisdóttir,” he says. “But Sunnudóttir is much better. More unusual. I’ve always thought that Birgir is such a common name.”

I smile at him. He has really been thinking about this.

“I hadn’t thought that far ahead about whose family name she should be registered under,” I say. “I’ve only been thinking about her given name. I don’t feel that it’ll do to just think and talk about her as the baby. And I also want her name to be really special. Something that suits her well.”

“You have enough time to decide that before the christening,” says Biggi.

“You can let me know, too, if something comes to mind,” I say.

“I’ll do that,” he says and smiles.

The door opens and the bassinette is rolled in. The light therapy is done today.

The midwife looks at Biggi and I in turn and then asks:

“Is this the dad?”

Biggi stands up and moves the chair so the bassinette can be put beside the bed. It is I who answers yes to the question. The midwife congratulates him and takes his hand. Biggi looks as if he’d rather sink down into the floor.

“Have you tried to hold her?” she asks and then takes the baby up out of the bassinette without waiting for an answer. She puts the baby in Biggi’s arms, who stands there and stares at the little dark head, as if he’s petrified. She winks at me playfully behind his back and goes out into the hallway.

Biggi stands silently for a long time with his daughter in his arms. Then he looks at me.

“Wow,” is all he can say. “How can anyone be so little?”

I laugh.

“Can you help me put her in the bassinette?” he asks.

“You can do it,” I say. “Just take care to support her head.”

Biggi moves super slowly and cautiously when he lays her down and carefully spreads the blanket over her. Then he looks proudly at me.

“Look,” I say. “You did it!” He smiles, leans over the bassinette and kisses the little head. Then he kisses me, too, on the cheek.

“Thanks,” he says, half dazed. Thanks for what?

“Thanks for the flowers,” I say. Then he leaves.

January 6th

We get to go home tomorrow! The light therapy has gone well and the baby is much better at nursing. I wait for her to wake up, wanting to eat, with my breasts full of milk, which leaks out as soon as I hear any noise from her. Then it's both bad and good when her little mouth latches on to my sore nipple and I feel the milk flow. Good-bad again. Brynja would never understand that!

I am so looking forward to mom's cooking again. All of these boiled carrots are driving me crazy. They are literally served with every meal. The cook here should write a book: Boiled carrots a thousand ways. Geez.

I'm also looking forward to seeing my friends and showing them the baby. Lilla is also going crazy, she's really looking forward to us getting home. Mom comes about midday with clothes for me to wear tomorrow and with a bag of washed and ironed clothes for the little one. I finished knitting the outfit yesterday and amma took it home to put the finishing touches on it and wash it.

I've already tried to bath the baby twice and it was much easier the last time. My hold on her is more secure now when I pick her up and lay her down and when I change her. At first I found her to be so tiny and fragile. Then, when I saw the much smaller premature babies in the incubators where she was having the light therapy, I suddenly felt that she was big and well-developed. And much more beautiful than all the other babies, of course!

When she's been drinking for a little while and has satisfied her hunger, she sometimes stops and looks at me. Her eyes are unbelievably dark and now that she's starting to open them more, I see how big and beautiful they are. Her eyelashes are also long and black and she has dark eyebrows, too. I look into the dark, endless depths of her eyes and whisper to her:

"Hi," I say. "I'm your mommy." Then she closes her eyes again and clamps onto the breast with her mouth and starts to suck. Her eyelashes lie like black butterfly wings on her soft cheek.

Her world isn't complicated yet. Sleep, drink. Be safe, warm, dry, clean and full.

I also felt that way during the last part of the pregnancy and just after she was born. As if we were in a little nest where there was no one else, just the two of us. But now the world closes in on us with all sorts of complicated problems, big and small. And tomorrow her world grows, too, as she goes home to our house and she gets to sleep in her own cradle.

January 7th

They are finished examining me and telling me when I have to come in for a check-up and the pediatrician is also finished examining the baby and gives her permission to go home. He was really pleased with her, she is drinking energetically and the jaundice is gone. He was a wonderful man who congratulated me on my beautiful daughter. Then he looked at me over his glasses and asked whether I would be living at home with my parents.

“You are very young,” he said. “It’s good to have support and help from your family. But you are her mother and above all, she is your responsibility. Or yours, as the parents.”

He put her into my arms again and said:

“Good luck, dear.” Then he was gone.

I take the baby clothes that mom has washed for me and start to prepare my little daughter for the trip home. She cries while I put the tiny little undershirt over her head and get her arms through the sleeves. She calms down when I take her and rock her a little while and she doesn’t fuss when I put her in the little white outfit that Biggi brought. It’s great to see her in these clothes instead of the pink hospital gown. The outfit is actually too long; the legs and feet dangle down below her little feet and I need to roll up her sleeves, but she looks so nice.

I lay her back in the bassinette while I put on my clothes, a black sweater and pants that I haven’t worn since last month. There’s a long way to go before I can wear my jeans from last summer, but I’ll get into the same size clothes as before. It’ll just take time.

I stand beside the window and wait for mom. In a little while we’ll be home. Home in my old room. Home, where everything is as before. Where dad, Lilla and amma wait, and probably Sara, too.

Mom knocks lightly on the door and comes in. She holds a baby car seat, a little quilt with a checkered pink cover and a bag with the outfit that I knitted. I say hi to her and then take the knitted outfit and hat and mitts from amma to put on her.

“Oh, may I dress her?” asks mom.

I hesitate a moment.

"I was looking forward to dressing her in the outfit that I knitted," I then say.

"You can put the rest on her."

I sense that mom is a little surprised, but she doesn't say anything, just accepts it and puts the hat on the baby when I'm finished putting the outfit on her. The little one only fusses when she's stuffed into the tiny little mittens. Then I put her into the car seat and mom helps me figure out how to do it up. I put on my coat, take my bag with my robe and the other stuff and look around me to see if I've forgotten anything.

The roses are still standing in the vases on the night table. Red roses from dad and mom, pink roses from Biggi.

"You should take them with you," says the nurse who comes in the door.

"Otherwise you'll be back here within a year!"

Mom laughs, half embarrassed, and I take the bouquets of roses out of the vases and wrap the plastic bag that the baby clothes were in around the stems.

"You can never be too careful," says the nurse, laughing. Then she leans over the baby in the car seat.

"Sweet Jesus, how can anyone be so cute!" she says. "May I just take her out into the hallway and show her off?"

I say goodbye to the mom with the twins, who is starting to recover and she smiles at what's going on in the hallway. I then get my baby, who is the centre of attention in the hallway, and say goodbye to the team in white and thank them.

"Did you knit this yourself?" asks one of the nurses.

"You have a tremendously energetic mom," she coos at the baby. I must admit that I am a little proud of myself. It's a good feeling to carry my daughter out into the world in clothing that I've made myself. With little help, actually.

"Good luck," says the midwife who passed the baby to Biggi and she holds my hand tightly. I can tell by the look in her eyes that this isn't just an empty wish.

Down at the entrance, mom puts the little quilt over the car seat before we open the door and walk into the cold winter day. There's a bluish light outside and soon it'll be noon. Behind us the door closes on the white world of the hospital.

Dad waits for us in the car on the driveway and he drives right up to the door when he sees us come out. Mom and I fasten the seat and get in one another's way in all our rush. Then we're able to shut the car door against the cold outside air, kiss dad and Lilla, who was allowed to come, buckle the belt and set off for home. I lift the quilt off of the seat so Lilla can see the baby and so she won't get too hot.

"Take care not to hurt the baby," says mom. It's suffocatingly hot in the car.

"She's so little," says Lilla, dumbfounded. "She's no bigger than my Babyborn doll." Then she smiles from ear to ear.

"She'll definitely fit in her clothes!"

I can't help but laugh.

"This is not a doll, Lilla dear," I say. "You can't play with her. She needs to grow a little before you get to look after her."

"I know that," says Lilla, feeling somewhat put out. Then she smiles again. "But in the summer she'll be big enough. Then I can go out with her in the stroller."

I'm not arguing right now. We are pulling into the driveway at home. Dad jumps out to open the outside door, but amma is there first and comes out on the steps. She must have been standing by the window waiting for us. I wriggle out, loosen the seat and lay the quilt over her again while we walk up the stairs and into the house.

The car seat is carried straight into the living room and set on the dining room table so everyone can gather around and admire the baby. I don't take her out of the seat or out of her outfit for a while. Mom runs to get coffee ready. Bread, slices of meat, cheese and fruit wait inside on a covered table. I find that I'm really hungry and sit down with the baby on my lap, wrapped in her blanket.

"Put her in the cradle," says mom. "You could spill coffee on her." She runs down the hallway and comes back with a wicker cradle on wheels, covered in pink checkered material. I put the baby in the cradle and have her within arm's length while I get myself a slice of bread.

"The cradle is very beautiful," says amma to mom, who beams with pride.

"But the other cradle, the one dad made," I ask in between bites. "Where is it?"

"It's in your room," says mom. "We thought it would be better to have two."

The doorbell rings and Sara joins the group. She has Aron Smári with her, who goes straight to the cradle and tries to climb into it. Sara lifts him up and shows him what's in it and he of course tries to grab the baby.

"Watch it now, don't let him near the baby," says amma, a little gruffly. Sara sits at the table and starts to shovel yogurt into Aron, who thrashes around in her arms. I pull the cradle close to me. He could knock it over if he tries to climb into it. The doorbell rings again and dad goes to answer it.

"Please come on in," I hear him say. Brynja appears in the doorway, says hello to everyone around the table and then hugs me. She looks into the cradle for a good while.

"God," she then says. "She's totally like..." She quickly falls silent and bites her lips, and looks at me with a guilty expression on her face.

"She is totally like her dad," I acknowledge and smile. "I know that."

Brynja is offered something to eat, but she says she has just eaten lunch. I finish the second slice of bread and stand up.

"Thanks," I say. "I'm going to go to my room and lie down with her; I'm a little tired."

Mom opens her mouth as if she's about to say something, but both Sara and dad look at her quickly as if they want her to be quiet. I don't understand what's going on. Doesn't mom want me to go and rest?

I push the carriage ahead of me down the hallway to the bedrooms and to my bedroom door; it's closed, which is unusual. Brynja is right on my heels and I notice that there's a commotion behind her. Now I understand. They've done something to my room, painted it or set up new curtains or something. Something that will surprise me. It's best to play along with it and pretend to be really excited.

But when I open the door I don't have to pretend.

I stand there, speechless, with my mouth open. My bedroom is gone. There's only a desk, empty bookshelves and a few boxes on the middle of the floor.

"Where's my room?" I ask then, like a complete fool.

Dad laughs behind me.

“Come, my dear,” he says. He takes my hand and leads me to the basement stairs. Now I begin to understand. But mom was against this. What happened?

I walk down the stairs with dad. The others all follow, mom takes the baby and carries her downstairs, wrapped in the quilt. Dad opens the door of the corner bedroom.

“Here you are, here’s the new home for mother and daughter,” he says.

I stand in the doorway of the room, like a stone, shocked. The room is freshly painted in a beautiful pale yellow colour. White, nearly transparent curtains let the bluish winter light in through the windows. My bed is made up with my old bedspread and the cradle that dad made stands beside the bed. The desk, the chair and the bookshelves fit perfectly at the other end of the room, and instead of my old clothes cupboard, a closet is built in on one wall. On my chest of drawers sits my old teddy bear and beside him is a vase with a big bouquet of yellow roses.

“Wow,” I finally manage to say. “How did you do this? When did you actually do it?”

“We could never have gotten this done without help,” says dad. “In fact, we didn’t come up with the idea to do it. It was your friend from the choir who contacted Sara and offered to help if you wanted to move downstairs.”

Anna. She is unbelievable. I take the baby from mom’s arms and lay her in the cradle. She wakes slightly and opens her eyes.

“She wanted so much to do something special for you,” says Sara. “So when I finished telling dad and mom about it...” She glances at mom. “That wasn’t easy, I’ll tell you; Anna got more kids together and they painted down here over two evenings and carried the furniture down.”

“Yes, and that boy, Steini, he helped me set up the closet,” says dad. “A very likeable boy. Quite handy. He could become an excellent carpenter.”

“Then they bought the roses for you,” says mom. “Steini brought them this morning.”

“It was good that you had to stay in the hospital so long,” says Sara, laughing. “Otherwise we never would have gotten this done.”

I sit on the bed and look around me. Then I look at mom and dad, Sara and amma, who stand smiling in the doorway.

“Thanks,” I say. “Thanks to everyone for everything.”

Mom puts the bouquet of roses that I brought from the hospital in a vase on the desk beside me and the scent fills the room.

They all go upstairs together and Brynja sits on the bed beside me.

“I wish I had known about this,” she says. “I would’ve helped. But Sara obviously thought that I wouldn’t keep it quiet!”

I lay on the bed. All of a sudden I’m so tired. Brynja sits beside me for a while and tells me all about school and the friends and the parties over the Christmas holidays and then sneaks out when my eyelids start to close. She lays the blanket over me and whispers that she’ll come again tomorrow. Then I fall asleep and the scent of the roses follows me.

I don’t wake until the baby starts to cry around three. I’ve just picked her up and lifted my sweater to feed her when mom comes downstairs.

“It’s all right,” I say. “She’s just hungry. Then I’ll need to change her.”

But mom wants to help me find a washcloth and diaper and she lays the change pad on the bed beside me. She worries, too, whether the radiator is hot enough and whether there's any draft in the hallway. Then she sits on the bed beside me and looks around.

"Yes, this will be just fine," she says. "Even though I must admit I would have chosen to have you both closer to me. But this room is bigger."

She runs her hand over the bedspread.

"I planned to buy a new bedspread for you before you came home," she says.

"This one is so worn. And it doesn't match the colours in here."

"This is fine," I say quickly. "I don't want a new bedspread."

The doorbell calls mom upstairs and I get some peace in which to feed the baby and change her without help. More company has arrived. It's Aunt Magga and her crew and I go upstairs to show them the baby and get kisses and congratulations and more gifts, a pink lace dress this time. And it's even from Magga, someone who is always so down to earth and practical. There's more coffee and amma makes crepes that Magga's kids devour before we know it.

February 1st

Today my daughter has a first birthday, of sorts. She is one month old. I don't understand how the time can pass so quickly and slowly at the same time, but that's how it's been this month. So much has happened, there's been so many visitors coming and going, complete with coffee and cakes and gifts for the baby. Still, the days are often long, and the nights, too, when I need to wake up and feed the baby and change her, so

sleepy that I have no perception of how much time has passed. I only hear the cry and know that she is hungry.

The first nights mom was at the cradle as soon as she heard the baby. I don't understand how she could hear the cry from up in her bedroom. But gradually she started to understand that I always picked the baby up and fed her so there was nothing she needed to worry about. She has also quit standing over me when I bathe her, like she did at first.

I'm not at all ungrateful that mom helps me so much. For example, she washes the baby's clothes and brings them to me carefully ironed and folded. I can put the clothes in the washing machine, too. I've been able to do it for many years. Although it's nice to have someone to do things for you, I feel sometimes that I'm a small kid again, domineered by mom. A small kid with a kid.

I'm really starting to look forward to going out. I haven't wanted to go out with the baby yet, she's still so little and it's the middle of winter. I don't want to wander around with her in the mall like I've seen some mothers do, with a tiny little baby in a carrier in a shopping cart. But soon I can start to take her out for a walk in the stroller. I really feel the need to get moving. I've only run out to get a little fresh air and mom looked after the baby while I was gone, but I didn't want to be away from her for too long.

The nurse who comes to the house to follow up on the baby is satisfied that she has gained weight. She's also awake more and lies in the cradle and looks around with her big brown eyes. Mom will not admit that her eyes are turning brown; she still thinks that all babies are blue-eyed in the first months. But I'm not colour blind and I see the

eyes that look at me and shift a little when they try to focus. They are the colour of dark brown velvet. Exactly like her dad's.

I take my daughter out of the bath, wrap her in a soft towel and dry her. Then I play with her a little bit before I dress her. It's so hot in the bathroom that I'm not afraid to let her kick around naked for a little while. She enjoys being free of the clothes, that's obvious. Then I put on her diaper and dress her in an undershirt and in a soft, red outfit. I brush her dark hair that often springs up in curls after her bath. Will she have curly hair like me?

Tomorrow is the christening. Mom has been standing on her head lately, cleaning and polishing and baking and amma also plans to bring a lot of cakes. Everything is getting ready, mom has even put the extra leaves in the table and covered it with a pink tablecloth. Pink tablecloth, pink napkins, pink candles. Pink is not my favourite colour, but I let it pass. It's mom who's putting on the party. Not me.

There is one thing, though, that I intend to decide myself. The name. I haven't wanted to let anyone know what her name is going to be; I just shake my head. It's not only because I want to wait to reveal it at the christening. It's just that I haven't decided yet.

Mom of course hasn't said anything, but I totally get the feeling that she wants me to name the baby after her. Kristín Sunnudóttir is okay, but still it's not a very special name. I want to find a name that is hers, only hers. Not a trendy name, like Telma or Tanja, or a foreign princess name like Victoria or Alexandra or anything like that. It can't be anything too weird or unusual either, otherwise it's likely that she'd be teased when she starts school.

In school. I look at my little baby, who yawns and lets her eyelids droop, happy and tired after the bath. Some day she'll start school. Some day I'll stand and watch her set off into the world with a big backpack on her back. Her name will be called out as she rushes to join her classmates; she'll wave to me, happy and content. Or maybe she won't want to let go of my hand, hold on tight and start to whimper. What will she be like? Is it me who controls who she becomes?

"Hello!" It's amma calling from the hallway. "Are the mother and daughter there?"

I put the little one in the wicker cradle and push her into the kitchen.

It's good to have the cradle up here because then I can always have her near me when I'm eating or watching TV or doing something else. Amma has started to take the cake boxes out of a big shopping bag. One, two, three, four.

"I baked a few cookies last night," she says smiling.

A few! There'd be enough for a whole army, and I know what follows; wreath cake, cream cake, crepes, ribbon sandwiches...

"Amma dear, how much do you think people actually eat?" I ask. "There are at most forty people, if the kids are counted."

"The kids gobble up the cookies and pancakes," says amma. "And your classmates from the choir can eat a lot, the boys anyhow. Teenage boys and cakes..." Laughing, she shakes her head and starts to make coffee. I sit on a kitchen chair.

"Amma, what was it like when mom was christened?" I ask. "Were you still at home?"

Amma doesn't answer right away; she finishes putting the coffee in the coffee maker and turns it on.

"Yes, I had the christening before I went south with her again," she says. "It was different then, no parties like today. Reverend Guðmundur came to the house and christened her in the living room. There was no one in attendance except for my brothers and sisters and my afi and amma. And mom and dad, obviously. Then there was just coffee afterwards. I seem to remember that there had been cream crepes with the coffee."

She sits on a chair beside me. Her voice is distant and she looks past me as if she can see the long ago events in front of her.

"Those were difficult days, right before I went south. Mom was offended because I didn't want to discuss leaving the baby with them. She, of course, had good intentions; she had worries of me living in poverty alone with the baby, and I was angry with her for having the idea that I could leave my baby. There were still a few hurt feelings from mom about the name. She thought that I owed it to her to name the baby after her.

Amma glances quickly at me and falls silent, as if she has said too much.

"Do you think I should name the baby after mom?" I ask.

Amma thinks for a moment.

"Of course she would be grateful," she says. "But you must, above all, choose a name that you are satisfied with, I think. Something that you find beautiful."

She looks into the cradle and smiles.

"And by that, I mean a proper Icelandic name. Nothing in poor taste, thank you!"

The doorbell rings and amma is quicker than I to react. I hear her open the front door and invite someone in.

"There's someone to see you," she says. I look up. Biggi stands in the kitchen doorway.

Amma takes his coat and hangs it up. Then it dawns on me that they've never met before. Just talked together on the phone.

"Amma, this is..." I start, but amma interrupts, smiling.

"It's obvious who this is," she says. "They are exactly alike, father and daughter."

Biggi turns quite red. I pity him standing there and I stand up and take the baby out of the cradle.

"Would you like to go into my room?" I ask. Biggi turns in the doorway and starts to walk down the hallway, in the direction of my old room.

"It's here," I say quickly and he follows me down the stairs into the basement, redder than before. Amma stands in the hallway. Nothing much gets past her.

"I moved downstairs," I explain and open the bedroom door. Biggi looks around.

"This is great," he says. He sits on the chair by the desk.

I lay the baby in the cradle. She's wet and a little fussy. I need to feed her soon. Biggi sits right at the edge of the chair as if he's not sure whether he should sit or stand. As if he doesn't know, in general, why he's here. I haven't seen him since I was in the hospital, but I called him a few days ago to tell him when the christening would be.

"She has grown," he says. I smile.

"That outfit that you brought for her will be too small soon," I say.

He straightens up and looks at me as if he's half scared.

"Does she need anything? Clothes or anything?"

I laugh.

“Come and look,” I say and pull out a box from under the bed. They are all gifts that I have yet to wash and put away. Most of the clothes are still too big.

Biggi comes and sits on the bed beside me. I lift the box up on the bed between us and show him what’s inside. Outfits and dresses, pants and sweaters, white and pink and red, nearly all the colours except blue. Velour and fleece and lace, wool and cotton.

“This is just what she’s been given,” I say. “Then I have a bunch of stuff from my sister Sara, too. And she’ll get more tomorrow. Christening gifts.”

“Yes, tomorrow,” says Biggi. Then he’s quiet. He’s not telling me that he doesn’t plan on coming to the christening?

“Mom sends her best and says thanks for the invitation. She wants...they want to know, of course, whether there is something that’s needed. I mean... a stroller or something. They can’t decide what they should buy for her christening gift.”

He grins. He’s obviously more relieved now that this message has been passed on.

“Mom has been beside herself for several days. She can’t decide whether she should come tomorrow,” he says.

I can’t help but smile at the thought of his mom being nervous. She who seemed to be so cold and sure of herself. This makes her seem almost human.

“We don’t need anything,” I say. “I have gotten so much, both loaned and given. It’s all here... except the name.

Biggi looks at me, surprised.

“Haven’t you decided on the name?” he asks. I shake my head.

"I only know what she shouldn't be called," I say. "She won't be named Kristín after my mom or Halldóra after amma..."

"Or Pálína after my mom," he says. We both laugh.

"Why not Sunna, after her mom?" he says and strokes his fingertips over the baby's cheek. She looks at him, her dark eyes wide open.

"Sunna is a beautiful name. And it means sun. She can definitely be named after the sun."

Sól. Sól means 'sun'. 'What proclaims the New Year's blessed sun'. I extend my finger to my little girl and her fingers clench it. The New Year's sun greeted her when she was born. Now I know what her name will be. I smile at Biggi.

"I know," I say. And I tell him her name. He is the first to know.

February 2nd

Christening day. Everyone is busy. Dad is picking up afi and Amma Sigga at the airport, mom is setting out the coffee cups. There is nothing in the fridge except cream cakes and ribbon sandwiches. Yes, there is a lonely container of yogurt in the corner. I eat it standing beside the kitchen table.

"Hurry up now and have your bath while the baby is asleep," says mom as she shakes the dust out of the pillows in the living room one more time. I obey her and hurry up; she's in control now.

I've just put on my robe and have a towel over my hair when amma and afi come through the door. They hug me and kiss me and then go straight to the cradle.

“She’s so beautiful,” says amma with tears in her eyes. Afi doesn’t say anything, just pats the quilt and turns away and blows his nose loudly.

The baby gets more gifts; amma has knit a sweater for her and a hat and afi slips me an envelope and says that I should put this in her bank book. After today she’ll have her own bank account. The first step in the grownup world.

The christening gown is ready, washed and ironed with a new pink bow. It’s the same gown that we were all christened in, the sisters, and then Aron Smári. Amma sewed it when Sara was born. I had nothing nice to wear, even though I’d lost a lot of weight these last weeks, but I just couldn’t think about wearing my black dress one more time. Mom ran out a few days ago and bought me a dress, which I didn’t like at first, but now I must admit that it suits me really well. It’s a simple cut, moss green and the colour goes well with my hair.

We get ourselves bread and coffee in the kitchen at noon and then we start to get ourselves ready. The guests arrive at two o’clock and mom rushes around, putting the finishing touches on everything before she gets dressed. Pink roses on the table, a crystal bowl with the christening water on a little table in the living room and candles in shiny polished candlesticks. I preferred to have the baby christened at home rather than going to a church with her in the middle of winter. She’s still so little.

The guests start to flock in as the clock strikes two. Kisses and hugs, thanks and flowers. The little one to be christened lies sleeping down in the bedroom. I don’t want to put her in the dress before the priest comes.

The kids from the choir arrive all at once. There are eight of them: the four who helped get the room ready, Anna, Hildur, Steini and his friend Bjarni, and then four whom I don't know as well. Two in each voice. They are singing at the christening.

Steini hugs me when he greets me and plants a kiss on my cheek, not shy at all. Then he greets mom and dad as if they are old friends. Dad pats him on the shoulder and thanks him for the last visit. The crowd moves slowly bit by bit from the front entrance, down the hallway and into the living room. The doorbell rings. It's the priest.

The priest is shown into a room where he can change his clothes and I go downstairs to check on the baby. She's sleeping and I can barely bring myself to disturb her so that I can put the dress on her. I listen for the doorbell. Biggi hasn't arrived yet.

The little one frowns at having been woken from her nap, but doesn't start to cry when I carefully slip the dress on her. It's way too big for her, but she still looks wonderful in a cloud of white tulle and lace. I tie the tiny little satin shoes on her feet, which are also too big, and definitely won't stay on her very long. The doorbell rings.

I try to make out the words from upstairs as I pick the baby up. Is this them? All at once Biggi stands in the doorway beside me.

"I found the right way this time," he says and smiles. We walk up the stairs together.

The people have all gotten settled in the living room. The older people sit on the chairs and the sofa, the younger ones stand. There is silence when they see the baby. The priest stands beside the christening bowl and smiles at me when I walk in with her. Biggi hesitates in the doorway. I look at him.

“Come on,” I silently mouth to him. We walk to the priest, where mom, dad and Lilla stand. She gets to hold the christening candle and beams with pride.

The priest nods his head to the singers who stand on the other side of the living room. The winter sun shines in through the windows behind them and paints their hair gold. Anna smiles at me as soon as they start to sing. They’ve rehearsed well. The sound is harmonious. And I know the voices, each of them; there is Anna’s soft alto, Hildur’s clear soprano, the deep and warm bass of Steini. ‘Hear creator’. I asked them to sing this, I think it’s so beautiful.

I feel a lump in my throat. If you are there somewhere, heavenly creator, I say. If you were with me when she was born, you must be here with me now. And always. Help me to look after her.

I look at the dark little head and again at the singers. Steini’s eyes meet mine, they smile at me. His lips form the words of the hymn:

... Come gently to me, your mercy...

Then the singers fall silent and the priest starts to talk. I barely hear what he says before he looks at me and asks:

“What is the baby’s name?”

He actually doesn’t need to ask because I told him on the phone last night. I had to let him know when the name was decided upon. The priest probably must be sure that the name is legal. The room is completely silent, everyone is holding their breath so that they can hear the name.

“Sólrún,” I say.

A light sigh goes through the living room. I look at Biggi over our daughter's head and he smiles slightly. I don't look at mom and dad right away.

Little Sólrún fusses when she feels the water on her head and cries a bit, but soon stops again so the priest doesn't need to raise his voice to be heard over her. The ammas dry their eyes when the Lord's Prayer is said and then sung. Oh tender Jesus, bless you. Anna sits at the piano and plays in the background. As soon as she starts to play the prelude, I hear the one thing that someone forgot to do in preparation for the party. Someone forgot to tune the piano. Anna quickly finds her bearings and plays very softly, and what's more, even leaves out the worst notes. Then the ceremony is over.

A hearty handshake from the priest, then congratulatory wishes and kisses. Everyone flocks to admire the baby. No, Sólrún. Dad and mom shake Biggi's hand and congratulate him. He mumbles congratulations in return. And then she stands in front of us, his mother. Or amma. Pálína.

"I offer you sincere congratulations," she says. "She is wonderful. And what a beautiful name."

"Thanks," I can only say. But mom appears at my elbow and takes Pálína's hands. There are smiles and congratulations on both sides. All at once I feel weak in the knees and sit in the arm chair with the baby in my arms. The kids flock around me. Anna is the only one who's seen the baby before.

Steini sits down on the arm of the chair and strokes Sólrún's little head.

"How can anything be so soft," he says.

I'm aware of someone standing beside the other arm of the chair and I look up. It's Biggi.

“Steini, this is Biggi, Sólrún’s father,” I say. The boys nod, Steini congratulates him. Is it my imagination, or are they eying one another suspiciously?

Dad clears his throat and invites the guests to please help themselves. I don’t feel like standing up, the baby is asleep in my arms and I don’t want to disturb her.

“Should I get something for you?” asks Steini as he stands up.

“It’s all right, I can do it,” says Biggi and hurries off. I find it hard not to smile.

Biggi brings me a plate full of ribbon sandwiches, cream cake, wreath cake and the crepes piled up on one another. I thank him and try to get the crepes that are underneath the sandwich and scrape the tuna salad and hard boiled egg off them. How is he supposed to know that I don’t eat anything with mayonnaise? I look around the living room where people are bringing their cups of coffee and plates and putting them down wherever it’s possible. Mom is still talking with Pálína and they seem to be getting on well. Afi has trapped Grímur in the corner and is interrogating him about his family history. Dad is chatting with Steini.

“Guðmundur,” calls afi right across the living room. “Did you know that Grímur here has family in Svarfaðardalur!”

I smile secretly and look down at the sleeping baby in my arms. All this is on account of you, I think to myself. No, all of this is on account of one evening. One night.

I put my plate on the coffee table and carefully stand up with Sólrún. Amma Sigga smiles at me.

“Is she sleeping in her christening dress, bless her,” she says. “That is a sign of good luck.”

And I turn away from the chattering and the rattle of coffee cups and go downstairs into our room to let my daughter sleep in a little peace and quiet.

February 5th

She should have been born today. The sun shines, the light is white and cold and almost too bright, but the sun is there. It gets higher in the sky everyday and gives a promise that spring is coming. I carefully tuck the baby in a sleeping bag before I carry her out and put her in the stroller that's standing on the outside steps. I'm going to take a short walk with her.

I button my coat right up to my neck even though the sunshine tempts me to dress lighter. But I must not get a chill in my breasts. I soon take off my hat and let the breeze mess up my hair. It's so good to be outside. The sun shines on the hat and the tip of the nose under the quilt. Sólrún sleeps quietly.

Now that spring is coming I can start to let her sleep out in the stroller. Then I can even start to look at my school books from time to time while she sleeps. Maybe I can take one or two courses from school. And mom has offered to babysit so that I can run over to choir practice. I think it's a little early yet, but maybe soon.

What will next fall bring? Will I be ready to put Sólrún in daycare all day while I'm at school? Do I want to leave her with someone I don't know? Mom can't quit work at the store to be with her. Maybe I can rely on amma to look after her. We'll see. It's still a long way off.

At this time last year I was in tenth grade. We were preparing for the standardized tests. It's like it was a hundred years ago. We toiled through the old tests

together, and went, shaking, into write the exams. Icelandic, math, Danish, English. Then life again according to the timetable. Recess, lunch, shopping trips, pop quizzes, essays, school dances, homework. Whispers about the boys. Giggles and glances. Who has a crush on who. No, that must have been a thousand years ago.

When I walk around the corner on the street, a car is stopped at the edge of the sidewalk.

“Hi! Is that Sunna?”

The woman at the wheel rolls down the car window and leans out. I don’t recognize her right away, but then I see that it’s Fanny who lived in the house next to us from the time that Sara was little. They sold it about a year or so ago.

“Hello,” I say.

“It’s good to see you, dear! I was in visiting Helga at number eighteen. Are you babysitting for your big sister?” she says and is nearly coming out of the car window to see into the stroller. Before I can say anything, she adds:

“No, Sara’s boy must be bigger. She doesn’t have another one?”

“No,” I answer. “She’s mine.”

Fanny’s silly smiling face falls at once in surprise. She has to swallow before she can speak.

“Yours?”

I smile sweetly.

“Yes,” I answer. “This is Sólrún, my daughter.”

Then I raise my hand to say goodbye before I turn my back on the gaping woman
and walk down the street with the stroller. Down the street where Biggi and I walked
hand in hand exactly forty weeks ago.