

‘A book about love – tender, eccentric and fiercely independent.
It feels a privilege to read it.’ Esther Freud

Tove Jansson | *fair play*



INTRODUCED BY ALI SMITH

Fair Play

A NOVEL

Tove Jansson

*Translated from the Swedish by
Thomas Teal*

Introduced by
Ali Smith

“*Fair Play* could in fact be called a novel of friendship, of rather happy tales about two women who share a life of work, delight and consternation. They are very unlike each other, but perhaps that is why they manage to play the game successfully, with patience and, of course, a great deal of love.”

Original cover copy by Tove Jansson

Thanks

Ali Smith thanks: my friend Kathleen Bryson who, several years ago, looked at me in wide eyed amazement when I said I'd never read anything by Tove Jansson, immediately took me downstairs to the children's department in a bookshop on Charing Cross Road, bought me *Moominsummer Madness*, told me about *The Summer Book* (which had been out of print for decades and proved very hard to find) and also about "a beautiful novel Jansson wrote about two women artists who live and work together", which she'd read in its original Swedish some years before.

Sort of Books thanks: Sophia Jansson, Helen Svensson of Schildts, Ali Smith, Kathleen Bryson and Thomas Teal; Peter Dyer, Henry Iles, Miranda Davies and Tim Chester for production; and Holly Marriott and Jason Craig at Penguin.

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Contents

Title Page

Epigraph

Acknowledgments

Introduction by Ali Smith

Changing Pictures

Videomania

The Hunter

Catfishing

One Time in June

Fog

Killing George

Travels with a Konica

B-Western

In the Great City of Phoenix

Wladyslaw

Fireworks

Cemeteries

Jonna's Pupil

Viktoria

Stars

The Letter

Copyright

Introduction

by Ali Smith

Labora et amare. Work and love: the motto Tove Jansson worked into her own personal bookplate design in the 1940s when she was starting out, a young artist. Fifty years later, internationally famous as one of the world's most enduringly imaginative and inspiring writers and illustrators, she still felt much the same. As she told an interviewer in 1994, "the most important thing for me has been work. And then love."

The publication of *Fair Play* in its first ever English translation is a notable event and really cause for a celebration. It's the first of Jansson's novels for adults to be translated into English for over thirty years. Jansson published *Rent Spel* (its original Swedish title) in 1989, when she was herself in her mid-seventies (she died in 2001, aged 86). It was the ninth of her eleven books written specifically for adults, of which, until now, only three have reached full English publication, most celebratedly her rich minimalist masterpiece *The Summer Book* (1972) – a story, in typical Jansson mould, about nothing much and yet about everything – about a child and an old woman who spend a long, light summer together on a tiny island off the coast of Finland.



Tove Jansson's artwork for the original publication of *Rent spel* (*Fair Play*), 1989

Jansson has always been rightly feted for being the brilliant children's author she is. Her tales of the Finn Family Moomintroll and their extended alternative family, which cared for everyone and everything from a tiny anarchist to a hulking great Scandinavian melancholic monster, and survived by inventiveness all sorts of catastrophes and existentialities, made her justly internationally famous. But it is only now that we're getting the chance to see how very fine her fiction for adults is, too. It shares the clarity, the beneficence, the imagination and the survivalist calm that made her writing for children unique. It also displays her particular versatility, which means a text by Jansson, whether meant for children or adults, can be read with great pleasure and satisfaction by pretty much anybody of any age.

But in her writing for adults Jansson was also, in her own quiet way, quite radical both with form and subject matter. Her preferred shape is an open form, in a language so tightly edited that its clarity makes for mysterious transparency. Her epics are almost transgressively, certainly anarchically, small and unexpected, and her books deal on the whole with people not usually included or given that much space in what we might call the extended family of literature.

On the backs of the Penguin Puffin copies of the Moomin tales, Jansson's biography used to say she lived and worked alone on an island; actually she lived, both on her island and in Helsinki, alongside her lifelong

partner and travelling companion, the graphic artist, Tuulikki Pietilä. The women spent over 40 years together, working and travelling. “We always took our sketch books with us wherever we went,” Pietilä wrote later, in a beautiful piece called “Travels with Tove”, where she remembers, among other things, how on one trip Jansson jumped, full of typical enthusiasm, into the Atlantic in January for a bathe (and contracted her usual bronchitis afterwards), how they liked to avoid stuffy first class and would always sneak off to second class, where things were much more fun, how they shared a lot of unlikely adventures, once ending up bunking in a kind of youth hostel in Edinburgh even though they were quite old ladies by then – “but we looked young”, as she says – and how they always made sure, wherever they were in the world, that they had enough money for cigarettes, and film for Pietilä’s Konica camera. “Tove was always my best subject.”

So what can happen when Tove Jansson turns her attention to her own favourite subjects, love and work, in the form of this novel about two women, lifelong partners and friends? Expect something philosophically calm – and something discreetly radical. At first sight it looks autobiographical. Like everything Jansson wrote, it’s much more than it seems.

Is it a novel? Is it stories? It’s both; it breaks the boundaries of both forms, in a series of linked vignettes about two women who live and work side by side in an equilibrium that’s at once slight and revolutionary. “They lived at opposite ends of a large apartment building.” Mari is a writer and illustrator. Jonna is a filmmaker and artist. Once again, not that much seems to happen. Mari and Jonna work a lot, watch films together, make films together, spend time on an island, travel the world, relive their youth, argue about their parents, go sailing, get caught in fog. Their stories dovetail and intertwine. They know each other’s sleeping habits. They know each other’s living and working habits. They honour these habits. They know that things are often uncontrollable, out of their hands, even on the tiniest island. They fight. They get a bit jealous. Things and people come between them. When this happens, they sort it out. The aesthetic and creative urge compels them, always. They put off work. They get irascible. They refuse each other and irritate each other, and are kind and tough with each other, so that both love and work are revealed as made of the little refusals and agreements that happen mundanely in the course of a shared life.

A lot isn’t said. “Don’t tell me things I already know,” one says to the other, amiably. There’s a lot that doesn’t need to be said out loud. It’s a novel with a profound sense of discretion at its core. But the flip side of silence is voice, and the flip side of nothing much happening, as always with Jansson, is that absolutely everything is happening. Take the first page of the first, typically unassuming story, “Changing Pictures”, where Jonna rearranges the art on one of the walls of Mari’s apartment. This novel is about creativity from the very start – about how you take a day, the same as all the other old one-after-the-other days, and make it really new and fresh, no matter what age you are, what life you’re in. It features an immediate challenge to vision – it is very much about how to shake off old ways of seeing, how to see things differently, get rid of what’s “hopelessly conventional” and replace it with something more hopeful. It is also a story full of the unselfish admiration of another, from the word go. Jonna is blithely uncompromising (as Mari will be, in other chapters), and in her art, or in her editing of Mari’s living space, she makes something come alive with “a completely new significance ... almost provocative”.

The book opens, then, on a simple little story about letting someone change things, which becomes a story about the editing process, or about how to make art – and is for the length of the book a parable about how to renew mundane life. Its inference is also emotional. “Look, here’s a thing of mine and here’s your drawing, and they clash. We need distance; it’s essential.” *Fair Play* is often an excellent handbook of advice and rules for the workings of art – but it’s never just about aesthetic wisdom. It’s also very much about emotional wisdom.

So many of its vignettes are about how to bring art and life together into a working relationship. And so much of it is about these concepts held in its new title, fairness and playfulness. The “blend of perfectionism and nonchalance” that Mari sees in Jonna is apparent all through Jansson’s own writing style – perfectly caught itself by Thomas Teal, a luminous translator of Jansson’s twin talent for surface and depth, simplicity and reverberation in language, and someone who knows exactly how to convey her gift for sensing the meaning embedded in the most mundane act or turn of phrase.

“Fog”, for instance, is literally a chapter about being lost in fog, and lost, too, to the fog of an old, old argument. It becomes a story about what’s not sayable, a story that admits some things are veiled, fogged, not resolvable. *Fair Play* allows for life’s unresolvables at the same time as being very much about aesthetic resolution and composition. The chapters are thoughtfully, deceptively casually, arranged to arise as if by accident out of each other. They seem like throwaway pieces of time. Of course, this is one of *Fair Play*’s themes – the recording of haphazard life and what it means, at all, to record anything. The cumulative effect is to suggest that there’s always more life, more possibility, another story, and that nothing is fixed or ended. There’s always something new to know or see, even when you think you’ve seen it all. The openness of this book’s structure, when you reach its end, is both liberating and moving.

It’s also a novel very much about “unexplored territory”, something Jansson will have been very aware of in the writing of these stories about friendship between women, and something which so fascinates Jonna in her love of B-movie Westerns and their repeating of clichés about endless honourable “friendship between men”.

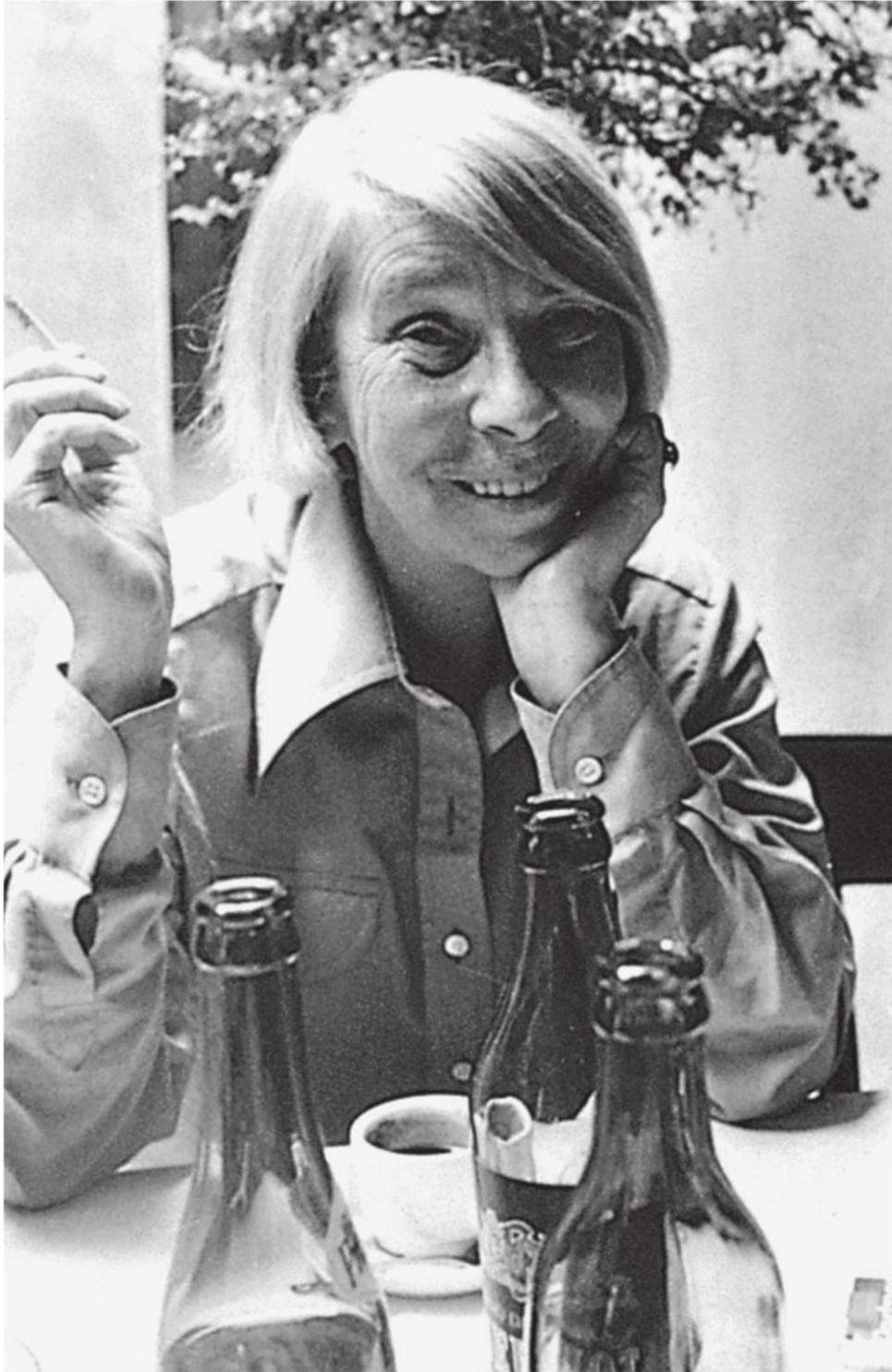
But the keys to this particular new territory are the opposite of cliché. Openness, playfulness and space are concepts which come up repeatedly through the novel. “Give these ladies some space!” yells a barmaid in Phoenix on one of the explorative adventures Mari and Jonna have. “They’re from Finland.” It’s as if *Fair Play* knows it’s a kind of foreign territory in itself. So many of these stories are about the giving of space to another person, the kind of space that only someone who loves properly and openly can give. “There are empty spaces that must be respected – those often long periods when a person can’t see the pictures or find the words and needs to be left alone.” There’s also crucial space between Mari and the narrator, which is what gives this book its essential meditative nature.

But it is, too, a piece of writing about time running out, about the end of living space, about inevitable ends. The chapter called “Cemeteries”, for instance, examines how we helplessly think we can order things and control our fates; *Fair Play* never ignores real bleakness. Part of its analysis of art knows that art makes a killing in the same way as a pin will through a butterfly. Part of its radicalism comes from the repeated admittance that its main characters are simply getting older. Yet the form of the book suggest there’ll be no stopping. There’s only the journey, the open travelling companionship, the long-running aesthetic argument and agreement between Jonna and Mari, “doing all right”, from the start of the book to its finish.

Consider the gentleness of this work, the twinned humility and understatement in what it actually means to be “doing all right”. Jansson deals with its relationship with care, humour and, above all, affectionate discretion. *Fair Play* is, in the end, a huge, yet astoundingly discreet, declaration of a good-working love, a homage to the kind of coupledness that rarely receives such homage, and at the same time a homage to the everyday weather, the light, the skies, the countless bad movies and good movies of living and working well with someone for the length of an adult life.

Labora et amare. “They sat opposite each other at the table without talking.” Kindness passes between them unspoken. It’s a relationship that works. Its final chapter, in which one, without so much as saying it, grants the other the necessary space to work – in other words, to be herself – reveals not just the size and truth of the love but the revolutionary freedom that comes with such love.

Fair Play is a very fine art.



Tove Jansson in Padua, Italy, 1979

Fair Play

A NOVEL

Tove Jansson

Translated from the Swedish by
Thomas Teal

Changing pictures

JONNA HAD A HAPPY HABIT OF WAKING EACH MORNING as if to a new life. which stretched before her straight through to evening, clean, untouched, rarely shadowed by yesterday's worries and mistakes.

Another habit – or rather a gift, equally surprising – was her flood of unexpected and completely spontaneous ideas. Each lived and blossomed powerfully for a time until suddenly swept aside by a new impulse demanding its own undeniable space. Like now this business about the frames. Several months earlier, Jonna had decided she wanted to frame some of the pictures by fellow artists that Mari had on her walls. She made some very pretty frames, but when they were ready to hang, Jonna was seized by new ideas and the pictures were left standing around on the floor.

“For the time being,” Jonna said. “And for that matter, your whole collection needs rehanging, top to bottom. It’s hopelessly conventional.” Mari waited and said nothing. In fact, it felt good having things unfinished, a little as if she had just moved in and didn’t have to take the thing so seriously.

And over the years, she’d learned not to interfere with Jonna’s plans and their mysterious blend of perfectionism and nonchalance, a mix not everyone can properly appreciate. Some people just shouldn’t be disturbed in their inclinations, whether large or small. A reminder can instantly turn enthusiasm into aversion and spoil everything.

Pursuing her work in blessed seclusion, free from interference; moulding and playing with all sorts of materials, a game that all at once, capriciously, could become irresistible and crowd out all other activity. Enjoying a sudden burst of practical energy and repairing everything broken in the house and in the apartments of her completely impractical friends – mending things or making them beautiful, or simply, to everyone’s relief, discarding them. Periods of nothing but intense reading, night and day. Periods of listening to music to the exclusion of all else. To name just a few.

And each and every one of these periods was sharply defined by a day or two of extreme unease and boredom, irresolute days in search of a new course. It was always the same; there was no other way. To encroach on those empty days with suggestions or advice was utterly unthinkable.

Once Mari happened to observe, “You do only what you like.”

“Naturally,” Jonna said, “of course I do.” And she smiled at Mari in mild astonishment.

And now came the day in November when everything in Mari’s studio was to be rehung, rearranged, renewed, and given a completely new significance – graphics, paintings, photographs, children’s drawings, and all sorts of precious small objects reverently pinned up on the walls, which as time passed had lost all memory and meaning. Mari had assembled hammer, nails, picture hooks, steel wire, a level, and several other tools. Jonna had brought only a tape measure.

She said, “We’ll start with the wall of honour. Naturally, that will stay strictly symmetrical. But your grandfather and grandmother are too far apart, and for that

matter it can rain in on your grandfather through the stovepipe. And your mother's little wash drawing gets lost; it needs to be higher. That pretty mirror is idiotic, it doesn't belong, we have to keep it austere. The sword's okay, if a little pathetic. Here, measure – it'll be seven, or six and a half. Give me the awl."

Mari gave her the awl and saw how the wall regained a balance that was no longer traditional but instead almost provocative.

"Now," said Jonna. "Now we'll remove these little curiosities you don't really care about. Free up the walls. This will be an exhibition without a lot of knickknacks all over the place. Put them in one of your seashell boxes or send them to some children's museum."

Mari thought quickly about whether she should be offended or relieved, couldn't decide, and said nothing. Jonna moved on, took pictures down and put them back up, her hammer blows inaugurating a new era.

"I know," she said, "rejection's not easy. But you reject words, whole pages, long impossible stories, and it feels good once it's done. It's no different rejecting pictures, a picture's right to hang on a wall. And most of these have hung here too long; you don't even see them any more. The best stuff you have, you don't see any more. And they kill each other because they're badly hung. Look, here's a thing of mine and here's your drawing, and they clash. We need distance, it's essential. And different periods need distance to set them apart – unless you're just cramming them together for the shock effect! You simply have to feel it... There should be an element of surprise when people's eyes move across a wall covered with pictures. We don't want to make it too easy for them. Let them catch their breath and look again because they can't help it. Make them think, make them mad, even... Now we'll give our colleagues here better light. Why did you leave so much space right here?"

"I don't know," Mari said. But she did know. Suddenly she knew very well that deep down she didn't like the painter colleagues who had done these undeniably very fine works. Mari began paying attention. As she watched Jonna rehang the pictures, it seemed to her that lots of things, including their life together, fell into perspective and into place, a summary expressed in distance or self-evident clustering. The room had changed completely.

When Jonna had taken her tape home with her, Mari marvelled all evening at how easy it is in the end to understand the simplest things.

Videomania

THEY LIVED AT OPPOSITE ENDS OF A LARGE APARTMENT building near the harbour, and between their studios lay the attic, an impersonal no-man's-land of tall corridors with locked plank doors on either side. Mari liked wandering across the attic; it drew a necessary, neutral interval between their domains. She could pause on the way to listen to the rain on the metal roof, look out across the city as it lit its lights, or just linger for the pleasure of it.

They never asked, "Were you able to work today?" Maybe they had, twenty or thirty years earlier, but they'd gradually learned not to. There are empty spaces that must be respected – those often long periods when a person can't see the pictures or find the words and needs to be left alone.

When Mari came in, Jonna was on a ladder building shelves in her front hall. Mari knew that when Jonna started putting up shelves she was approaching a period of work. Of course the hall would be far too narrow and cramped, but that was immaterial. The last time, it was shelves in the bedroom and the result had been a series of excellent woodcuts. She glanced into the bathroom as she passed, but Jonna had not yet put printing paper in to soak, not yet. Before Jonna could do her graphic work in peace, she always spent some time printing up sets of earlier, neglected works – a job that had been set aside so she could focus on new ideas. After all, a period of creative grace can be short. Suddenly, and without warning, the pictures disappear, or they're chased away by some interference – someone or something that irretrievably cuts off the fragile desire to capture an observation, an insight.

Mari went back to the hall and said she had bought milk and paper towels, two steaks, and a nailbrush, and it was raining.

"Good," Jonna said. She hadn't heard. "Could you grab that other end for a second? Thanks. This is going to be a new shelf for videos. Nothing but videos. Did I mention Fassbinder's on tonight? What do you think? Should I build it right out to the door?"

"Yes, do. What time?"

"Nine-twenty."

About eight they remembered Alma's dinner. Jonna phoned her. "I'm sorry to call so late," she said, "but you know, Fassbinder's on this evening, and it's the last time... What? No, that won't work; we have to be here to cut out the commercials... Yes, it's really too bad. But you know how I loathe those commercials; they can ruin the whole film. Say hello to everyone. We'll see you... Yes, I will. Have fun. So long."

"Was she mad?" Mari asked.

"Oh, you know. Apparently the woman hasn't a clue about Fassbinder."

"Should we unplug the phone?"

"If you want. Nobody's going to call. They know better. Anyway, we don't have to answer."

The spring evenings had grown long, and it was hard to darken the room. They sat in their separate chairs and waited for Fassbinder, their silence a respectful

preparation. They had waited this way for their meetings with Truffaut, Bergman, Visconti, Renoir, Wilder, and all the other honoured guests that Jonna had chosen and enthroned – the finest present she could give her friend.

Over time, these video evenings had become very important in Jonna and Mari's lives. When the films were over, they talked about them, earnestly and in detail. Jonna put the cassette into a slipcover decorated in advance with text and pictures, copies from the film library she'd been collecting all her life, and the cassette was given its dedicated place on the shelves reserved for videos – an attractive, continuous surface of gold and soft colours with little flags on the backs showing the country where each film was made. Only very rarely did Jonna and Mari have time to see their films a second time. There was an uninterrupted flood of new ones to accommodate. They had long since filled every shelf in the house. The shelves in the hall were in fact badly needed.

Especially close to Jonna's heart were the silent films in black-and-white; Chaplin, in particular, of course. Patiently, she taught Mari to understand the classics. She talked about her student years abroad, the cinema clubs, her rapture at seeing these films, sometimes several a day.

"You understand, I was possessed. I was happy. And now when I see them again, these classics, so awkwardly expressive, with the clumsy technology that was all they had, it's like being young again."

"But you never grew up," said Mari innocently.

"Don't be smart. They're the real thing, those old films. The people who made them went all out, defied their limits. They're hopeful films – young, courageous films."

Jonna also collected what she called "pure movies" – Westerns, Robin Hood films, wild pirate romances, and a lot of other simple stories of justice, courage and chivalry. They stood alongside the films of contemporary multifaceted geniuses and defended their territory. Their slipcovers were blue.

Jonna and Mari sat in their separate chairs in the darkened room and waited for Fassbinder.

"Before I go to sleep," Mari said, "you know, I think more about a film you've shown me than I do about all my worries, I mean all the things I've got to do and all the dumb things I've ever done... It's sort of like your movies freed me from myself. I mean, of course it's still me, but I'm not my own responsibility."

"You do get to sleep pretty quickly," Jonna said. "It can't hurt you to not have a bad conscience once in a while for twenty minutes. Or ten. Now you can go and turn it on."

The little red light came on. Fassbinder confronted them in all his exquisite, controlled violence. It was very late when he was done. Jonna switched on the lamp, slipped the cassette into its cover, and put it on the shelf labelled "Fassbinder".

"Mari," she said, "are you unhappy that we don't see people?"

"No, not any more."

"That's good. I mean, if we did see them, what would it be like? Like always, exactly like always. Pointless chatter about inessentials. No composition, no guiding idea. No theme. Isn't that right? We know roughly what everyone will say; we know each other inside out. But here on our videos every remark is significant, nothing is

arbitrary. Everything is considered and well formulated.”

“All the same,” said Mari, “sometimes one of us might say something unexpected, something that didn’t fit, something really out of the ordinary that made you sit up and take notice. You know, something irrational.”

“Yes, I know. But make no mistake: great directors know all about the irrational. You talk about things that don’t fit – they use such things, with a purpose, as an essential part of the whole. Do you know what I mean? Apparent quiriness but with a point. They know exactly what they’re doing.”

“But they’ve had time,” Mari objected. “We don’t always have time to think, we just live! Of course a filmmaker can depict what you call quiriness, but it’s still just canned. We’re in the moment. Maybe I haven’t thought this through... Jonna, these films of yours are fantastic, they’re perfect. But when we get involved in them as totally as we do, isn’t that dangerous?”

“How do you mean, dangerous?”

“Doesn’t it diminish other things?”

“No. Really good films don’t diminish anything, they don’t close things off. On the contrary, they open up new insights, they make new thoughts thinkable. They crowd us, they deflate our slovenly lifestyle, our thoughtless way of chattering and pissing away our time and energy and passion. Believe me, films can teach us a huge amount. And they give us a true picture of the way life is.”

Mari laughed. “Of our slovenly lifestyle, you mean? You mean, maybe they can teach us to piss our lives away with a little more intelligence, a little more elegance?”

“Don’t be an ass. You know perfectly well...”

Mari interrupted. “And if film is some kind of edifying god, wouldn’t it be dangerous to try and emulate your gods, always knowing that you’re coming up short? That everything you do is somehow badly directed?”

The telephone rang and Jonna went to answer it. She listened for a long time, then she said, “Wait a minute, I’ll give you his number. Stay calm, it’ll just take a second.” Mari heard her finish the conversation. “Call back if there’s any news. Bye.”

“What’s happened?” Mari said.

“That was Alma again. Her cat jumped out the window. It was trying to catch a pigeon.”

“You’re not serious! Mosse? I didn’t realise; you were so short with her...”

“I gave her the number for the vet,” Jonna said. “You have to be short and matter-of-fact about accidents. You were talking about badly directed.”

“Not now!” Mari burst out impatiently. “Their Mosse... Jonna, I think I’ll go to bed.”

“No,” Jonna said. “We have to wait. She might call again and need comfort. You have to answer and talk to her for a while. You know, share it out fair and square.” She hung the silver cloth over the television set to protect it from dust and morning sun, and lit the last cigarette of the day.

The Hunter

THE SKERRY WAS SHAPED LIKE AN ATOLL – granite surrounding a shallow lagoon or tidal pool with a narrow passage out to the sea. At low water, the lagoon became a lake. Seals had played there in the old days, before they were shot or moved on to quieter locations. Now eider hens used it for a nursery. The cottage stood on one side of the lagoon; the other side was sea-bird territory. Guano streaked the granite like snow, and white as snow were the nesting gulls and terns and the long, showy borders of daisies in every rocky crevice.

On the highest outcropping, a black-backed gull with a single chick had taken up residence, a huge bird with black wing feathers and a beak like a bird of prey. Their distinct separation from the rest of the settlement seemed to express superiority, contempt. Now and then, as if in distraction, the gull would make its way down the mountain to devour an eider chick. Hundreds of screaming birds would rise in a cloud each time and, one by one, dive steeply on the gull – but never come too close. And the lord of the island would snap at them absent-mindedly and return to his own territory, where he would stand stock-still, distinguished, statuesque on the atoll's highest point.

Jonna liked eider chicks, especially after one of them wandered up to the cottage and insisted on following her. Finally she got the chick into a basket and rowed around for an hour before spotting a likely eider family, distant enough from the territory of the black-backed gulls. "Some day I'll murder those black-backed gulls," she said. "You just can't work in peace around here with all these stupid birds."

One morning, Jonna was oiling her pistol out on the granite slope when, almost without thinking, she fired off a shot across the lagoon in the direction of the gull's stolid silhouette. Whether it was to scare him or to shoot him is uncertain. In any case, the bird collapsed and fluttered down from its mountain top. Mari hadn't seen it, and she was used to hearing Jonna shoot at tin cans. Jonna went to finish off the bird. She was very upset, but at the same time proud of her marksmanship – it was at least a hundred metres across the lagoon. But the gull was nowhere to be found.

Two days later, Mari came running across the rock. "Jonna," she called, "it can't fly and it can't walk, and the chick doesn't know where to go!"

When they came to the water, the whole shoreline was empty.

But the dismal morning inevitably came when Mari found the black-backed gull dead on the rocks, and by then it was full of worms.

"Typical," Jonna said. "Of course you had to be the one to find it. Well, okay, I'm sorry. I shot it." And she added, "At a hundred metres."

"I might have known," Mari burst out. "I should have guessed! You've killed the King. He was awful, but he belonged to the island, to us! You just love guns! You just can't stop! So now you can take the feathers. Take them. Go ahead, take them! They're just what you need for your blessed graphic acid bath, aren't they?"

"I didn't mean to," Jonna began, but Mari interrupted and began speculating

cruelly, thoughtlessly, about when the chick would eventually float ashore. Then she went down to the live-box and put on a demonstration by slaughtering perch, a job she despised and generally left completely to Jonna.

Jonna detached the long pinions, washed and dried them and put them in her work drawer, farthest in. All day she waited for the unavoidable sequel, but it was not until they had laid out their nets that Mari began talking about the concept of the hunter. Somewhere she'd read that people could be broadly divided into hunters, gardeners and fishermen. "The hunter type", she explained, "is naturally the most admired. He's considered to be bold and a little dangerous. You know, a person who plays for high stakes, who can be ruthless and take chances that other people don't dare take. Isn't that right?"

Jonna went on whittling on her net peg, observing by and by that "There must be all kinds, but mostly people are a mixture of all three. Or all ninety-five, or whatever."

"Yes, of course, but there are still typical cases of what we might call hunters. And they're born that way."

"Speaking of gulls," Jonna said, "do you remember the one that broke its wing and crawled to the steps every day? I suppose you were being a gardener when you tried to comfort it with food it didn't even have the strength to eat. And what happened? I threw the pike net over the poor thing's head when you were off doing something else and took care of it quickly with a hammer. I'm sure it was full of worms. You can't mend what's totally broken. And for that matter, you were relieved. You admired me. You said so."

"Well, yes," Mari admitted, "but that was completely different. That's anecdotal evidence."

"There are times," Jonna went on without listening, "there are times when a healthy ruthlessness is the right thing. What about that time those idiots came ashore in their horrible plastic boat – it was purple – and were going to shoot our birds before the season even opened?! And what's more they were drunk, though that doesn't excuse them. Remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

"So you see what I mean. I went down to the shore and gave them a piece of my mind. No effect. They sneered at me and sauntered up onto the island with their shotguns."

"They were dreadful," Mari agreed.

"They were. And then I thought, the only right and just thing to do right now is to shoot holes in their boat. That would teach them, right? A couple of holes at the waterline, bang."

"But how did they get home?!" Mari burst out.

"They had to bale. Or maybe they had rags."

Jonna and Mari sat silent for a moment.

"Odd," Mari said. "Did you say that was last year?"

"Yes. Or the year before. And the boat was violet. Lilac."

"But are you absolutely sure you really shot holes in it, or did you just think about it?"

Jonna stood up and shoved the dinner dishes into the box under the bed. "Maybe I just thought about it," she said then. "But the point ought to be clear enough. You have

to realize that there always has to be an aggressor. Someone who attacks when no one else has the guts to get involved. To protect...”

“Ha!” Mari cried. “You’re very clever at getting me to go along with all sorts of things that are beside the point! The point is, you think guns are fun! Admit you think they’re fun! At midsummer you shot the stovepipe on the tent sauna full of holes, and the smoke’s been coming in ever since. Did I say a word about it? No. But let me tell you something once and for all: I loathe that pistol!”

Mari took the rubbish bin and went outside.

After a while, she came back.

“Jonna, they’re here again. The purple plastic boat. Can you go down and talk to them?”

“The nerve!” Jonna said. “But maybe they’ve come to apologize. They might even have brought water. Or wood. Wait. I’ll go down and see.”

When Jonna was halfway across the meadow, Mari came running after her. “Take this,” she said. “You never know.” And she handed her the pistol.

Catfishing

THE SUMMER HAD MOVED INTO JUNE. Slowly, thinking Mari didn't notice, Jonna went from window to window, tapped the barometer, walked out on the slope or out on the point, came in again with comments about things that needed attention, complained about the gulls screaming and copulating to drive a person crazy, and spoke her mind about the local radio, which had the most idiotic programmes – for example, about amateurs who had shows and thought they were God's gift to art. And the weather was implacably beautiful the entire time.

Mari said nothing. What could she say?

Finally Jonna got busy. She built up her great unassailable barricade against work, against the agony of work. With small, polished tools she began shaping exquisite small objects of wood, tinier and tinier, more and more beautiful. She visited the islands to the west looking for juniper; she walked the shoreline gathering unusual kinds of driftwood, odd shapes that might give her an idea. She arranged it all on her workbench in symmetrical piles, smaller ones, larger ones, and every piece of sea-polished wood had its own special potential to keep her from making pictures.

One day Jonna was sitting on the granite slope polishing an oval wooden box. She claimed it was an African wood, but she'd forgotten the name.

"Will there be a lid?" Mari asked.

"Of course."

"Have you always worked in wood? I don't mean woodcuts or wood engravings, but for real?"

Jonna put down the wooden box. "For real," she repeated. "That's brilliant. Try to understand, I'm playing. And I mean to go on playing. Do you have a problem with that, maybe?"

The cat came in, sat down, and stared at them.

"Fish," Mari said. "We ought to take in the net."

"And what happens if I do nothing but play? Until I die! What would you say to that?"

The cat meowed angrily.

"And ambition," Mari said. "What are you going to do about your goals?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

"But what if you can't help it?"

"I can help it. Don't you understand; there isn't time any more. It's all I do, just observe, observe to distraction, pictures that don't mean shit until I draw them, and redraw them. I've had enough for one life, my only life! And anyway, I don't see them any more. Admit I'm right!"

"Yes," Mari said. "You're right."

The sky had clouded over and there was rain in the air. The cat meowed again.

"Fish," Mari said. "The cat food's all gone."

"We can leave it overnight."