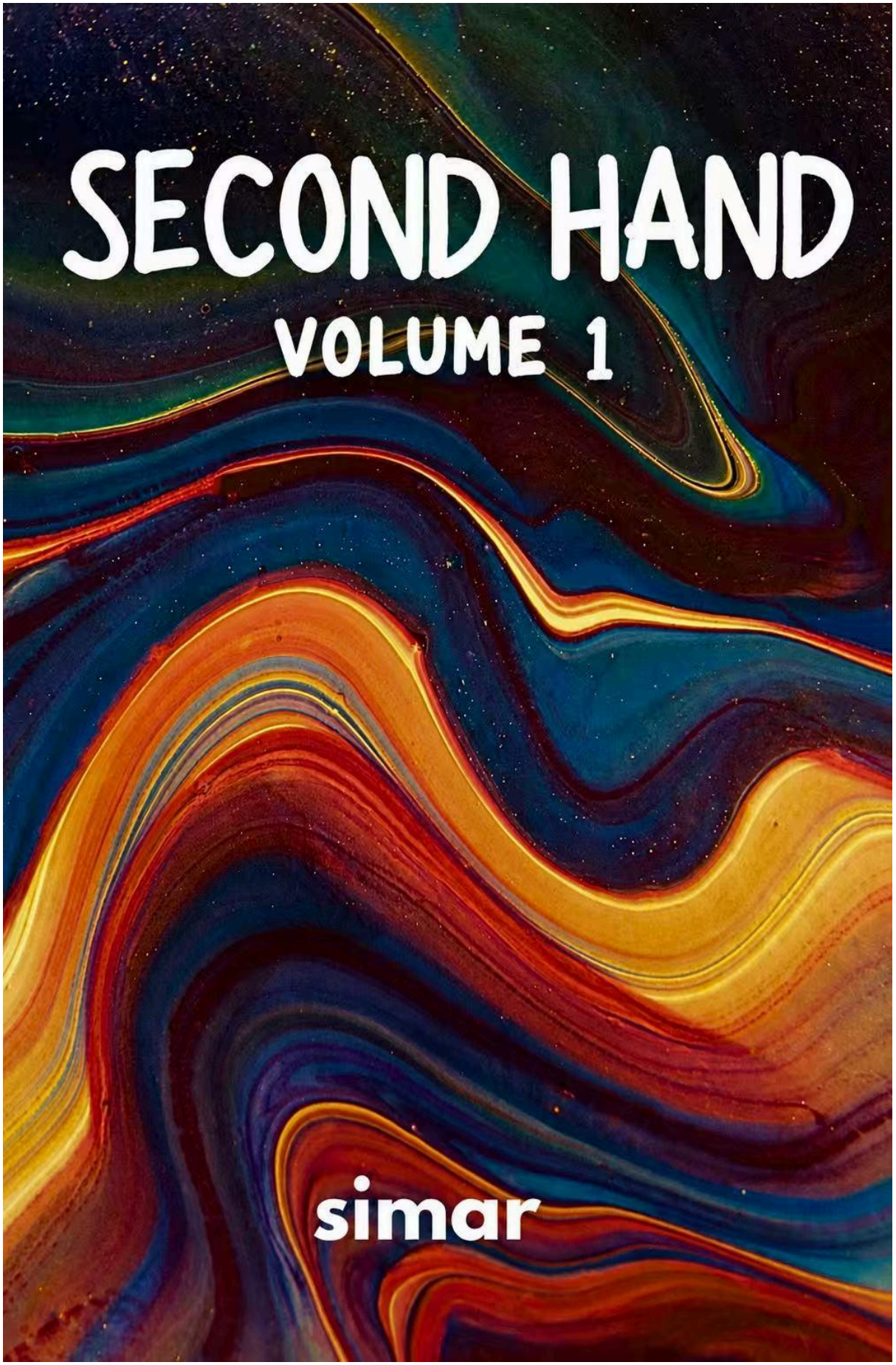
SECOND HAND
VOLUME 1
simar

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Written and translated by Simar.

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About the Author

Born in Armenia, Simar is a writer and English teacher currently living and working in China. With a professional background in education and a longstanding interest in literature and storytelling, Simar explores themes of humanity, identity, equality, and social responsibility through fiction.

Second Hand is the author's second book. The first explores the life of a chair that once served a Minister in the Ministry of Happiness, using the chair's perspective to reveal the events, people, and experiences surrounding the minister's life.

As a writer, Simar sees literature not merely as a form of entertainment, but as a means of encouraging reflection and opening new perspectives. The author's ambition is simple: if even one reader can see the world or another human being differently because of a book, that alone gives the work a meaningful purpose.

Through writing, Simar hopes to create stories that can continue to influence readers beyond the author's own lifetime—stories that encourage greater understanding, challenge discrimination and division, and contribute, however modestly, to a better world.

Foreword

"Second Hand" tells the story of a world where colours are not merely colours. They divide people, districts and even people's right to live. In this world exist invisible borders, closed zones and the Colour Guardians, whose presence controls everything: from people's movements to their chances of meeting one another.

Within this strange reality an unusual narrator emerges: a ball of yarn, which later becomes a sweater and begins to see the world not as an ordinary object, but as a living, mysterious reality. Through its eyes, the reader enters the world of Soyal and her granddaughter Ingrid, inside a house where scissors can fly, objects can come alive, and threads and colours weave stories.

Yet beneath this fairytale beauty lies a dangerous reality. Ingrid and her companions strive to understand the laws of their world, outwit the Colour Guardians and uncover the truth that could transform not only themselves, but the whole world.

Second Hand blends fantasy, mystery and the delicate drama of human relationships, exploring division and unity, freedom and control, memory and identity. Here colours may become borders, words, weapons, books

doorways, and an ordinary sweater the most unexpected companion in the tale. It carries the reader into a strange and enigmatic world, where colours partition land, set the limits of human existence, and the Colour Guardians uphold an order whose true meaning no one yet fully understands.

Sometimes, to change the world, it is enough simply to see it in a way others cannot.

What would happen if colours ceased to be just colours?

In this world, everyday objects can possess their own voice, memory and will. One of the story's most extraordinary companions is a sweater, through whose eyes the world unfolds with all its contradictions: beautiful, fairytale-like and unsettling all at once.

Ingrid's life changes the moment she begins to draw near to the secrets hidden within her home, her family, books and the surrounding world. On her path she meets people and creatures, each bringing new questions, new boundaries and new dangers.

I wish to state once more that Second Hand weaves together fantasy, mystery and philosophical reflection. It is a tale of freedom and control, memory and identity, division and connection.

When a world is built upon borders of colour, the most vital question may not be what colour you are — but who decides what colour you ought to be.

A Hope for the Screen

Perhaps every story begins with a quiet hope.

When I first began writing this book, I did not know where it would eventually lead. I only knew that there was a world inside my mind that demanded to be brought into existence — a world of mystery, colour, strange encounters, forgotten places, and questions that perhaps have no simple answers.

And now, as you hold these pages in your hands, I find myself carrying another hope.

I hope that one day, this story will leave the pages of a book and find its way onto the big screen.

I hope that its characters will one day breathe, move and exist before an audience; that its mysterious worlds will become landscapes, its impossible places will become sets, and the emotions hidden between these pages will become something that can be experienced together in a cinema.

Most of all, I dream that this story might one day travel far beyond the place where it was written — reaching audiences all around the world.

But a dream like this cannot travel alone.

If, while reading this book, you feel that it could become something extraordinary on screen, I kindly ask you to share it. Share it with your friends, colleagues, filmmakers, directors, producers, screenwriters, actors, cinematographers, artists, or anyone connected with the world of cinema. You never know where a single shared story might lead.

Perhaps it will reach someone who sees what I see.

Perhaps it will reach someone who can give this world a screen, a voice and a life beyond the page.

I am not asking you simply to recommend a book. I am asking you to help a story find its way.

If you are a filmmaker, producer, director, actor, artist, or simply someone who believes that this story belongs on the big screen, I would be genuinely honoured to hear from you.

You can contact me by **email, Instagram or WhatsApp-** **roland.simonyan91@gmail.com, simar_sta, +37441235056**

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my sister, **Anna Antonova**, whose help with the Danish texts was deeply appreciated. Her contribution became a meaningful part of bringing this story together, and I am grateful to have had her support throughout the process.

And there is still much more to come.

This is only the first volume. The journey does not end here. I am currently working on the second volume, continuing to uncover the world, the characters and the mysteries that began in these pages. I will do everything I can to complete it and release the second volume **within the next six months**.

And perhaps, one day, somewhere in a cinema far from where this journey began, the lights will go down, the screen will come alive, and the first scene of this story will begin.

Until then, the story remains here — waiting for someone to open the door.

Thank you for reading. And thank you for helping the story travel.

Second Hand

"*'God morgen Ingrid*[1]*.*" Did you sleep well? I've sewn new pillow-cases from the scraps Del brought. You probably haven't noticed."

"God formiddag bedste[2]. I slept wonderfully. Even if we'd still had the old pillow-cases, I would not have felt any difference at all."

"As I see, you didn't notice the change either."

"Yes, *bedste*[3]. I slept really well. We sat for ages at the sewing-machine last night, and you kept me hard at work. Hand-sewing techniques are my favourite subject of all. I have always longed to learn them."

"I believe our time is coming, Ingrid. Man ved *aldrig*[4]. We must master every skill that connects in any way with the local neighbourhoods. Tomorrow Del will bring more scraps and the thread we need. For what we already have is poor-quality, and we seem to be running short besides."

"Bedste. We must do everything to make an early start. Only a handful of days remain until Christmas."

"Yes. We must hurry, so we can launch our plan before the appointed day. Everyone will be occupied with the festivities, and that will give us the perfect opportunity to operate unseen."

"Åh Gud[5]. We still have so much work ahead of us together. There is a great deal to learn, and no end of things to refine."

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[1] *Danish: Good morning, Ingrid*
[2] *Danish: Good morning, grandma*
[3] *Danish: Grandma(spoken)*
[4] *Danish: You never know*
[5] *Danish: God help us*

"Bedste. Only do not start going on again about my caution. *Jeg har det som blommen i et æg*[6]. Your explanations and your stories forged from life-experience have taught me never to trust anyone."

"I trust only you among all these colours, Ingrid. And this is not merely a matter of trust. Why do you suppose that is your only weakness?"

Ingrid fell silent, like a helpless, wounded beast. She understood that having one of her vulnerabilities pointed out could very easily become Soyal's key to listing her remaining flaws one by one and dragging them all into the open. So she assumed the posture of a meek, compliant listener, determined not to give ground to the older woman's observations.

Ingrid and Soyal went on to converse over several quite different subjects, yet I could no longer hear them. I was trying to come to terms with my own displacement. Only yesterday I had still been in Del's workshop, gathered together with countless other spools from various workrooms. Soyal had come to Del's workshop, carefully inspected the spools and threads, though she did not stop there. She bought several pillow-cases and bed-linens as well, then fell into a warm conversation with Del. It was plain to see they were long-time acquaintances, perhaps even friends. Once the transaction was complete, I ended up inside a cloth sack supplied by Del, placed in Soyal's car. And now I have arrived at Ingrid and Soyal's home. I presume they are grandmother and granddaughter, for the age gap between them is quite striking. Besides that, Ingrid kept addressing Soyal as *"bedste"*.

At first glance, I must say I am very taken with their house and the atmosphere within it. There is a kind of quiet calm that had been absent from Del's workshop. The constant coming and going of people there had been inexplicably draining. Here, by contrast, an unusual stillness hangs over everything, with only two people present: grandmother and granddaughter. Yet it seems that is not all. This house holds other inhabitants besides Soyal and Ingrid. Suddenly my eyes fell upon more spools, and the sight filled me with delight. I am not alone. But I wonder how long these spools have sat lined up upon the shelves. Can all spools communicate, living a secret reality hidden away from humans? I could lose my mind over this wealth of colour. I had never seen such a vast selection of shades even in Del's workshop. It is enough to drive one mad. What on earth have Soyal and Ingrid been doing with all these thread spools? I began to examine my surroundings, wondering if perhaps they were making scarves, jumpers or other garments from us to sell.
Yet apart from a few rough sketches, I could still make out almost nothing within this neatly-kept combined workroom-bedroom. Ingrid's clothes and personal belongings were arranged across different parts of the room. Her workroom-bedroom was rectangular. Right beside the room's single large rectangular window stood her bed, dressed with very neat, colourful bed-linens. From Ingrid's clothing and the objects dotted about the room, it was plain to see she loved bright, vivid colour. She lowered herself half-sitting onto the bed, let her feet hang down, and slipped on her fur-lined slippers.

Then she yawned and stepped towards the wall to the left of the bed. Scissors were fastened along almost the entire length of this wall, fixed to some huge wooden board that resembled a display panel. Most of the scissors hung upon this board, some upside-down, some tilted, others half-turned. They came in all sizes, with handles of differing hues. From a distance they looked as though they were mounted

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[6] *Danish: I feel perfectly at ease*

securely, yet not a single one was held in place by any fastener at all. Each floated in its own little allocated space. Yes, these were scissors suspended in mid-air, ready to serve at any moment, should Ingrid merely stretch her hand towards their panel. Which of them would hurry to answer her call, though, was far from clear to me.

Suddenly Ingrid reached for the smallest of the scissors. She brought it up to the nail of her left index finger, snipped at something, then slipped her fingers free from the scissor loops and let it drift away. It flew back towards the board, settling exactly into its original spot.

Right in the centre of the room, standing in open space on all sides, was an unusual table, more like a workbench fitted with shelves and racks of varying heights. Some were builtin, others attached externally. The shelves and racks were crammed full of countless sewing and dress-making supplies: threads, needles, thimbles, measuring tapes, sticks of coloured chalk and tailor's soap, metal and plastic rulers.

The numbers on the metal ruler were not laid out in sequence; they were jumbled all over. The plastic-looking ruler bore no numbers whatsoever, yet its whole appearance suggested it was not merely a scrap of plastic, but a proper measuring tool. When Ingrid picked up the metal ruler, I watched the jumbled numbers swiftly rearrange themselves like people lining up, falling into perfect numerical order. It turned out they had never truly been disordered in the way I had imagined.

From one of the shelves she pulled out several blank sewing samples, mounted onto some thick material. Ingrid glanced all around her, as if searching for something. All at once, the shelf upon which Ingrid's gaze had rested moments before slid open. From it she took out a medium-sized box holding green and yellow needles. She examined the thickness of each needle and selected a yellow one measuring ten to twelve millimetres across. Setting the needle beside the blank sewing sample, she began to sort through various spools of thread of differing quality. She picked up size-forty thread; judging by its gauge, she was clearly preparing to work heavy-weight fabric.

Nearly everything inside Ingrid's bedroom was vividly coloured. Objects would appear in her hands with almost uncanny speed. She scarcely needed to exert any effort to grasp a tool; they floated through the air, glowing with their own bright hues. I had only been inside Ingrid's room so far, yet I was already growing fond of the house. There was a certain coldness within the walls, despite the abundance of rich-toned objects scattered everywhere. I could not say exactly where this chill came from, but alongside all the colour, I sensed a breath of sorrow clinging to the walls and furnishings. It felt as though these serviceable objects moved against their own will, each imprisoned in its own timeless cell, condemned for all eternity.

I watched the table from one of the cabinet shelves, level with its surface. This was, you might say, my vantage point. The cloth sack still covered my rounded form. I was not truly restless or afraid — or at least that was the impression I tried to give the other spools beside me. I hoped I would soon make friends with them, assuming we remained intact as we were. I had no doubt I had been bought from Del's shop and brought here for some definite purpose. One thing alone was certain: I would become part of some garment. How, when, and to what end, I thought, was too soon to know. People did not simply buy thread from sewing workshops for no reason. We were not lengths of canvas, to be displayed as art to decorate people's homes.

"Ingrid, could you help make breakfast? Would you do a bacon omelette, for instance?"

"Det gør ingenting[7]*."* You know full well I can cook anything, Soyal.

Suddenly they both laughed aloud, Ingrid from within her room and Soyal out in the passage beyond the door.

"Dedste. Shall I make some of your favourite pasta perhaps?"

"Who on earth eats pasta for breakfast, Ingrid?"

"Very well. Let me carry on with the tacking for a little while longer and then I'll come. All right, *bedste*? It's coming along so nicely. I'm just worried about that transfer-stitch technique we learned yesterday."

"And where exactly is your difficulty?"

"Soyal, I think I'm mixing it up with cross-stitch. I remember you said the transfer stitch is used for shifting symmetrical seams across."

"You remember that part perfectly. I cannot see why you are fretting over it."

"Wait, let me go over it again, Soyal. The transfer stitch is worked from the wrong side of the main fabric."

"There you go again, the wrong side. That is where you started confusing it with cross-stitch. Remember: transfer stitch is simply tacking stitch with straight stitches. What you just described is a cross-stitch. *Du behøver ikke og gøre mere end det*[8]. I think you ought to rest, so you do not muddle the stitches you have already mastered with these new ones."

"Hand-sewing techniques come to me only with some difficulty, Soyal. But what can I do? I love them."

"Your mother loved them too, Ingrid."

It seemed to me — or perhaps it was quite real — that Ingrid did not care for her grandmother's mention of her mother. She slowly closed her eyes, and when she opened them she looked away towards something else. If one were to translate the expression on her face into words, it would have amounted to something like: Can we please not speak of my parents? Presumably Soyal noticed her granddaughter's troubled mood and did not press the subject further. Soyal had spoken of Ingrid's mother in the past tense. I could only suppose either that her mother was no longer alive, or that Soyal was using past tense phrasing as a way of speaking of her being far away.
I remained in the room and continued to observe my surroundings after Ingrid left and closed the door behind her. Ingrid owned such a great many coloured pencils and house-plants; her pencils lay scattered everywhere. The vacuum cleaner jutted messily out from under her bed, yet it caused no disturbance, much like a lonely toy

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[7] *Danish: no trouble at all*
[8] *Danish: There is no need to overdo it*

pushed into a child's corner, troubling nobody. The shelves upon which my fellow spools and I rested functioned almost like a vast wardrobe in their own right.

Kom nu![9] Can one truly be this utterly captivated by vivid colour, as Ingrid is? *For resten*[10]. Even Ingrid's socks were brightly coloured, visible through the half-open shelving.

I had settled comfortably atop the largest piece of furniture in the room. Small chairs stood in the corners, painted in tones of blue, green and pale yellow. Hanging all across the walls were pictures that at first glance appeared to depict suffering and pain. Yet I noticed something strange: the images shifted and transformed within their frames. I wondered whether the defect lay with my eyesight, but it seemed not. I was not imagining it. The motif that appeared most repeatedly was fleets of multicoloured buses, endlessly in motion. I realised I had stumbled into a place steeped in enchantment. I could scarcely bring myself to utter the word magic. Everything felt so real and yet so uncanny all at once, leaving me unsure what to believe — what my eyes beheld, or my inner senses. Reality and illusion had blurred together.

A quiet unease lingered within me, yet from all I could gather, they meant me no harm. This was my first time inside a house brimming with such sorcery. What if none of this was magic, but the result of revolutionary new technology? No, that could not be. As far as I knew, flying scissors had not yet been invented. Well then, better not to fixate on it and overburden my spool-mind. Caution is a virtue, when it springs from foresight rather than fear.

Right beside Ingrid's bed stood a rocking chair holding several spools. They huddled modestly against one another, whispering amongst themselves. Though I was newly arrived among their ranks, not one of them so much as glanced in my direction or paid me any attention. Each spool conversed only with its nearest neighbour. We came in every conceivable hue, just like every nook and object throughout Ingrid's room. It was as though the subjects they discussed were also varied and diverse, shaped by colour. From the left and right sides of the room, fragments of the spools' many different conversations drifted to my ears.
Hour by hour, I was coming to understand that if any one of these colours were absent, something vital would unravel. Nobody had told me this, yet an inner feeling persistently compelled me to think so, thus thoroughly had I been captivated by Ingrid's riot of colour.

The wall-mounted clock became the summation of all my day's astonishment, etched deep into my mind to remain there. It held seven large hands and seven small ones, paired together to share the very same hue. To gaze upon the clock for the first time was unsettling. Where the hands crossed one another, illusory eyes would appear from a distance. These would gradually dissolve as the hands drew apart, only to meet other hands soon after, conjuring fresh eyes and stares. Not a single hand aligned with any other; each pointed to its own distinct number. Ingrid's room was profoundly strange, yet most remarkable of all was that I found myself enjoying it. "*Velkommen til det lille mirakelhus*[11]*"*, I said to myself, and noticed the spool sitting right beside me began to observe me with curiosity.

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[9] *Danish: Oh, never mind. Come on, it's fine*
[10] *Danish: While I think of it*
[11] *Danish: Welcome to the little house of wonders*

While I tried to focus on the clock-hands and work out what time it might be, Ingrid and Soyal re-entered the room. They were restless, or perhaps exhilarated; neither could hold still in one position for more than a few seconds. Soyal tried to steady her pacing around the worktable, yet this did little to conceal her surge of excitement. Ingrid appeared more anxious than enthused. Their unease was plain to see, though the manner in which they showed it was sharply different.

Soyal wore black trousers and a white jumper. Her hair, half-grey and half-black, was tied back in a hair clip. She had round eyes, and altogether her features were soft and expressive. Her fine, graceful eyebrows heightened whatever emotion played across her gaze. Furrows would form on her forehead only when she spoke of something that astonished her greatly, yet those lines were not pronounced enough to lend an air of old age to this composed woman. Despite her considerable, venerable age, Soyal still possessed very long, thick hair. She spoke with such measured deliberation that, regardless of her actual words, one instantly felt inclined to agree and do exactly as she said, in the order she gave. There was an inexplicable calm in the timbre of her voice, and at times even what sounded like a faint whisper, more akin to quiet wariness. She radiated mental and emotional serenity even through her ordinary movements. A thought crossed my mind: was she always like this, or did she have some motive for maintaining this slightly unnatural composure? She was never hasty with her speech. When she talked, she never broke-off mid-sentences to chase stray passing thoughts. Beyond syllabic stress, she placed emphasis on whole words, lending her speech force and clear purpose. Every sentence had one or more pivotal words around which she built her ideas. She did not mumble or slur a single letter; she spoke in smooth, unbroken breaths, without gasping or faltering. Her voice was wonderfully pleasant to hear.

Ingrid had seated herself upon her bed, while Soyal perched on the edge of the rocking chair — not sunk deep into its back, nor balanced right on its rim, but positioned precisely at its centre. The spools resting gently upon the rocking chair immediately fell silent, showing signs of unease. Yet Soyal had no intention of sitting down and crushing them. She bore her weight on her left foot, leaning her torso to the left, resting her right knee against her left, and spoke to Ingrid in this half-angled stance. Her gaze was steady, shifting from Ingrid to the wall where the paintings hung. There were four pictures upon that wall in total, yet I had the impression Soyal was waiting for something, expecting a response from them. Time and again throughout their conversation, she looked toward the paintings with an expectant, watchful bearing.

"We must finish what we began many years ago, together with your mother and father, Ingrid. You take after your parents greatly. You are as clever as they were, calm-tempered and patient, which is of great importance to the work we have undertaken. You are very capable, and your interests too mirror those of your parents."

Soyal praised Ingrid carefully, yet her words held a note of caution, as if leaving space to imply that Ingrid was still untested. I noticed Soyal spoke Ingrid's name twice within her address, affirming her granddaughter's significance. I believe any listener hearing their own name repeated like that within such a short exchange would feel their own importance acknowledged — even I, who was not Ingrid, could sense it. Soyal also repeated the word *"interests"*, perhaps to avoid piling on unnecessary phrasing concerning Ingrid's parents. For, as I had observed, Ingrid was highly sensitive to any discussion touching upon them.

"Ikke den skarpeste kniv i skuffen[12]. You will surely become skilled, and grow hard-headed in many matters."

Ingrid listened to Soyal's speech calmly, one might say unblinking. As she spoke, Soyal offered advice to her granddaughter, telling her that she did well to keep eye-contact with whoever she conversed with.

"Remember this, Ingrid. You must always look at the person you are speaking to — at the very least their face, if not straight into their eyes. The tone of your voice ought to be steady, yet clear, and at times carry a note of quiet insistence that feels compelling rather than commanding."

Ingrid bore herself exactly as she was told.

"Not everyone is gifted with such a perceptive gaze. The sharp outline of your eyes will serve you well, softening whomever you speak with."

Soyal spoke without expecting replies from Ingrid; it was almost a monologue. Yet every single word was absorbed meticulously by the girl. She addressed Ingrid's flaws with care, pointing them out only indirectly. Most striking of all was how smoothly she would shift from shortcomings to strengths, as if to gracefully smooth over the criticisms she had just voiced. Her craft, though, was more refined than one might at first perceive. If you listened closely to her compliments, you would notice they implied Ingrid had not yet mastered those qualities. The sharp outline of your eyes will serve you well, softening whomever you speak with. On the surface this sentence sounds like praise for Ingrid's existing strengths. Read carefully, however, and you realise Soyal says it will serve you well. She does not state that Ingrid already succeeds at this now. It will help her once she begins to wield, or learns to wield, that penetrating gaze. What mastery. What a magnificent gift for framing one's thoughts.

"It will soon be roughly one year for you now, that we have been working towards all of this. And for me…"

A deep breath followed Soyal's words, then a pause. It felt so natural that I wondered whether it was genuine, or a rehearsed, calculated part of her lesson.

"Sår den ged barberet,"[13] Soyal said.

"Surely, *bedste*. Do you think I am ready already?"

It seemed Ingrid had long waited for Soyal to say this. Her astonishment was unmistakeable. Her blue-grey eyes lit up so beautifully that Soyal's cold composure shifted abruptly.

"Yes, Ingrid. Your mother and father would have been proud to see you now. We have nearly finished mapping the bus stations. Only the green and violet stations remain for us to examine in greater depth. The districts your parents once travelled through will, I suspect, have been altered. Still, I shall pass all the information I possess on to you. Though only when we visit those particular districts. Look, now."

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[12] *Danish: You are neither the cleverest nor the most experienced*
[13] *Danish: The mission is accomplished*

Abruptly, three more similar pictures appeared beside the ones already hanging on the wall, two of them tinted in greenish and violet hues. So the pictures in this room could manifest at will. This truly was a house that hunts wonders. My bewilderment kept growing. I found myself wishing that once I was woven into some piece of clothing, I might stay here, in Ingrid and Soyal's home — if indeed this place could even be called a home at all.

Soyal had shifted into a different tactical mode in their conversation. Their talk swung between intimate exchange and practical business matters. In this way she was trying to mentally prepare Ingrid for some important task that lay ahead, for her counsels read more like directives. I could not fathom exactly what Soyal was planning, or what end she hoped to reach. Yet one thing was plain: a very serious assignment awaited Ingrid.

"Look at the paintings, Ingrid. Within them you see real-life reflections taken from different parts of the districts. I want you to find their similarities and differences on your own. Try to work it out independently, for when you step into the real domain depicted by each of these pictures, you will have to navigate your tasks by yourself. No matter how clear and purpose-driven your visit may be, this visual exercise for your eyes will serve you well once you enter the actual spaces of those districts. You have never set foot anywhere but the Red District in your life. These paintings will act as your guide. Study them as often as you can throughout each day."

Once more Ingrid stayed silent, yet her breathing was noticeable, audible.

"Remember, Ingrid. The most vital thing is regulating your breath and respiration. When you speak, your voice must never rise away from your lower abdomen, driven by emotion up into your chest or throat. You must feel air and voice present equally across all three places I have named. Your conversation partner should perceive nothing but calm in your speech. Anxiety and fear will serve you poorly. Bear this in mind: if you follow my instructions, your shifts between states of mind will remain as manageable as possible."

"Der er ingen grund til bekymring."[14]

As she gave her advice, Soyal embodied every precept she laid down. I do not think she even needed to demonstrate or lecture. It felt as though she simply lived her life by the very bearing she described. I waited impatiently for the instructional training to end, hoping Soyal would drop her tutor persona. Gradually, though, I understood she was not performing a part at all. This was Soyal: elegant and cultivated, kind and seemingly cruel, innocent and cunning, fearless yet apprehensive.

I suspected I still had a long way to go before I would truly grasp where I was, and what lay in store for me. Ingrid seemed as one preparing for a long, distant journey. Soyal remained in the room, her gaze fixed upon the fourteen-handed wall-clock, while Ingrid stepped outside, smoothing her hair as she went.

"Ingrid, you may smoke inside your room, if that is why you are leaving."

"No, *bedste*. I shall quickly take a bath and return, then we will have breakfast."

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[14] *Danish: There is no cause for concern*

"Nu skal vi hygge[15]*.* I need to clear my thoughts a little."

After those words, Soyal switched on the gramophone. The track *"niels windfeldt-smil gennem tårer"*[16] began to play, and she started to drift and turn about the room in a swaying motion. It seemed there were tears in Soyal's eyes, yet alongside them lay a cold, almost callous indifference. From time to time she stroked and gathered her long hair with her slender fingers, as though tense over something — or rather, as though she were waiting for something.

Suddenly she began to talk quietly to herself.

"Ah, Ingrid, Ingrid. You think I do not understand that you do not care for me. "Do not care for" is putting it gently. No, I do not wish to think you hate me. Perhaps our cause has turned me cruel and monstrous over time. Yet in my own eyes I remain Soyal, who fights for everyone and for justice. You know that well enough, Ingrid; we too love justice and equality. It is only that in life priorities must be ordered according to urgent necessity. The necessities I have laid out may have disrupted the course of your life and brought about fateful turns. Still, the greater purpose — which we too uphold and defend — must be fulfilled, even at the cost of my own life.

I cannot lay all my cards bare before you, Ingrid. The weight of guilt I bear, waking each day with it, is a burden I alone must atone for, even if I must sacrifice myself as so many did back then. Forgive me that I lack the courage to speak the whole truth. If one day you grow enough to learn it for yourself, then I shall have won once more. That will give me cause to take pride: that my schooling raised you fittingly. Is it not true that for a teacher, to be surpassed by one's pupil is the very mark of that teacher's success?"

One could only marvel at Soyal's powers of expression. I grew increasingly convinced that an unrivalled, exceptional orator dwelt within this house, steeped in dark and sombre histories. Every thought she voiced was clear and comprehensible; she never spoke aimlessly. If one were to analyse her words, first and foremost one would note the sharp clarity of her ideas and the deliberate purpose behind her speech. Her thoughts were always substantial, shaped by meticulous planning and underpinned by solid logic. She possessed a distinctive Soyal-esque stylistic voice. And what struck me most, plain for anyone to see, was the architecture of her speech: transitions glided smoothly from one point to the next, well-grounded and never rambling. Exactly how she accomplished all this deserved a study all of its own.

Soyal's voice carried an inner force that inspired deference in her listener rather than fear. The pitch of her timbre aligned perfectly with the stresses she placed. Her speech maintained an even tempo, without rushing or unnecessary drawn-out pauses. Especially her consonants rang with a distinct Danish articulation, where noise over-rode pure vocal tone — a testament, I thought, to her flawless enunciation. I wondered whether Ingrid practised articulation exercises at all.

Most vital of all, and the finest seasoning that made her speech flow so smoothly and persuasively, were her gestures. Even when alone with herself, with the delicate, long fingers of her pale hands she knew precisely when and what sweeping motions to make, so her words landed upon their intended recipient at exactly the right moment and with exactly the intended meaning. Her masterful bearing drew my attention

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[15] *Danish: To have a little pleasant respite*
[16] *Danish: The singer Niels Windfeldt's song, Smile through Tears*

completely away from the substance of what she said. I even forgot the very thoughts she spoke aloud. I watched her utterly captivated, absorbed by the ethereal presence she projected.

Abruptly, Soyal turned with a sharp movement, fixing her gaze on every moving object in the room, as if in rebuke. It felt as though she were threatening these moving things, forbidding them to talk and repeat her private musings to Ingrid. Yet was there someone here in the room who would remember every word she had spoken?

Then unexpectedly she went on, half-voiced to the empty air:
"You will love me once I have reached my goal, Ingrid. I am not cruel. I am not evil. I merely want equality to return. I am only searching for the fragments of my shattered dreams, so I might piece them back together again. I must free people from their suffering."
One could feel from Soyal's words that two opposing forces waged a battle within her. One was driven by a noble purpose, for the welfare of all. The other had chosen her own granddaughter as a weapon to attain that purpose — a choice that seemed to have stripped Ingrid of her natural right to be a free-willed person. I had only known them a short while, yet I could sense chains fastened around Ingrid's neck. I do not know whether it was easy for Soyal to live torn by these contradictory feelings. Still she lived with them, and still she related to Ingrid, or so my hasty deductions told me. She spoke of a shattered dream, and beyond her goal of bringing equality to human relationships, there were personal motives she kept hidden from her granddaughter.

Everything grew more intriguing by the moment. I longed to know all I could, as quickly as possible. For I might yet be taken away from Ingrid and Soyal's house, or end up stored away in some cupboard, as had happened to me many times back at the Del's workshop.

"Det ser ud til du hygger dig uden mig."[17]

"Why, Ingrid. Have you finished so soon? Come, wait, I will turn the music down."

"Yes Soyal. I never cared for loud music in the house."

Soyal cast a pensive gaze into Ingrid's eyes, studying her granddaughter's preoccupied bearing with piercing insight, then walked over to the window, as if not hearing her complaint about the loud music.

"Come and look outside. "Hvordan *er vejret i dag? "Det sner." Nyd din fridag!*"[18], Soyal said.

"Yes Soyal. While we have not yet begun, we ought to savour all of this."

Ingrid's words were uttered under the heavy weight of sorrow. They stood side-by-side, watching the snow swirl and fall. Strange, pleasant sensations travelled along my entire spool-length. I believed they were stirred by the cryptic conversation between Soyal and Ingrid. I hungered to understand more, to grasp greater truths,

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[17] *Danish: You are having quite a good time without me*
[18] *Danish: Enjoy your day off*

yet that opportunity was not mine to have. As the saying goes, *vente*[19]. One must fill oneself with patience and wait.

Ingrid and Soyal exchanged a few more words. Then Soyal muttered some phrases under her breath and left the room. I caught only her final saying: *man skal ikke sælge skindet, før bjørnen er skudt.*[20]

Ingrid was searching for something on one of the shelves, yet it was plain her efforts were fruitless; she could not find whatever it was she sought. Soyal was no longer in the room, and the air felt lighter for all of us. I cannot say she had done anything outright evil, yet following the flow of events and conversations, I felt uneasy in her presence-and I suspected everyone else felt much the same as me.

We found ourselves captivated by the indescribably beautiful dance of the snow. Winter felt like the loveliest of all seasons. Snowflakes fell like tiny pearls, ceaseless, silent and untiring. Our space and field of vision were far too small to witness the full performance of this snow-white beauty. I stretched along my whole rounded body, trying to take in the entire white expanse spread out beyond the window.

Suddenly the window began to adorn itself with another jewel from winter's treasure-box. Stirred by Ingrid's steady breathing, the cold outer glass bloomed with crystalline patterns from her exhaled steam. I revelled in these shapes painted by winter's icy brush, which mirrored Ingrid's equally frosty bearing. Ingrid's soul was as cold as winter. It was as though she lived and breathed against her own will. She resembled someone who had just returned home from a railway station, having left their beloved behind, the sentence of never seeing them again carved deep within their heart.

What could be tormenting this young girl? Could Soyal truly be so terrible that Ingrid wore such an agonised look? A little while ago she had not been so crushed. Unless this was all an act, one that *bedste* forced her to learn.

"How many times have you been turned from a spool into clothing?" asked another spool that had settled right beside me.

"Well, I suppose I have not had very many attempts."

"Well, how many are "not-very-many" then?"

"I suppose this will be the second one."

I wondered why it had asked such a thing. Perhaps I had been thinking aloud. No, though; I could not have been so careless.

"Is there some connection between that and Ingrid's sorrow?" I asked. It was as though this poor neighbouring spool had been listening in on my inner thoughts.

"Does it matter," it replied.

"You know, people grow sad because they choose to. They do things that lead them to ruin or dead-ends, then go on living with their suffering, swallowing pills and

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[19] *Danish: To wait*
[20] *Danish: Idiom: Do not take off your shoes before you have seen the water or Do not count your chickens before they hatch*

hiring psychologists. Take one of my old owners for example: he fought constantly with his partner, dragged himself around pubs and clubs, slept with whoever crossed his path. Then he would wear me and we would go off to the psychologist. The therapist would tell him to follow his heart, and also make it clear that he liked my owner and would happily sleep with him."

"But surely not everyone wants to land in a desperate state? What you describe sounds like self-destruction."

"You know, your observations are quite sharp for such a new spool, with only one lifetime spent as clothing. Anyway," my neighbour went on. "Of course not everyone is a masochist, darling. But my past owners were one depressive psychedelic character after another."

Darling. No one had ever called me that before. I realised I had never earned anyone's affection in this existence. How strange. Only a few days ago, nobody so much as noticed me back at Del's workshop. Yet here, inside Ingrid's half-fairy-tale room, I was being called darling.

"Listen. Imagine how pleasant it would be, if right this moment I were wrapped around my old owner. Him dancing with whiskey in hand, spilling it all over me, getting thoroughly drunk."

I understood I would never grow bored in its company. Still, our conversation was left unfinished.

"Ingrid, are you still in your room? I thought you would already be at the breakfast table. Look, I managed to bring your favourite *wienerbrød*[21]."

Soyal had stepped outside in the meantime and hurried to the neighbouring *bager*[22]. She stood half-framed in the doorway to Ingrid's room, holding a paper bag in her hand. Try as I might, I could not see its contents, yet across every inch of my spool-body I caught scents of pastries other than the *wienerbrød*.

Ingrid began to get ready to leave the room. She reached her delicate hand toward one of the cabinets and swiftly pulled a hair clip toward herself. Believing Soyal had gone far enough not to overhear, she started speaking aloud to her grandmother.

"What else did you buy besides *wienerbrød*, *bedste*?"

Soyal answered something from a distance, which I could not make out.

"I knew you would get *kanelstang*[23] too."

Ingrid came out of her room looking so bright-spirited, though it was clear these were only moments of fleeting joy.

What else might there be in this fairytale-like room for me to discover? But in an instant, everything I had observed since Ingrid had woken was gone. Yes, the furnishings and colours of the room were entirely transformed. It felt as if I were in somebody else's room, not Ingrid's. Uncertainty washed over my spool-being. Could

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[21] Danish: Viennese pastry
[22] Danish: Bakery
[23] *Danish: Cinnamon stick pastry*

anyone explain what on earth was happening inside this house? Yet my fellow spools only stared back at me in silence. Perhaps you are not even the same spools at all? I began to examine everything around me, like a wretched castaway who has finally set foot on some shore after a shipwreck.

The spools themselves appeared unchanged; there was no shift in their ranks. A bed had suddenly appeared directly opposite our cabinet, where most of us spools rested. All the paintings had vanished from the walls. Gone was that huge sewing-table upon which objects had been arranged like spectators seated in theatre boxes. In its place stood a small table piled high with multicoloured scraps of fabric. The rocking chair had been replaced by an ordinary armchair, deep-soft enough to sink into. The floating scissors were gone, supplanted by a shelved storage unit. Perhaps those scissors had been carefully set away upon those shelves. Several other pieces of furniture had not been completely remade, but had shifted position, occupying wholly new corners of the room.

Why had all this been rearranged? Who was the magical author behind this transformation? What purpose did it serve? Only my fellow spools could tell me, and they kept on looking silently, first at me, then at one another.
The inquisitive spool beside me had averted its gaze, as though hiding some secret from me. That magic was at work within this room had long since become plain. Still, I would hold my tongue. I would wait until someone found the courage to speak. Yet patience brings success only when one's manner of waiting is rhythmic and considered.

"You know what, I will tell you everything," the garrulous spool suddenly broke the silence.

"Even if you do not, *det er klart*,[24]" I tried to feign casual indifference. All the same, my spool-body was close to igniting right there in the middle of the room from sheer curiosity.

"But you did want to know what happened to you, did you not? If you do not wish to hear it, I can stay quiet."

This one was clearly craftier and more experienced than I. I had not even time to think up some counter-ploy, when it pressed on once more, like a top student who has already been given the answer.

"Very well, listen. I shall tell you everything. You decide for yourself. You may commit it to memory, or you may erase it from your spool-brain." It began abruptly, breathless and half-whispered.
"I do not even know whether I ought to greet you with congratulations for arriving as a guest inside Soyal's magical house, or not. Still, I must say: welcome to Soyal's fairytale. This fairytale belongs to Soyal, for she is its author and its master."

I could not wait for my fellow spool to finish its flowery speech.

"Are you saying Soyal is a witch, or a sorceress?"

"You said that, not me."

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[24] *Danish: That's plain enough*

"Then what other single word can you use to describe her? Please, limit yourself to just one word."

"You know, I would say monster," it spoke very softly. So quietly that I had to make the garrulous spool repeat itself twice, to be certain I had heard correctly.

"She is changeable, unexpected, unpredictable. And I cannot tell whether she is good-hearted or evil."

"But you called her a monster. How can there be any question of goodness?"

"Speak softly, whisper. Soyal keeps watch over everything, over every one of us."

"Is it only we spools who can hear one another?"

"We all know we possess our own separate thread-world. Yet sometimes it feels as though Soyal can hear us. But she keeps this hidden from us, so she may learn many things through us. There have been spools against whom Soyal dealt very cruelly. She burned many spools, those that heard too much, saw too much — not to mention those that spoke of it.

All of this was done under various pretences. For instance, that those spools were no longer needed, that they had worn out."

"Very well, I understand Soyal is monstrous. Though it is not altogether clear wherein her monstrosity lies. Will you tell me what is going on in this house? I cannot even tell if this house is strange, or not."

"Do not rush to form assumptions. Listen, I shall tell you everything. I will leave the guesswork and conclusions to you. Now, this is Soyal's fairytale, and Soyal's alone."

"And I already knew that it was Ingrid's doing — or that Ingrid was part of it too."

"Wait; again, do not rush. I have not even begun yet, and you are already taking sides and picking heroes. Of course, the choice is yours, you can…"

"Please go on. Or rather, start properly. You got sidetracked before telling me anything at all." When I looked at the garrulous spool's coiled-twisted face, I realised I too had my share of blame. "Fine. I promise I will not interrupt you while you tell your story."

"Alright, I shall carry on. I have so much to relate to. And any moment now Soyal or Ingrid might turn up again, *gud forbyde*[25]. You have arrived in a house that may very soon become the birthplace of a prayer of thanks for all humanity. One thing at a time. As I already said, Soyal is a person who wields magical, supernatural powers."

"I have noticed how extraordinary the objects in this house are. Everything here lies outside normality and everything I have ever seen before. It only remains for the things here to start speaking, and that would be the end of it. By some miracle they live, move and function."

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[25] *Danish: Heaven forbid*

"Well, that very miracle belongs to Soyal. Everything here lies within Soyal's bounds of what is permitted and what is forbidden. For many long years, Copenhagen has been divided into segregated districts. Within each district — or to speak in Soyal's own tongue, each zone — live people who share more or less the same outlook. And why segregated? Because by some incomprehensible occurrence, they are separated from one another by invisible walls and barriers. As far as we know, Copenhagen is split into seven zones. I know you are going to ask who mapped out and enforced this division. I will tell you straight-away: nobody knows for certain. Only one thing is known: the guardians who keep these districts from mixing are called the Colour-Guardians."

"Colour-Guardians? Why Colour-Guardians of all things?"

"You ought to have gathered that already from the colours of our own zone. Those seven zones that Copenhagen is split into each have a colour. Every district has its definite hue, so-to-speak its own colour. I have barely started telling the tale, and you have already changed countenance, *Og er overrasket."*[26]
"Alright, but who decided these colour assignments? Who set all of this in place? I do not — though I suppose I understand, it is not all that complicated, still…"

The garrulous spool stared at me in surprise, for the emotions I showed had thrown it into confusion.

"Fine, say the city is split into zones. So what? Let it be divided, *for guds skyld*[27]. What is so remarkable about it anyway?"

"Well, you are right in a way. There is nothing remarkable about it at all. Except that every zone, besides its colour, holds a distinct class of people. Do you follow?"

"Yes. One could say the inhabitants of each district carry one human shade; only one single social class."

"How then do people manage to live, knowing one another exists? Why don't they try to mix and live side-by-side together?"

"And who said they are allowed to mix with one another? This is where I must bring up the Colour-Keepers again. It is they who see to it that people, and the barriers, do not intermingle."

"You speak as though seas ought to let their waters merge into one another."

"You would not believe it, but that is precisely what I am about to tell you. Listen. The districts, or zones, possess boundaries completely invisible to those who live within them. People go about their daily lives, never seeing the inhabitants of the neighbouring district — not to mention having any contact with them at all."

"Ingrid, we need to go to Del's shop. If you can, drive me there in your car. If you are busy, I will drive my car."
The moment Ingrid and Soyal stepped inside, stone-cold silence fell over the room. Not one of the spools dared so much as to cast a sidelong glance toward even their closest neighbouring spool-companion. Ingrid and Soyal had changed their clothes;

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[26] Danish: Astonished and surprised
[27] *Danish: For God's sake*

from their attire it was clear they were getting ready to go somewhere. Ingrid thought for a long while before replying. She was searching for something under her rather untidy-made bed. But when did this girl manage to change her clothes? When? Only a little while ago she had left the room in her house garments. It was confusing, blurred almost to the point of drowsiness.

"Ingrid, can you hear me? Can you take me to Del's workshop?"

"I can, *bedste*. I just do not know what time my meeting will finish, so I can bring you back."

"Alright, wait, let us sort this out."

They walked out of the room talking. I managed to observe them thoroughly from head to toe. They wore quite expensive clothing and smelled like freshly-opened jasmine blossoms. It seemed to me that Soyal and Ingrid led a comfortable life.

"We got away with it, it seems. Are you certain they did not hear us?" the garrulous one asked anxiously.

"I do not know. I am not sure."

"You speak so calmly. It is obvious you have never witnessed Soyal's severity."

"Alright, tell me something. Is that all you had to tell me about the strangeness of Soyal and Ingrid's house? Or do you have more startling things to share?"

"What do you mean by strangeness? Do you actually think all of this is strange? *forstå som du vil*.[28] One thing I know: we ourselves judge phenomena based on our moods and our biases. What you have heard may strike you as strange. To me, it is all perfectly ordinary."
I stared in astonishment at that spool, which only a little while earlier had spoken with a spool-body swollen by curiosity. It was as though Ingrid and Soyal's entrance had wiped away our earlier conversation, along with all its fine nuances.

"Very well, anyway. I shall decide for myself how to regard everything I have just heard from you. Tell me one thing: does your story have more to follow?"

"To tell the truth, even if it does, I am no longer interested in talking about these oddities."

"So the events unfolding in Copenhagen and inside Soyal's house are not ordinary to you after all."

"These oddities are perfectly ordinary to me," the garrulous spool said in a genuinely indifferent tone. "And by the way — this is your second time being turned from spool into clothing, is it not? Do not try lying to me in the future. Do we understand one another?" the talkative spool spoke, half-command, half-threat.

Oh. So it had noticed that I lied. Yet why did it absolutely need to know about Copenhagen's zoned divisions? I thought to myself. I realised I was trying to convince myself of something I ought to have been trying to convince it of. But no.

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[28] *Danish: Interpret as you will*

Nothing worked. My excuses and arguments collapsed under the sway of this cunning, dangerous spool. This creature was either a twin-star constellation or a crafty fox. I could not draw the garrulous spool into negotiation, not even to understand what purpose the city's zoned division served, or the more intriguing question of who lived within those zones. I had grown eager to hear and learn everything connected with the city's partitioning. What would happen if I could suddenly find myself inside each of those zones one by one? What if I had come to Soyal's house as a guest from one of those very zones? What a strange turn of events that would be, *jeg vil gøre mit bedste*[29]. I needed to regain my composure. Above all, I had to win back the garrulous spool's trust. Since we were still not close, I did not wish to lose my only sort-of-friend.

Outside, darkness was slowly asserting its dominion. Beyond the window, the fir-trees, the garden's artificial hedge, the pillars, and everything I could see from our only available window had begun to yield obediently to the dark. Yet darkness did not act alone. It had very capable players on its side. It could never defeat humanity by itself. And its helping hands had natural roots; they bore no connection to people at all, which made them all the more reliable for the night. Those helpers were the stars and the moon. They lent their aid to the dark exactly as night and darkness requested of them. By the dark's command, the moon and stars would pour forth their measure of light upon humans.

When people had not conducted themselves with sufficient grace and decency through the day, darkness would forbid both moon and stars from lighting their paths through the night. But when human behaviour found favour in the dark's heart, darkness would bestow rich rewards upon them through the moon and stars, spilling silver moonlight and the eye-caressing glitter of the stars over them.

There was only one thing in the yard that, I thought, would in no way co-operate, much less submit to the dark: the electric lamps. Humans had proven so stubborn that instead of re-examining their conduct to earn the light of moon and stars in the hours of night and darkness, they had chosen a devious path. Can you imagine? They had created these electric luminaries and, in a manner of speaking, found a trick to outwit it all.

On the other hand, I suppose any cleverness is justified if its purpose is self-preservation. And who would not resort to underhanded means to ease their troubles and keep the next step of life as steady as possible? Take me, for instance. I will try by every means to learn all those things that not even the night with all its silver glow can distract me from. I will deploy every weapon to pry information out of that garrulous spool. And who would not quench their desert-like, burning thirst from a cup that is filled, for better or worse, with human red-hued wine?

"This is a restricted area," the sound came from right beside Ingrid's window.

It was an alert from Soyal's house security system. It triggered whenever movement was detected on the grounds. Through the window I spotted Soyal, climbing out of a car wrapped deep inside her winter coat.

"We must wait for the seventh flower to bloom," a little later, Soyal's voice was heard from the hallway, as she spoke with Ingrid.

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[29] *Danish: I will do my best*

"The glass panels are melting, Soyal. I do not know what can be done. If the glass melts completely, the flower will dry out, *bedste*."

"In an emergency we must perform cross-pollination between the two plants whose glass casings have melted simultaneously, so we avoid desiccation. In the worst-case scenario, the flower drying out must not bring about the full biological death of the plant."

"In this instance it is the air that poses the danger for us, Soyal. If air seeps in through the glass, it will first desiccate the flower, then begin the biological destruction of the plant."

They were talking about some kind of plants. A powerful curiosity rose within me to see those plants and their blossoms. Did Soyal and Ingrid have a garden? What flowers were they talking about? What did they need those flowers for?

"There are seven of those flowers," the garrulous spool spoke suddenly.

I tried my utmost to be careful in how I engaged with it, so I would not irritate it this time.

"How lovely that they have flowers," I said, feigning casualness.

"This is not about what is pleasant or beautiful, not in the slightest. Those plants were brought from Copenhagen's seven different zones. They bloom only in air-tight conditions, but once every seven years. Soyal is the only person who has managed to obtain these highly vital plants. They hold enormous life-or-death importance for her, to finish what she has planned, what failed years ago. They keep these plants on the far side of her house. All of them are kept under glass domes."

"Perhaps those flowers are medicinal herbs needed to make some kind of remedy," I said.

"Yes, they are medicinal plants and no ordinary flowers," my fellow spool added gravely.

I could barely recognise this spool now that it had grown serious. Perhaps the subject it was speaking of accounted for its vigilant approach to our new conversation.

"And who tends to these flowers anyway?" I asked, skilfully masking my insatiable urge to learn everything at once.

"Er det ikke klart?[30]", it said.

"I see. So it is Soyal."

"Yes, my friend. Soyal herself. She would not trust such a critical ritual to anyone but herself."

"But if these flowers and plants sit under glass vessels, how are they cared for? Water, for instance?"

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[30] *Danish: Is it not obvious?*

"How very simplistic your view of everything in this life is. Do you really think this house is a den of such plain-minded, innocent purposes? You ought to have realised long ago that you have not arrived at some place of ordinary, uneventful existence."

For a moment I felt ashamed that my thoughts were so simplistic in the face of its revelations and explanations. Yet it was not my fault. I had come from Del's workshop, and life there had been comparatively ordinary, entirely outside Soyal's fairytale.

"How was I supposed to know that after leaving Del's workshop I would suddenly end up inside a fairytale?" I said, hurt.

"Well now you know, don't you?" my fickle spool-companion replied in a weary tone.

The garrulous spool was interacting with me in an unrecognisable way. To be honest, its recent disappointment and distrust toward me had wounded me. Still, we talked again, and it used warm-sounding phrases. This time I was a friend, not some beloved confidant. Even so, I detected passive-aggression in its manner of speaking, which was pulling my thoughts away from twin-star constellations and toward cascading waterfalls.

"What do you think, did we fall down from the sky?" it said.

I did not have to wait long for more displays of passive-aggression. The garrulous spool kept launching half-question attacks.

"Well, how should I know? At this point nothing would surprise me, not even if you really had fallen straight from the sky," I replied, trying to sound as innocent as possible.

"No, my respected friend. We all travel the same road to get here. There is only one path: from Del's workshop. We are simply brought to Soyal's house, and then we find ourselves inside a fairytale. *Velkommen til det magiske rige!*[31] Soyal and Del have been friends for many years. Del takes part in Soyal's affairs, directly or indirectly. There is hardly a corner across the face of Copenhagen where Soyal does not have acquaintances. Yes, do not stare in surprise. She has connections in nearly all the zones."

"So from what I gather, Soyal is a very influential person."

I suddenly noticed my fellow spool's mood beginning to shift. It started to wrinkle the hollows of its spool-eyes in a half-smile. I could read a great deal from that half-smile of it, yet I tried not to rush, striving to draw more words out of it.

"I would very much like to get to the part of the house where Soyal's flowers are kept."

"They are not merely kept, they are tended by Soyal, you know. You want to know an awful lot. Why do you need to learn so many things?"

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[31] *Danish: Welcome to the magical kingdom*

Honestly, I did not know how to answer. For I understood myself that ever since I set foot inside Soyal's house, my evident curiosity might seem strange to the household's native inhabitants.

Suddenly, music sounded from the living-room. It felt like my helper, arriving at just the right moment for me to dodge giving an answer. The tops of the garden fir-trees danced so beautifully, keeping time with the music. Then footsteps were heard, yet shuffling and strange. It sounded as though someone could not make up their mind which direction to go. Though their movements lacked full coordination, there was a discernible rhythm that gave me the impression of deliberate motion. Barely half a minute passed, and Ingrid suddenly threw open her bedroom door. She moved with contemporary-style gestures, stepping backward then forward again, as if struggling to enter the room. For she would appear on one side of the doorway, then on the other.

"I think she is dancing," I said aloud, forgetting the garrulous spool's last aggressive question.

"Ah, you do not know Ingrid yet. She is a person of magnificent talent. She dances wonderfully. You will still see her dance many times."

"And yet it gives the impression she is suffering more than dancing," I added.

The moment Ingrid stepped into the room, she halted her vigorous bodily movements. Even so, she remained under the music's mental influence. Every now and then her body would ripple and twist, speaking to her extraordinary sensitivity to sound. She had not yet freed herself from the melody, and note by note it flowed out of her slender frame.

I grew to like Ingrid's dance, odd as it had first seemed to me. From time to time she would throw her head back and execute half-spins, eyes closed, index fingers stretched before her lids. Sometimes she sang along in parallel, yet soundlessly only, her lips moving in perfect silent sync. To her strange contorted dance was added an equally strange wordless vocal accompaniment.

Ingrid's appearance was beyond discussion altogether. She was so beautiful she scarcely needed any description at all, I thought. Her blue eyes paired wonderfully with her pale-white skin. I wished Ingrid's hair were long, yet it only reached her neck, barely covering half of it. I did not know whether that dark-ginger shade was her natural hair colour, or if she had achieved it through dye, but it looked very distinctive alongside her thick, light-brown eyebrows.

What appealed to me most was how unpretentious she was. Everything she wore, everything upon her body, existed purely for her own comfort. *Du ser skøn ud*[32]. I watched every one of her movements, every facial expression, and understood that *dit indre er endnu smukkere end dit ydre*[33]. I had not yet had the chance to hear her thoughts or her conversations on all manner of subjects, yet I was certain she was more captivating within than her enchanting outward looks. With Soyal, for example, I cannot say I feel the same. Though, to keep a clear conscience, I ought to admit I had not personally seen anything bad from Soyal so far.

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[32] *Danish: You look gorgeous*
[33] *Danish: Your inner self is even more beautiful than your outer self*

It suddenly occurred to me that my conversation with my garrulous companion had been cut short the moment Ingrid entered. Ingrid's gentle aura had forced my fellow spool into silence. Or perhaps he was simply wary of talking about her family and her plans while Ingrid was present.

"Soyal, what if I do not want there to be anything with buttons? Do we absolutely have to learn button-making techniques?" Ingrid asked.

"Look, Ingrid. We can study different kinds of pocket construction instead. Having pockets is going to be a necessity. It will be far more convenient to keep Cipher inside a sweater pocket."

"I think I would like that. Having pockets would be convenient even just for myself. Though I suppose the best place for Cipher will be a pocket on a sweater. But what if I change my mind? Would it be possible to undo the stitching afterwards?"

"Of course, Ingrid. Do you not know that nothing is impossible for your grandmother?"

They shared a knowing look. After that, Ingrid opened one of the movable shelving units, converted it into a table, and sat down opposite it.

Soyal began explaining the technique for sewing-on patch pockets.

Considering their sweater was to be woven, they were having a little difficulty with the pocket fabric.

"Actually some being named Cipher lives inside this house, for whom Ingrid's pocket could become a comfortable dwelling," an inner thread-voice within me whispered, and I felt somehow certain: it is alive.

While Ingrid and Soyal were occupied with sewing, I marvelled at the flight of objects filling the room. All those tools and items passing through their hands were not set back into their places. They soared freely through the air, moving at all kinds of angles. Scissors, threads and needles would sometimes drift dangerously close, yet their paths never crossed one another. Within this sewing-galaxy, the scissors performed elegant double-bladed spins, and the needles were like their natural satellites. Everything was beautiful; it made for an enchanting, extraordinary spectacle. Especially that moment when a pair of scissors, its jaws open, tilted toward one of the fabric edges, found some kind of support in mid-air, remained suspended with jaws agape, and began spinning on its own axis. Meanwhile scraps of thread twisted through the eye-holes of the scissors, performing what looked like a rhythmic ribbon gymnastics routine. Every object Soyal and Ingrid released from their hands as they worked began to dance within this impossibly lovely scissors-constellation. Completing the picture were multicoloured thread fragments of varying lengths, rippling through the air in serpentine coils. The scene was unapologetically magical, bewitching and dazzling. Watching these scissors-dance was pure delight. Only music was missing for this needle-orchestra to become a full ballet performance, where only inanimate objects danced with their sharp blades and pointed tips.



Soyal even noticed this airborne, contemporary-style scissors display. *"Det er fedt."*[34]

"Sindssygt[35]*,* said Ingrid. Then she added, *kanon(cannon)."*[36]

Ingrid really had found the right word. For this was one of those moments when everything felt far more fantastical than merely beautiful. On her worktable Ingrid had several coloured ribbons, which she would pick up from time to time and try to fasten around the pocket edges. Yet whenever she disliked how they looked after being fitted, she would let go and cast them aside at once.

Once released and no longer needed by their owner, the ribbons began their own soaring dance. They twisted and coiled around the blades, the deadly jaws of the scissors. Perhaps this was their only kind of contact where they faced no threat of being shortened, neither in length nor width. They seemed to love those blades, brushing and clinging, swaying embraced alongside them. And the scissors, true to their nature, kept seeking angles to slice the ribbons into shreds, yet they could never complete their work. Missing was the participation of a far-more formidable blade: human hands, which commanded those obedient metal jaws. And human hands were fully occupied with other tasks at that moment. Can you imagine?

In the short while I had been savouring this aesthetic sewing-dance, Ingrid had already learned several techniques for stitching pockets.

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[34] *Danish: That is awesome*
[35] *Danish: Insane*
[36] *Danish Slang: Great*

"Try folding the top hem of the pocket over to the wrong side. There, like that. Look, Ingrid."

"But now side gaps have appeared, Soyal. What good is folding it to the wrong side?" Ingrid grew frustrated.

It seemed that her aptitude, so evident a short while before, was fading because of this trivial mistake.

"Ingrid, get over your perfection-complex," Soyal suddenly laughed. "You fret like a school-child chasing flawless results. You are only just learning, is that not enough? And you get upset on top of it. You have to allow for mistakes. These are forgivable errors. There are far graver, unforgivable mistakes — those are the ones you must watch out for and fear."

Ingrid looked straight into Soyal's perceptive eyes. It felt as though Soyal never spoke without purpose. Every single one of her words, every gesture carried meaning, meanings I could not grasp.

"Here is how we will get rid of those side gaps you mentioned," said Soyal. She picked up a single-bladed scalpel-like tool with a sharp cutting edge and began trimming closely along the seams, cutting away the excess fabric outside the pocket stitching that had been troubling Ingrid.

"Now if we iron it too, I think everything will fall into place," Ingrid said.

"You are quite right. Ironing is certainly needed, and several times at that, my little perfectionist. Naturally, if you want our pocket to look ideal."

"Are you teasing me, Soyal?" Ingrid suddenly smiled. "Of course our pocket has to look perfect."

Soyal went on to explain that auxiliary seams ought not to be left loose. Instead, they should be gently pulled at the curved corners. Their voices gradually grew to ring and fade inside my spool-ears, for I had become captivated by the pocket's aesthetic appearance. I noticed the decorative flower stitched onto the pocket opening, opening and closing its petals over and over — yet these were not real flower-petals at all, but thread-petals.

Meanwhile I saw that the needles and threads had ceased their graceful dance. The ribbons no longer brushed against the scissor-blades. Unexpectedly, I began to ponder: why is it that those who inflict pain tend to be loved more? Why is rejection and neglect in this world twice as alluring as what is readily within reach? Ah, these strange quirks. What purpose do they serve? These bitter contradictory truths that drag life along behind them like a steel locomotive over snow-buried rails. Do people follow them consciously, or unconsciously? Either way, the outcome is always astonishing. *Vælg mellem pest og kolera*[37].

Soyal kept explaining different stitch types. These instructions felt so familiar. Back in Del's workshop I had heard many such lessons and lectures. Del was the best at giving detailed sewing explanations. With her cracked, calloused fingers she would somehow grip the needle between her digits. She wore thick-lensed spectacles, and

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[37] *Danish Idiom: Choose between plague and cholera*

every time someone demonstrated a stitch, she would push those glasses further up her nose to see better. Even with those heavy lenses she still could not make out the stitching clearly. My Del was not especially old, barely Soyal's peer, or perhaps a few years her senior. She was a true master, knowledgeable and skilled in her craft. Yet she lived on only in my memories, the master of my very first sewing workshop.

"I think this pocket looks very lovely. Made of adaptive fabric, it will sit beautifully on the heavy-thread woven material."

"I agree, Soyal. Now we only have to get started on the sweater."

"The time has come already, you are right. We must not waste even a single minute."

"The calendar timings align precisely with the festival dates. Imagine all the flowers have bloomed. It would be disastrous if the glass vessels crumble. Naturally I will not let that happen. But if we fail…"

"Bedste. We cannot afford to fail, under any circumstances," Ingrid cut in, anxious.

Soyal looked at Ingrid in surprise, seemingly trying to work out whether her granddaughter's anxiety was genuine, or yet another performance of suspicious behaviour.

Soyal managed to hold back the distrustful tone natural to her character. Instead, she filled her voice with persuasive, feigned sympathy.

"Yes Ingrid, of course we cannot bear to wait another seven years."

She spoke those words — seven years — so calmly, as though she were talking for seven seconds. And that profound indifference of Soyal's stirred suspicion in Ingrid once more.

"What kind of calculated dynamics are these?" I thought to myself, bewildered. One cannot make sense of these people.

"And why are you so surprised, my friend?" my garrulous companion broke the silence.

"But how can one live, using one another and regarding everything with suspicion?"

"You know, you are quite dangerous," my fellow spool said.

"Why?"

"Well, you understand far too much. It is not merely understanding itself, but how quickly you have managed to grasp what matters in so little time."

"Yet what is so complicated about seeing that the bond between those two is fake?"

"You speak as if you were discussing inanimate objects," I sensed my companion growing offended.

I realised I had to restrain my indignation, and not poke my spool-nose into places it did not belong.

Ingrid and Soyal had fallen into conversation again, and it was mostly another didactic lecture delivered by Soyal.

"Not everything in one's life ought to be displayed for the public."

"Yet one must speak out for all that is trampled-upon, and strive for justice beyond one's own power."

"You are only talking about protest now, *bedste*. I fully agree that when you feel powerless in some matter, you begin to universalise your trouble, to stir up noise, draw attention, and hope that under the pressure of the masses a just decision will be reached."

"Yes, Ingrid, you are quite right. You described exactly what I said a moment ago. So where, then, is your objection?" Soyal cast a sidelong glance.

It was as if she sought to silence Ingrid with her reproach-filled stare. Yet Ingrid was not ready to fall quiet at all. She had grown heated; it seemed she had even lost her self-command and control over her emotions. Perhaps that was precisely what Soyal wanted to see. Maybe she provoked Ingrid on purpose, to test the resilience of her granddaughter's nervous and mental equilibrium.

"Soyal, you put it very well. It is an objection, not your objection, let me point out. An objection can take many forms, by the way. Those who oppose you can bring plenty of other counter-arguments against the things you said a little while ago."

I regretted that I had not heard a single word of Soyal's earlier remarks. Joining a conversation halfway felt akin to offering an apology after a crime had already been committed.

"Each person decides for themselves how to spend their time these days."

"Yes, Ingrid. I have nothing further to say."

"Well then what is the problem, if anyone wishes to address whatever topic they choose, *for guds skyld.*"[38]

I thought I could grasp the underlying premise of their argument.

"What I mean is different, Ingrid. Not everything in this foolish age can and ought to be made public. Can feelings and emotions really become subjects for public debate? You are not sad for the sake of an audience. If you are not at fault for grief or sorrow dwelling outside of you instead of locked inside your chest, you ought not to perform it artificially for show. That is what I am talking about."

The vehemence in those final words was so powerful Ingrid could not carry on the debate. She met her grandmother's gaze in silence for a moment, and apparently decided it would be foolish to disagree with her.

I strove to understand the true core of their exchange. Soyal's short, impassioned speech was emotionally charged, yet I believed there were several vulnerable points

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[38] *Danish: For God's sake*

in it, at least one for certain. She spoke about not parading sadness, of not serving every sorrow up for public consumption. But who could explain to me why only sadness was being discussed? Who had said joy should be freely displayed? I thought it would be better if private laundry were never hung out at all, whether soiled or clean. Doing so would not turn laundry into tableware; it would remain nothing but laundry, all the same.

Once passions had subsided following Ingrid's concession, and they went back to working quietly side-by-side, Soyal suddenly broke the silence.

"Godt klaret.[39] I am proud of you, Ingrid. You held a wonderful debate and kept your emotions in check. Your voice did not tremble at all. You were confident in your arguments and calm within. I cannot tell whether this was the fruit of my teaching, or if you truly were indifferent to the subject."

Ingrid looked toward Soyal like a student who had just sat an examination, her eyes glistening with tears. Either Soyal failed to understand the source of her granddaughter's distress, or she simply did not care what the young girl might be feeling at that moment. Ingrid was likely upset because she could not have an honest, untroubled conversation with her grandmother. I realised this young woman had endured so many trials. It seemed everything could be cast into doubt whenever Soyal was the one pulling the strings. My spool-mind could no longer find its bearings. Should I believe Soyal's words, or not? Perhaps everything Soyal had said was her genuine opinion, and she merely wanted to test how skilled her granddaughter was at argument, after years of deliberate training.

Admittedly, "training" felt like a harsh word. Yet combining everything my garrulous spool-companion had told me with what I had witnessed, I understood that in the case of Soyal and Ingrid it was the appropriate term.

"They need to move very quickly," my spool-companion said. "Ingrid is growing increasingly unmanageable. They must not lose time."

"You know, I can feel they are preparing for something," I said.

I noticed my companion regard me with a dangerous gaze, and he said:

"The underestimated collect the greatest prizes in this life."

I had no idea in what way I was underestimated, what he was talking about. It sounded as though my companion spoke out of undisguised envy; even without knowing many fine details, I could still perceive the bewitching, treacherous corners of Soyal's enchanted house.

This time I tried my best to hold back from drawing our conversation further. I needed to piece together everything I had seen and heard, to understand what fate awaited me inside this house.

Soyal left the room, leaving Ingrid alone with her thoughts.

The weather suited my mood once more. The overcast sky had turned even more brooding. Wind rattled against the windows, as if begging to get inside.

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[39] *Danish: Well done*

Ingrid glanced toward the window. She walked over to one of the needles floating in mid-air. When she took it in her hand and set it into one of the needle-cases, the scissors-dance, the ribbon-embraced spectacle, stopped at once. All the airborne implements, which had formed a single unified whole, settled back into their places. I wondered what special needle this could be, whose touch brought the scissors-dance to an end.

Ingrid stepped toward the cabinets and stood directly in front of my companion spool and me. She began to study me specifically, for I was a newcomer. Her eyes watched me with some purposeful intent, as if trying to gauge how useful I might become to her should she undertake some undertaking. I averted my gaze to avoid meeting her scrutinising inspection. After she had examined my spool-body from every angle: left and right, up and down, every possible side, she moved to the row of books standing nearby.

Without hesitation Ingrid picked up the half-read book marked by an iron bookmark. She looked so joyful, like a child awaited for nine months finally coming into the world. ″The Moon and Sixpence″— the title was printed on the cover in English. Beside the lettering was a drawing: the gaunt facial outline of a man, nothing more. She hugged her book, cupping it in the palms of both her eight-fingered hands, pressing it inward against her forearms. She sat down on the bed, right beneath the faint light from the window, and began to read.

“Ingrid is very fond of Somerset Maugham[40],” my spool-companion said. “If you look to our left you will see the shelves are filled entirely with Maugham’s works. She owns nearly all his stories. Still, it would be unfair not to mention Villy Sørensen[41], who also contributed greatly to shaping Ingrid’s inner world. These two foundational writers forged Ingrid as a person. Of course my account would be incomplete if I did not add that this reading list was taken straight out of Soyal’s educational arsenal.”

I would be surprised if Ingrid had discovered these writers through anyone else’s suggestion or influence. Once again, it came back to Soyal and her methods of upbringing.

I would be surprised if Ingrid had found these writers through anyone else’s suggestion or influence. Once more, it came down to Soyal and her educational methods.

My spool-companion possessed far more knowledge about the lives of Soyal and Ingrid than I could have guessed. But where did it all come from? How long had he lived inside Soyal’s house, and what else did he know? *Tålmodighed*[42]. I understood that if I could master my patience, I might achieve a great many things throughout my existence as a spool.

I enjoyed Ingrid’s presence. I could not explain what made her company so pleasant. I could not say the same for Soyal. I grew tense, perhaps even afraid, every time Soyal appeared. I felt no fear of Ingrid, none at all. At any rate I experienced no discomfort. On the contrary, I wished Ingrid could stay near me for as long as possible. She read her beloved book, making subtle facial movements, evidently living alongside her

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[40] English writer: William Somerset Maugham, known for his novels, plays and short stories, 1874-1965
[41] Writer, philosopher, founder of modern Danish literature, 1929-2001
[42] Danish: Patience

characters. *Livet er interesant*[43]. These two-legged creatures always prefer reading about others, prying into other people's feelings, delving into strangers' emotional inner worlds. Yet they never pay attention to their own lives. After all, their own life is itself book-material for some other stranger. They live through the lives of characters created by some writer. But who is supposed to care about their own life? Who will feel for them? Perhaps they ought to write down episodes from their own lives, so they might stop feeling sorrow or joy over the fortunes of others. They are potential heroes themselves, yet they live through other people's heroes. How curious these human-creatures are. I had spoken that last thought aloud without even realising it.

"What chaotic thoughts are wandering through your head?" said my unpredictable, fellow spool.

"Everyone in this house seems unpredictable, you included, Soyal and Ingrid…"

I did not get to finish. Heat washed over my spool-body and my head began to spin. *For pokker*[44]. I was in Soyal's hands. I lost control over my spool-self and my body tensed as much as it could. I had never been so terrified in my life. My first thought: they must have overheard all my reflections and my conversations with the garrulous spool. If that was so, why was I the only one about to be punished?

"So Ingrid, what do you think, shall we start work today, or tomorrow morning? Del gave me highest-quality spools."

Ingrid stayed quiet. She seemed unwilling to tear herself away from her book, lost within Somerset's world.

"I see, you are not quite ready to begin something new. Prepare yourself; we will start the sweater tomorrow."

"Yes, Soyal. Tomorrow, I suppose. Let us begin tomorrow. The time has truly come," Ingrid spoke with belated interest.

"Yes, the time has come," my garrulous companion observed, addressing me. "There is no need to be tense. Every single one of us in this house was brought here for some purpose. At first we play the observer: innocent, naive and simple, just as humans are in childhood. Then we mature like those two-legged beings, gain vast experience, and grow ready to sink into guilt."

"You speak as if the gallows are waiting for me."

"Not at all, my friend. A very interesting life awaits you, in Soyal's hands and upon Ingrid."

"Maybe you could speak more openly with me. Sometimes I feel I am talking to Soyal's assistant," I remarked. *"Puha"*.[45]

But my spool-companion was no longer listening to me. He had drifted off into his own thoughts. I looked at his spool-face and understood his mind wandered far away, among the cold, frosty districts of Copenhagen, where everyone lived their lives in no

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[43] *Danish: Life is interesting*
[44] Danish: *Damn it*
[45] *Danish: Ugh*