

Audience
(1987)

On the stairs
I
met
the pope
on
a stair
of
his own.

What
did the pope say?

I
am
the pope,
said the pope.

When I shade my eyes
I can see better
It's as you say
It's the pope
sitting out there
on the little island
farthest out
where the waves break

The pope met the sisters
one day on the square
The sisters had come a long way
each with her dog
Welcome to the Vatican
said the pope
and fell on his knees
before the dogs
They knew more languages
than he did
and could lip-read

Trumpet blowers
under the spruce-firs
and those that follow
of the wind players
How can a hare
possibly compete with
a trombone
With a french horn

through tall ferns
that reach to your waist
and shiny shoes on roots
A big path in a little wood

I hold the hare by the ears
and do not let it go
until they have past
Then I let it run off
and report back

Here I have knocked
my hoops into the earth
You with your
sandbags
You with your
big bowls of water
I don't think
you will make it
I think you'll have to let go
of what you're doing

Not even the pope
who has such podgy small hands
and such a little round chin
and such white skin
that it hurts your eyes
with a real rose-coloured gleam
And such a funny little calotte
over his white silky hair
Not even the pope
Rubens on a trip to the Aegean Sea
can wish anything he likes for himself
He too believes in the cuckoo
and knows how the land lies

A smell of bird
comes from the pope
only faintly
but the brothers can notice it
at the Monday meeting
if the wind's in the right direction

Then they exchange a few looks
over the table
and make the same sign
several times

It's common knowledge
that the pope prays on the rooftop

He sits in the big wind
and welcomes a seagull
when it lands

The cormorants
on Galapagos
have small black wings
that are no use for flying
but it has no enemies
even so

The penguin
That's a different story

It's not easy
to be a puffin
with multicoloured beak
to be an uncommon bird a rare bird
out where the fjord meets the sea
where the waves break
and the young die in the nest
But it's better
to be a puffin
than a great auk
A great auk's a bird
no one envies

I measure the boundaries
pace out one two three
four thousand metres
If that's they way you want it

The birds still fly
from sea to sea
Those with thin skins still meet
just as punctually in the juniper scrub

If you want to talk to me
you'll have to sing really loud
or send snail-mail messages

It was the doctor
who stated
that the pope had grown fat
ten perhaps twenty kilos overweight

When the pope sought consolation from the bird
it gave him the same advice as the doctor
so that put an end

to cake
which the pope was fond of
and to cheese

But once in a while
the lights in the church are turned off
and everyone's gone off
Then the pope sneaks round the altar rail
and nibbles a wafer
behind the pew

Quick quick
all that can run
all with sideways breathing
and a slightly oversized tongue
all with a stomach rash
and backward step
breast lumps
and runny eyes
soft underarm with light-blue veins
and small-pox vaccination
Now we're off to
a flat space in the forest

In a quick space I run
ever quicker
Right behind me
is the hare
It knows the way
better than me
It knows the stones
by the path
And all the roots
But it lets me
go first
Sly one

Just think
that the crab too
has a pope in its stomach
That's why the crab is
the highest of the animals
apart from the dog

Then it doesn't help
to be a gannet between wings
at a pinch a gull behind a fishing boat

The cardinal gets

his red hat
from the pope

He walks all the way across
at knocks at the Vatican
the pope welcomes him warmly

The pope has a small supply
of such hats
and picks out one
that's the right size
for the cardinal
who tries it on
and nods

Afterwards
as they take a stroll
the pope shows the cardinal the animals
but the cardinal is thinking most about his hat
and he doesn't listen properly
Then the pope gives his dog a sly wink
and the dog replies with a wry smile

The pope stares blindly
at the manuscript
It is closely written in two black columns
He follows the lines with his index finger
but gets easily confused even so
and reads the same place several times

When he gets tired of it
as he often does
it sometimes happens that he falls asleep
with his big chin almost touching
the thin pages

Or goes out into the garden white-eyed
and lies down with his head
in the grass
He lies like that
until he feels cold

When the pope gets tired
he takes off his slippers
and scuffles barefoot
small white pads
across marble and carpet
to his bed
Rolls himself up beneath the sheet
rolls up tight beneath
the sheet and the blanket

Curls up
with the big cat
snuggles up to the big
brown-striped cat
And is able to fall asleep
almost
at once

The big brown-striped cats
sated and heavy
along the whitewashed wall
had remnants of mice
in the corners of their mouths
and milky beards
It would take at least three hours

My hands have ears
when they stroke the cat
The words are on the outside
those that are hidden
from one time to the next

The cat tells me of
places
a low bridge
over shallow water
and something that shines
so far

Actually
if the pope could choose
he would have chosen the pond
all day
talked of this and that with the ducks
Each of them carries truths in its beak
and speak of things
that not even the pope knew about

Every time he has an hour to spare
the pope walks out into the garden
in his wide white robe
his dogs at his heels
to listen to
the latest news

The ducks are clear-sighted
They quickly recognise the pope
from one time to the next
big cheese in the grass

The pope
knows about the sisters in the garden
They have stolen eggs from the nest
they hide them in their cotton pants
while they smile to each other

The pope looks at them
from the tree
He too has found eggs
which he hides in his pocket
feels the smooth round shape
against a finger

In the evening he boils one of them
and eats it for dinner
along with a slice of bread and butter

The pope and his dog
understand
each other well
Is that you
says the pope
Other those with wet noses
may read
my herbarium
The dog tells
its story
with small notes in the margin

When I draw the house
it's without a door
but with windows
on all sides

The brown dog
with a broad back
jumps over the fence
and disappears

To begin with I thought
of the little deformed dog
as a soft small cheese
small dead herring
in the net
with fingers in the wrong place
And the sky was a blue melon
with the sun a hermetic peach
I wanted to eat with a spoon
The evening has never been juicier

the air never so sweet inside the mouth

Then I thought of
the grey dog
that was sick
on the carpet each evening
and that they had to put down

The dog
with the sad eye
sees everything that is sad

It follows the shadows in the garden
and counts the figures on the moon's face

The dog has seen more
than is necessary
for a dog to see
therefore low-voiced it can
save an important star

It's not always
that easy to be pope
says the pope
He hides under the table
and calls his dog to him
There he sits until it is dark
and everyone's stopped looking for him
When everything's quiet
in the Vatican
he crawls out
from under the cloth
and gives his dog
fresh water in its bowl
Then he eats letter biscuits
at the window

Once every six months
the pope goes round
to the cardinals
He has known them
for over twenty years
And each of them
has his own story
to tell
which the pope listens to
with bowed head

Later
when the pope comes home

he takes his dog up
in his lap
and strokes it
along its narrow back
Then he tells everything
to the dog
who listens
with bowed head

I walk along the dikes
with the lake on my right
the dark expanse
the long line
from outpost to outpost

When the voice no longer holds

Then we must learn
from whales
to carry
the seven seas on our backs

More and more often
the pope goes out to his dog
and lies down
beside it
his head in close to the
big grey dog
Both have soft water
behind closed eyes
They know about death
and train a little every day
in the afternoon
while it's still light
In this way they become worldly wise
and can give answers
When the pope's not at home
Go to the grey dog
with your tears

The Gospel according to the Ape
(1989)

This is the year of the ape
with snow in the air
wood-stoves and the squirrel
The days dress in cross or crown
and their shadows shorten and shorten
on their way past

For this is the year of the ape
and he has waited a long time
to speak from the tree

And the ape came from the cloud
divided day from night
Man from woman

Starts wearing horns and serpents
Moves on

I have this with me for you:
tights and paper clips
The unhatched flies of summer
The chorus of summer

The woman with round shoulders
comes to the ape in the tree
Her pockets are full of buttons
one button for each thing that hurts
and a few extra ones

Then the ape descends
into the cold water
take her by the shoulders
and says

I cannot help you
even if I wanted to
I can only take you up
into my arms
sew your buttons onto your blouse
and say
that this is the world
and the world is the world
and the world is the world

This is what the ape says to the blind:

There is nothing to see
anyway
For the night is even darker now
and the sky cries out for light

Signal
Across the square out onto the lawn
Women bending down and large animals

The ape draws a circle on the sheet of paper

catches a green fly
and a black widow

Signal
water released from a great height
The pressure of a falling mountain

The ape draws a big circle
round the moon
filling its hands with fever

This is my cathedral
says the ape
This tree
This willow
This lime in the yard
This ash
are my church
which I scatter over the meadow

Says the ape from the tree
Says the ape from the tree

And from the tree
I can see the sea
and hear that it's singing
and it's singing
and it's singing
says the ape from the tree

Elb calculates backwards
washes the clouds from the sky
and maps the globe
Land between sea and sea

She cracks an egg in the pan
pours milk into the glass
bangs her head against the wall

And stares blindly
at the view
from the third floor

Elb emerges from the forest
She has red shoes on
The mountains give way to the valley
The trees part for the path
Then Elb walks in and out
of the heather

in mother's clementine
The sun separates the yolk
from the egg
and everything takes place
under a gull
on the slippery bare rock-face
at the mouth of the fjord

Eight weeks later
the mother's uterus has become a grapefruit
Elb has all her organs in the right place
and the vertebrae in her back

She dares
to lay stars
under her tongue

She lays stones on straw
and waits
a great sorrow

Then the ape comes
under the willow tree
with tousled eyebrows
He talks about
hair that grows
and about wind and water
How light is caught by the wall

He says:
"Loose your hair from the plait
for the wind will blow it
across the sea
And you will stand at the very
end of the world
and call
and call"

She forbids the sun
to lay eggs on the lawn
chases the dogs out the tree
and stops the sea
by whistling

See the pig
how thin it is
See the lemons propagating behind the hedge
And the sheep point with their ears
for water

Who is to keep word
when even the sun
gets out of bed on the wrong side

Then she seeks the ape
for advice
“Mix with dry
with the wet,” says the ape
“Keep the eel in the lake,
the serpent on land”

The ape tells
of days in the small town
with the family

Run a race
with the fleeting light
to the three red benches at the tower
See the evening grow in the grass
The milk as a drop
at the very centre of the leaf

That's all I want
says the ape
Sleep among the bulbs
Cycle off a clear morning
and return
with fresh bread

Elb has a short-sighted child as a boarder
that fetches wood
in a bucket
and runs bent double
through the bushes
without friends

The child hides her spirits
under a touch of glass
Here hands in bandages
and stands up to her knees in the river
to call the fish
up to the surface

In the evening
her ear against the wall
she hears the child give evidence
She looks in the mirror for water
and saves a dead person from drowning

Undressed in front of the mirror

Elb has one breast that's too small
and the other
it not that big either

But she has feet
that point forwards
And her heart in the right place:
three buttons from the top

Look at me
says the cuckoo
on its way south
My feather-clad breast
is also just as alone
as the nose in the face

Strange how everything is
the way it is
How the stomach is higher up
than we imagine
The arms stick out on both sides
The rosehip's full of lice
and the sea flows

The mother
is still with her
through the high reeds
Does not lie down
until she lies down
Does not go off to the right

These are for my mother
she says
and holds out her slippers
So she won't have to go barefoot
in the winter
Not feel her toes freeze
when she follows

It's cold
being an ape
in December
when the moon freezes
onto the sky
and the snow plough
drives through the streets
with crooked back

For nothing is as sad
as an ape
without a tree

says the ape
He's sitting in the cupboard

My boat is loaded with
oranges
apricots
Atlantic salmon with cucumber salad
and the ape's commandments from the tree:
Eat the cake while it's hot
Divide the berry in two
Drink the juice in the sun
Lie on the jetty in the evening
and throw stones into the water

For my boat is loaded with
avocados
aubergines
the remains of the ark at Ararat
and the ape's commandments from the tree:
Sleep until you wake
go barefoot in the grass
have toffees in your pockets
and sit at table for a long time
when it's breakfast

And that's what the ape says
in the evening
at the stove
while he plays king's patience

But I feel most alone
when the family's gathered
says the ape
And all close relations are eating
from the same dish
The cold is severe here in the castle
with stone walls within walls

Have you tried
diving at night
into a sea or small lake

Lying awake thinking
when someone's asleep next to you
Darkened rooms
or a Sunday with rain

Let's drink a toast to loneliness
says the ape
So they drink a toast to loneliness

Christmas Eve
at the vicar's and the farmer's
The faithful face of winter against the window pane

And the horse bites its manger
and the cow tramples on the cat
and the dog writhes in convulsions

Let the moon become an angel
so the dog can find its way home in the dark
Let the door be open
so the dog can come in
with sausages in its mouth
Let the slippers be by the bed
so the dog can have something to chew

The mother carries the child
up to the ape
places it under the tree
like a cone
or a pear
and the ape speaks
and the ape says:
Just think in five years
you'll be five years old
and in six years
you'll be six
Such is the ape's blessing

The Linnea passion
(1992)

Do you hear Linnea singing
Do you hear Linnea singing

In the roof hangs a red swing
In the swing sits a little girl
far far away

Round the roof is a night sky
round the swing is a boat
Then she is a sail for stars

When she sleeps
she is behind mountains
and high white houses
with all too many windows

Impossible to say where she begins
and where she ends
sinks right through the mattress
and deeper
down to China

The way the hand lies on the sheet
The curve of the arm
The dream like a darker patch
round the eye

The mother does not wake her up
but eats of her sleep

No resistance
but warmth between the back and the bed
No sound
but her breath that eases

The night broods in the room
hatching out dreams between head and pillow
A big snail in a sandpit

Then Linnea wakes up
and sees the dark
crouching in the wall

Is the moon asleep now, asks Linnea
Yes, now the moon's asleep

replies the mother

That night the moon comes
in the window
and strokes Linnea's hair
catches her in the flight
between a green cloud
and a yellow sea

The mother hears her singing once more
from a low branch in the oak tree
a three-note song among the finger leaves

Eyebrows and forehead
More serious than death
is the song

She whistles to the tree
Then the tree comes to her window
with the sky in its hands

- Here I am, Linnea
says the tree and is hers
a ladder
between one thing and the other

- Who are you, asks the tree
and Linnea answers
- a yellow sock
a red belt
a fire in fifteen houses
and a tree who asks me
who I am
Linnea answers on the lawn
She knows the way bit by bit

The pine tree comes to her
with its branches
and talks to her
half turned away

- Put a five-crown under my root
says the tree
- And I'll give you back ten

- No, says Linnea
and doesn't trust trees
that talk about money

The tree lays back its arms
and shouts
- Oh, dammit!

Then Linnea wakes up in her room
and looks out
The yellow street light
The white moon
The black tree
that swears and swears

The sad tree
follows Linnea to the bend
with its shadow
stands once more at the fence
with its birds

Stops to filter the air
through its leaves
Has other things to do
than follow to the door

- Not yesterday, not today
but tomorrow I will follow you home
little girl, says the tree

If Linnea doesn't get wings
it's not because
she isn't good

The night is dark
and the curtains full of patterns
The day is light
and the bushes full of birds

- What's the point of wings, little girl
asks the tree
and dances to the end of the meadow
with Linnea on its shoulders

I envy you your shoes
says the tree
one day in August
I envy you your feet
that jump and dance
and never want to stop

I do you, says Linnea

Your roots under the house
beneath the garden
beneath the stream and the path and the stone

Linnea lies ill under the tree
- Oh oh oh, whispers the tree
And the tree lets its leaves fall
The big tree, the kind tree

And the tree lifts up the sky with its arms
so it won't weigh too much
on her chest
And the tree turns aside the night
so she won't feel frightened

Where are you going, she asks the river
bend beyond bend
- I am off and away
and never come back
the river replies
and sucks itself closer the sea
with foam in the corners of its mouth

The trees curtsey to the wind
and the river licks her feet
A timid dog disappears
quietly from the bank

- I'm not going
says Linnea to the river
- You're the one that's going
and I wave
she says
and is neither happy nor sad

The river has no eyes
but a current
The river has no ears
but two paths
That's where I came from
and that's where I'm going

- I have no paths
says Linnea
- but two ears
I hear what I say
I hear the current pull
the water's cart towards the sea

The river has no comfort to offer
a girl that's crying
The river only reflects the rain
in rings on its surface
ripples itself quiet
and hurries on

For what is a girl that's crying
Behind every bend
the river has a girl that's crying
leads the water on
on and on
to the sea's salt salt tongue

Linnea Linnea
opens like an autumn flower
while the trees whisper
of rainy weather and mist

She learns how to whistle from the wind
She learns from the river to reflect something forgotten
flecked with stars

In the bushes outside she remembers something
she can't quite remember
The leaf in the stream follows a pattern
draws a route
and memory adds a swallow
to the flight
as it disappears

Linnea divides herself up into pieces
Cries in pieces under the table
under the chair
under the stairs
in the chest of drawers

When the mother is at the door
she collects the pieces
hides the joins

Plaits her hair
as the mother passes through her
in three strides

The mother crosses the floor
with arms that are swelling
- What do you want me for, mother
What will you give me

Everything everything everything everything

- Now you see me, says Linnea
with her eyes open
- And now you don't, she says
with her eyes closed

The mother sees the girl even so
for she's wearing a red-striped sweater
That sweater is impossible
not to catch sight of

- Are you singing, asks the tree
- No, says Linnea
- I'm crying
I'm not crying
it's my mother who's crying
through my eyes
This is my mother
And this is me
says Linnea

and remembers the big branch
remembers the big branch

Sew up my eyes with thread
Mummy, my mummy
and I'll learn to follow you
with my ears
across the floor and back

Bind my hands behind my back
and I'll write your name
with my tongue
in the salt on a red plastic cloth

Mother's shape at the bath tub
Mother's shape at the sink
- Is that what I'm going to be like
she asks the tree by the wall

- Yes just like that
the tree by the wall answers
Just like that
three blasts on the trumpet
The dead spit of your mother

Now she displays her face

This is her face
These are her arms
This is her white back

Take this biscuit and eat of it

This is Linnea
This is Linnea
bathed in body

First he came to her with plums
which she hatched out between her breasts
Big blue plums that split
one by one over her stomach
and decayed in the days that followed

Then he came to her with his eyes
and planted eggs in her throat
She brooded for weeks and weeks
until the shell dissolved
in tears
she did not recognise as her own

Days with ice on the ponds
Days with heavy boots

With the sun returned over the mountain ridge
Three stars in Orion's belt
She burnt her hands
and her lips
Became blind for three days
But the sun was in her hair
and her hair shone

Linnea grows out of herself
kneads herself out between shoulder and shoulder
In front she has two hills on the map
The promise of the flesh

The mouth works with the tongue as its tool
The face cultivates itself into a kiss
a morello of a mouth
just made for eating
The taste of lip

She is an edifice
A pillar, a church
of milk and white bread
She balances forwards
from a place under the heel
The flesh that sings

But in the middle of the back
death lies waiting
Already present
at a spot she cannot see

- You don't know me
but I know you
says death
a bell

Riddles for a rainy day
(1994)

What's the resemblance between nothing and everything?

The rain at the lamppost
The bushes by the fence

This is rejoicing
This is rejoicing

These wet leaves across the road
This road

The heartshaped pond
and the gravel
This gravel

Who?

It's you
who carry yourself so

The head's relation to the throat
The throat's relation to the chest
The mouth and chin

The way you hold your head
like a hat
high up against a low sky

And such a stylish hat
you've been allowed to borrow
for the short walk
up the ridge

Where does the rain come from?

From your lips
stretched out like two slugs
from corner to corner
full to the brim with laden flesh

When they begin to tremble
a small white rowing boat
enters the strait
with clouds in tow
Heavy curtains
striped with rain

Who cries and cries without stopping?

Is it you?
Then you can fill the bath tub
to the brim
for I want to bathe
Immerse myself in your tears
and rub the yellow soap into my hair
Now that the apples are almost ripe on the trees
and the wind and the rain

What is it that is hard and soft wet and dry and disappears into thin air?

It is water
that changes clothes
Water that burns
Water that runs
Water that goes out in snow
You thought perhaps
it went away
when you drank it?
You thought perhaps
you had eaten it up?
But water does not disappear
It is only travelling

You and I are worse off
We are the ones who die
with thirty-seven degrees under our arm
Clothed or naked
With or without safety belts
On holiday or in bed
We lean back
while the water rains
among the poplars
and the lake rises

Who speaks quietest in the grass

The apples?
No, not the apples
But out in the horse pasture
stands a bath tub full of water
talking quietly of thirst
So still so still
that not even the grasshoppers
can hear it

But who is it that laughs under the oak tree?

It's the boy in the red wheelchair

Who was it that always dressed up more than was necessary?

It was the fat magpie
who was to go to the burial
of its grand aunt

Even when death pressed him down onto the asphalt
he had his best shirt on
like a medal
for the white carrion birds' crusade
of the flesh

**What is it that swallows with its eye
blows with its ear
on its way through the marshland
with great strides?**

It is the frog
jack of all trades and heartbreaker
To eat, to kiss
to catch between its fingers
all through the summer

Unfairly treated
as most softies
crawls in under the fridge
with a broken leg
to dry out among dust and paper
close to the radiator
while you sing and sing in your bath

**What will you say
when the pig asks?**

You don't know perhaps
For it's not always easy to know
And it's not always easy
to say anything at all
As if we were born to speak
As if we were created
to think really great thoughts
As if words came of their own accord

But the big pig has clear thoughts

about glass apples
and knows that up is up
and down is down

Once in a while
about every Thursday
the pig comes to tea
and says
How odd that the earth hangs in the air
And you say
Hold on tight
Hold on tight
you say
Three spoons of sugar in your tea
And the pig holds on tight
with all four legs
and trusts in gravity

**What will we say to a snake
that's crying?**

Go ahead and cry
Go ahead and cry, snake

Is a snake not to be allowed to cry
Are its tears always to be held back
and held back
in sealed bottles in the cellar
Vintage upon vintage
Fermented juice with mildewed corks
Redcurrants from a forgotten summer
Blackcurrants from the saddest bush

This bottle is for you
my friend in the grass
captain of rainy weather
skipper of mist banks
Let us sail the bottle-ship out into hair
Back on the brink of cloud cover

**What will you say
to a pig in a cold-sweat in the hammock
while the sun dribbles against the plastic cloth?**

- Oh poor little pig
you can say
and give the pig red apples
from America

Nothing like red American apples
Nothing like fever in the pear orchard

Nothing like a pig
that's never slaughtered
That just goes on living
living and living

**Who is it whispering in the bushes
Is it you?**

Once again
the fox comes to the hare
in coat and tails
White paws, fine teeth

Dear hare, dear friend
Pray enter this throat's delicate gateway
and feel the touch of the uvula
The massage of the pharynx
I'll give you a chance
of becoming part of my flesh
In that way I can take better care of you
and you through me can be more active
The same body, the same spleen
The same blood, the same heart
We can't get any closer

It's not even certain that I want to have you
says the fox
The fine claw, the white shirt
But if you clean your ears out, my friend,
wipe your nose, smooth your coat
Then perhaps, perhaps then
you'll be granted entry
to the soft acid-bath of my stomach
And I, no less than I the fox will offer you
a tour of the small intestine
A warmer journey towards the squeeze of the large intestine
Just think: the suction of tufts through the blood
The kiss of digestion!

What's the advantage of having a cold?

It makes you aware of the presence of your nose:
a boiled apple among mucous membranes
hermeticised in the head's saucepan
The palate melted in butter
and the slack muscle of the tongue
much too big for the mouth

To swim one's lukewarm cheeks
through sticky hours
towards the bed's final meal

of cotton and down
The smooth pillow case's Our Father
Thy kingdom come
The duvet's deliver us from evil

**Who is it that collapses sideways
across the table?**

Is it you?
Has a Brussels sprout got stuck in your throat, perhaps?
Falling glasses
red-wine stains on the cloth
Peas out of the bowl
like a broken string of pearls

Are you the one gasping for breath?
Leaning forwards
with your chest against the edge of the table
Your arms
Do you give up?
Are you resting your forehead against the roast?
Your chin in the potatoes that you'd mashed in the gravy
You who had so looked forward to the gravy
to the cowberry preserve
You who had so looked forward to the dessert
The stuffed apples, the dollop of whipped cream and the raisins
To the summer with gulls

What do we do now?
Do we thump you on the back?
Stick out fingers down your throat?
Do we try grabbing you round the waist
and pressing our fist
into your diaphragm?
Or do we just stand there looking on
Put down our fork neatly
at the side of the plate
Straighten the cloth that's getting wrinkled
Stop talking

Is it you that's suffocating?
Why are you looking at me?
Do you think I can help?
Ought I to find the Stanley knife
and slice a short cut for your lungs?
Open your chest, throat
and remove the Brussels sprout with tweezers

Just think, a Brussels sprout
Would you rather have fallen?
Plunged into an abyss?

Or be burnt to death?
With smoke as a mattress over your mouth
or simply one Friday morning
not be wakened by the alarm clock
be wakened by the door bell
just stretch sleep, stretch sleep
into nothingness

What room only has room for one

The snail's shell?
The tiny loo
with the knot-holes in the wall?
Or the closet with the vacuum cleaner?

I'm thinking of the body
as I sit on my own
behind the bones' palisade
This fencing between you and me
of cartilage and bone
This diver's suit of veins and tissue
This fine-meshed pattern
over the hands and up the arms
I've put on
a really tight skin

You thought perhaps
we were closer each other
You thought perhaps we were one
Your arm under my soft neck
As if there was room for two
on board this vessel
As if it was possible
to press our bodies closer together
to interweave beneath our subcutaneous fat
and suck from the same thoughts
look out of the same eyes:
The red sweater on the back of the chair
in the blue kitchen
Would we understand each other better then?

But yet again
you have to stand outside
encapsulated by nose, chin
With our separate bellies
we can call to each other
from the second floor
as usual

What is it that hides under the bed

The grey sock?
The worn slipper?

No
It is Christmas
that lies under the bed
waiting for December
Crawls out a little clearer
each year
nearly bursting in anticipation

Who is it in the room that keeps so still?

It is the small stillness
that would like to have a name

What name would you like then,
my little friend
Any suggestions?

Crane
and Crane was its name

**Who's quickest
over the hills and far away?**

Is it the leopard?
The antelope?
Or the swallow?

Is it the car?
The plane?
Or the rocket?

Is it sound?
Light?
Or thought?

No, you're the quickest
The seven steps to the telephone
Not even light
can compete with you then

**Who has too many letters
for love?**

The glove
If you open it
you can see how empty it is

So empty that it houses a bag
of sweets
or a mini-holiday
with stamps and serviettes
That's not too bad

Perhaps you have an extra G
in your name?

Who's biggest?

The old man is biggest
even though the son
has outstripped him
even though the grandson
has outstripped him
even though the greatgreatgrandson
has outstripped him
the old man is biggest

even though he's horizontal
in a white oaken coffin
with carvings
and brass handles
the old man is biggest

or perhaps not?
Perhaps he was always the smallest
amongst his brothers
Then it doesn't help to be older
than his long-legged son
Then it doesn't help either
to stand on a box

But who's smallest?

The smallest is smallest
The very smallest of the very smallest

So small
that not even the tears are visible to the eye
Not even the tiniest angry tears
not even the saddest tears either

nor even
the tears
cried with one eye

Who is it whistles down the road

at six 'o clock in the morning?

It's not the paper boy
on his blue bike
Recognisable from the chain
and the gravel that tinkles in the driveway

It's the old engineer
you can hear
He's the one who always whistles cheerfully
on his way
on his third and last round
along the fences

His sweater back to front
And hands in his pockets

**Who is it whistles in the storehouse
at ten 'o clock in the morning?**

It's the happy clearer-upper
thinking of his packed lunch
Whistles Dear God all's well with me
too quickly
among the crates

Who is it sighs
farthest in the hall
at twelve 'o clock?

It's the kind store manager
who's forgotten his packed lunch at home
And that was the special one
Three slices of seed loaf
with ham and tomato

But who is it mumbles at the window
at the back of the tram at ten past four?

It's the little hairdresser lady
who's counting the days
till Easter

It's the fourth of February
no more
nor less

**What is it that you can't hear
but which rings
thirteen alarm clocks in the room?**

The child
with a toy-block stuck in its throat
The locked tears
The open mouth
The look a tiny bell
The pale-blue colour
The hare in the snare
The shot in the elk
The fox in the trap

**Who is it waits for you
no matter what you've done
no matter what you've done
Softer than you had thought
Better than you could recall?**

Your pillow
in its worn old pillow case
One single great cheek
of embrace

**What do I get
if I burn my child**

Nothing
Absolutely nothing

Where have you hidden what you've forgotten?

In the back seat of the car
where memory becomes indistinct

The crumbs and a dry slice of cheese
A raspberry sweet stuck to the carpet
The sand and the summer's yellow snail shell
The smell of rubber, petrol
vomit, apples

Somewhere or other here
there is a trigger
a door handle
in to one of the rooms
where you stood with your back to the wall

A cinema ticket
lies in the gap between back and seat
A serviette with a stain
that looks like a face
A dirty glove, a ten-crown note, a stick
The hairs from a grey-white dog

put down long ago

When memory resembles understanding
When the pieces resemble the picture
When the picture resembles reality
As if there was a pattern
a context
a whole

As if the riddles had an answer
far in under the front seat
An unopened lollipop
between sand and dirt
A plastic watch
a broken pencil
Farthest in to the right
something that shines
It's not your ring
but some cellophane paper

Leaning forward against the blue crack of the front seat
I hear my mother sing
A wild duck swims quietly
near the high coast of the island
Somewhere behind the nose the eyes
it hurts
As if the tears had rusted a hinge
where the wild duck still floats
deep inside the head

Who's sitting in the wall looking?

A teeny-weeny mummy with a fur hat

Who are you that comes into my house even though the door is shut?

Is it your back in the hall door?
Is it your steps on the stairs?
Is it you
that puts illness on my children
Lays out quarrels in the bedroom
Steals the milk from breasts
so that the unweaned child cries itself to sleep
A cold after you across the living room floor
A draught across the neck
The cream turned sour in the cupboard
The roast spoilt

Who are you that dares lead my children
towards the drop behind the house

Who are you that tempts them higher
higher, higher
up the climbing tree
Who are you that waits at the bottom of the road

Is it you
that lays out infection on the kitchen unit
Shoves children down stairs
deceives them with poison
If you blame me I blame you
Lie upon lie across the table

A cross on the chair
where you have sat
A cross in the cup at the kitchen sink
A cross on the floor where you have stood

Who is it that nobody sees?

It's mother, that's who it is
merging with the bowls
saucepans, glasses
Moulded into the kitchen unit
and crucified to the clothes

In this way she carries the house on her back
the rubbish bin on her head
Fish skins, meat leftovers
and the sticky remains of some porridge
In this way she bears the day along
meal for meal

And sits with the hooks
the sharp scissors
rolls out children flat in a dough
This is how I cut you:
A heart, a hare, a horse
This is how I divide you
into one, into two, into three
The mother's steady hand, but unsteady fingers
There it slipped again:
Clips the ears off the son
the finger off the daughter
sucks up the blood
with the sponge of her tongue
Some ointment, a plaster

In this way she kneads us out
one after the other
The grip round the neck
the hand against the back
kneads us out into unequal buns

a childhood in the oven

A bearer, a baker
A queen over stomach and intestines
A ruler in the breast
She is crown in crumbs
in the room that breathes
She is honoured in salt

To then worm us into the night
with hot, dry sugar hands
The wafer of thanks on the tongue
when she folds us into sleep
In through the grace of the flannel
The blessing of rest in the church of the cheeks
An altar in the dark

**Let's say you stuff your mother
into a suitcase
What do you get then?**

A piece of hand luggage
you have to lug up the stairs
through the streets
across the squares
right across the towns

Perhaps you want to put down your suitcase again
forget it at the airport
lock it up in a luggage box
As if you would really do that
As if that would be enough
Take a bus or run off
Take a new name
Change addresses
As if that would help
Your mother's still there
Your mother can see you
You thought you left her behind
along with the suitcase
but she's still around
half hidden
between your eyebrows

**Who is it that takes
one step at a time?**

It is the thoughtful cashier
on his way home

When does the town look like an old man?

In November
When the precinct dressed in grey
hangs its shoulders
Breathing out
through stained gateways

With threadbare socks
With worn hands
Dirty ears and black-edged furrows
the town is on its way home
to croon itself off into a brick's winter sleep
under quilts of plaster

The half-open door
The hum of the fridge

What is it that goes and goes and never gets there?

It is the park
passing through the evening
so quietly you scarcely notice it
A movement deceptively like another one
A movement reminiscent of a film
Seen from a car window in passing
Or from a bridge
Slower than a film
quicker than a drawing

What's the resemblance between remembering and forgetting?

The contours of a half-thought thought
are the depression in the asphalt
Or the wound in the wall
where the plastering is gone
The cylindrical heart
Visible, distinct
Is anything ever going to be explained?

In the backyard
stands a green lady's bicycle without a saddle
Against the wall:
a red and white plastic bag that has been tied
Everything whispers to me
The string
and the eight knots on the string
The bottle in the corner. And the cardboard box

I can hear something I can't hear

The swish in the pipes. The rain in the stairway
The staircase that sings

A hundred thousand hours
(1996)

Mummy, mummy! Back's what I'm
going to call you. Big broad back's what I'm
going to call you.

My mummy. My lips peel for you.
My hands. My ears. You talk to me
through the chairs. Through the liver paste on the table.
You look at me from the milk-glass. When I smile,
my lips smart.

If my mother says the green jacket. I put on the
green jacket. Does she want to see me dance? Stand on my toes?
March? Does she want to hear me laugh in five languages? I can
sit to order. I can lie on my back. Cry a
streak of tears. That's my little one-dog-show.
That's all I can.

My mother lives in my arms. In my neck. My
mother lives in gravity. She comes after me down
the road with a dark bag.

My one heart says: Look down. My other heart
says: Look up. I hide behind my mouth. Laugh
a lot, run quickly. My one heart says: Wait. My
other heart says: I can't wait. I stand on
the diving board and look at the water. In the corner of my eye
I can see my mother standing like a starting flag.

Plunge out into my body. Swim into the thighs. My breasts stand ready. Two
flower bulbs under the yellow blouse.
Smiling with round curves. Waving with their nipples
under the blue T-shirt. Pip, pip, they tease. Toot, toot. Two
indiarubber dolls. Saying hello to everyone who goes past. What's
your name? Where are you off to?

And I have to keep hold of them. Button a jacket tight
across my chest to keep them quiet.

I am a yellow dress in the door opening. A lemon butterfly.
Everything is flower-dust. Everything is pollen.

I hide two pairs of black silk panties under a white
stone. And I can see my mother in all the trees. Once home

I hide in my hair, but when I look up, the black
lace panties flutter in my gaze.

I know something I mustn't know, and my mother puts
out the shame for me on the bath. I put it on.
It's tight round the crotch and grows softer
and softer.

I am more naked with clothes on than without. And in the mirror I can
see the bath mocking me. The walls laugh with their smooth white
tiles. And the tap assents by keeping silent.

I'm to be salted. I'm to be salted. My mother clears paths
in the living room. My mother sits by the window. She rubs and
rubs one thumb against the other thumb.
And the big brown clock strikes eleven. The chairs
straighten up. The floor becomes smoother. The table shinier
and shinier.

I'm an impurity. A stain on the white cloth.

My mother's a pair of scissors. She cuts into me on her way
past. Smells my jacket, looks through my dirty
clothes, searches through the pockets. No matter how quickly I
run, it's not quick enough: No matter how far I
run, I always come back for dinner.

The snakes grow out of the ground where my mother walks.
She eats into my head through my eyes.
Sucks out my thoughts with a straw. I keep silent with two
tongues. The fingers' reptiles on my arm.

Let me go. Let go of me. If the roses can sing, then
they sing of air and love. If they can whisper, then
they whisper about the sun. If they can shout, they shout for new
water in the vase. New water in the vase, dammit!

The quarrels grow out of my scalp and lie
waiting in my hair. I practise sticking my mother
with pins and needles. Her fat calves. Her
heavy upper arms. When she asks me what I'm thinking
about, I kiss her.

My mother teaches me how to lie. And I dissolve in
excuses. Short cuts through the scrub. Detours
through the forest. In front of the mirror I also deceive myself.
No one notices any difference.

My mother stands in front of me with her tears on like an apron. Then I walk through her. I walk right through her womb. No other way out than out.

Don't wait for me, Mummy. Don't sit by the window in your nightdress with the golf jacket over your shoulders. I'm not coming home, Mummy. Hit me. Hit me. I'm unfaithful to you.

No one has fondled my navel. That is why my navel hides away and sulks. No one has stroked the back of my neck. Now every single invisible hair on the nape of my neck is stretching out for a touch.

When is a room a room? When the floor is there and keeps the walls up. When the walls stand there and lift up the ceiling. When the corners nail the room square. Then the room crawls out from the centre and spreads to all the edges. And what then? What then?

Then you come.

The voice is the throat's flower.
I speak with two mouths.
One on the outside. One on the inside.

Outside the shadows mate on the lawn. Right until evening all the shadows come and make up one body.

Inside the standard lamp touches the back of the chair. Everything trembles. As I turn out the light, the sofa silently mounts the dining room table. And the chairs ride each other without a single creak.

Take a piece of me, then. Divide my rib steak in two with your tongue. The tender meat salted to taste. Come! Let me prepare a roast on the blue sofa under the yellow kiss of a forty-watt light bulb.

You put me on, and I become your glove. Of nylon, of leather. Of thigh. A hairy glove. A glove that breathes.

I open a sex in my mouth to kiss you better.
Slide to meet you on a wet tongue. This is the red carpet I'm giving you.

I set up an arrival hall. And the snow plough advances
between my thighs with a heavy plough. A bulldozer through
my body. And the child turns inside out in a piece of meat.
I am a crater. Only the tracks of the wheels left. A battle-field.

I glue the child onto my body. She is an extra
arm. She is an extra breast. A lung. And I breathe
through her. I smile with her mouth.
The world is precisely as large as the distance between
her forehead and my mouth.

I dream that I throw my child down the stairs.
Drop it over the rails on the balcony. Heave it
out of the window on the fifth floor. Her body is an
imprint in my arms.

It isn't me who eats up my child. It's
the child that eats up me. Sucks me out from
my breasts. Empties me hour by hour. She is a
cannibal. And I cry out: Eat me. Eat me.

I have my mother in my hands. It is she who
is holding my daughter through me. And my mother
strokes my daughter's back with me hands.
And my mother kisses my daughter's hair with
my lips. And my mother complains about her with
my mouth. That's how poor I am. I have borrowed everything.

I carve my daughter out of sallow. Whittle a flute
out of her fingers. When I blow her, I can hear
how beautifully she cries.

I dress myself in my child. A coat of mail. A suit of armour. A
daughter shield. Hold her in front of me on my lap.
My lap forms a throne. The people rejoice.

My daughter grows out of my hands and into the
crook of the arm. Out of the crook and up on the shoulder.
You mustn't grow so fast, I say. My daughter
grows out of my lap and onto the floor. The dirty
woollen sweater. The tangled hair. Up off the floor and out of
the door. I take hold of her arm hard. No, I say.

- Where is my daughter, I ask the street lamps. - Where
is my daughter, I ask the corner kiosk. - Where
is my daughter, I ask the tall silent trees. But

no one has seen her. Not even the bench at
the bus stop.

But the road can tell me about her feet. The
red socks. The white shoes. It is the road that has
her. And the road refuses to say if she is coming
or going.

The standard lamp sucks current up the wire. And
the cushions in the sofa ask to be plumped. I am a trumpet
on the floor. A hundred thousand hours will I give you. A hundred
thousand kilowatt hours. Keep your house warm.

When I suffocate my child, I suffocate
the child with my best intentions.

We have gathered this home round us. These
souvenirs. In this museum we were to grow old
together. Eat our Berlin pastries under
the objects' memoirs. Sit there two centimetres from
each other to give this exhibition a meaning.

Alone in the sofa each thing becomes a cross. This room
a graveyard.

- Sorry, I say to the wall, - Sorry, so sorry.

From the corner I see the chair's back split. A tear in
the fabric. It rattles. And the chair cries out. And the room
trails from the nailing-strips.

I want to be a slut for you. Heave out my breasts on
the table. They were what you came for. I want to be a
bitch for you. I want to writhe on the floor. Call you
names. You house longhorn beetle. You carpenter ant. I want to
smash the crockery in front of your eyes. Fling the cups at the wall.
The bowls. I want to be a bloody cow.
An insult on your lips. A gadfly, a wasp.

I am still hoping for an occasion to stick
my knitting needles into you. Sew your ears shut
with white thread. Don't you dare come any closer than five
hundred metres. If I see you in the street, I'll bake
ginger biscuits in your face. If there's another, I will
burn your heart to cinders in the oven at two hundred and fifty
degrees centigrade.

I will slaughter you. Scare you across the grey
cement floor. Press you into a white-painted corner.
Hear you squeal like a stuck pig through stone. A pair of tongs
with two electrodes that I press against your head.
Now I'm really going to shock you, dear. A brain
charge of 1.25 amperes. Hang you up
on the wall on a hook. And let you dangle. That's
the thanks I'm giving you.

A whole roast pig on the table. And I will cut
you up in perfectly thin slices. The big sharp
knife with the black handle.

May the discs slip out of your back one by one and
your eyes grow shut. May you be paralysed down all of your
right side. Lose your powers of speech. Lose the use
of your fingers. A life on a mattress. And the radio, the small
black travel radio, your only friend.

Do you think then that I will come? And wheel you
out into the sun?

On really bad days I spread out a gull between
my arms. Unfold wings like grey-white sails and
replace thoughts with clouds. And everything is drawn towards the sea.
Everything streams into the great winds over the Atlantic
where warm air and cold air change places. Somewhere out there
I will turn round and come back with the sea in tow.

There is so much I want to tell you. About the wind that
blew down the birch tree. About the rings of fungus on
the lawn. And the fire in the house next door.

There is so much I want to show you. The tomato plants against
the wall. The morellos. The Virginia creeper. I have seen the forest full of
tall yellow lilies.

I have twenty thousand thoughts a day. And only two
hundred have to do with you. That's how little you mean. I let
the wind comb the grass. I let the wind brush the tangles
in the bushes. I shake the pears out of the pear tree and hear
them rejoice. Even when they are lying rotting in the grass,
they rejoice.

I hear a knocking on the window and run to see. It
is my friend Nobody going round the corner of the house.
- Welcome back, I cry and lie down on

slope to hear the grass sigh. And the white wagtail with the big breast pecks at my wounds. Somewhere in my body the bells ring.

I'm beginning to get used to my friend Nobody. He just shuffles in the hall in big slippers, waits under the trees in a worn jacket. A companion.

But in the evening I notice his outline in the room.
- Go away, I whisper and turn the radio on. Even so I sense him beside me in bed. A lane in the mattress.

Imagine being a bumblebee in the grass. Just being a bumblebee in the grass. No other worries in this world of clover and harebells than that my wings are perhaps a bit too small to carry me home.

My mother comes. My daughter comes. Friends sit round the table. Everything in abundance and profusion. A day for bathing in the lake of conversation where the glasses sparkle. But somewhere in the house my friend Nobody has hidden. When I turn round, I see him waving from the hall. He is ready to keep me company when the guests have left.

- This is for you, Mummy, I say and give my mother the moon. - You can hang it up outside your window as a night-light.
That's the least I can give you.

I take my daughter with me up the heights. - All this is yours. These larks that soar. These lakes with their fish. These forests with their squirrels. This is your inheritance.

The sun on the other hand is mine. There have to be limits to my generosity.

One evening I row my friend Nobody out to the skerry. The waves lick the bow of the boat. And the evening melts in the greasy light.

Farthest out I set him down, take him by the hand. Hear him call after me far away on the other side
Under the bridge the lake gleams green. And I fill the boat from gunnel to gunnel. I fill the night from shore to shore. And when I come home, I fill the house.

If the sun-king comes to door, I will invite him in for lemon cake and boast about his castle and his wig. I am ready for shoes in big sizes.

Recently the chairs have begun to bleat. If they go on like that, I will set them free.

Riddles for a rainy day (1994)

The rain

What comes first?

Beauty in the long green leaf

What's the resemblance between nothing and everything?

The rain at the lamppost
The bushes by the fence

This is rejoicing
This is rejoicing

These wet leaves across the road
This road

The heartshaped pond
and the gravel
This gravel

Who?

It's you
who carry yourself so

The head's relation to the throat
The throat's relation to the chest
The mouth and chin

The way you hold your head
like a hat
high up against a low sky

And such a stylish hat
you've been allowed to borrow
for the short walk
up the ridge

Where does the rain come from?

From your lips
stretched out like two slugs
from corner to corner
full to the brim with laden flesh

When they begin to tremble

a small white rowing boat
enters the strait
with clouds in tow
Heavy curtains
striped with rain

Who cries and cries without stopping?

Is it you?
Then you can fill the bath tub
to the brim
for I want to bathe
Immerse myself in your tears
and rub the yellow soap into my hair
Now that the apples are almost ripe on the trees
and the wind and the rain

Where does the end begin?

The last bathe
among mussels and seaweed
A weightless anchor

In the lake
where you drown summer
in September

The tree

**What is true
even when
the trees lie?**

What can a branch be?

As if a branch is only a branch
As if a mountain is only a mountain
As if a loaf of bread
A fire, a spot

The pool
were my mother's dissolved face
The knots in the rope
my father's knees

Who lives in the loaf of bread?

A poppy
A cornflower
A west wind that bends the stem
and you, eating bread
with full lips

When are the trees full of leaves?

In the apple-light of September
When desire grazes its way through the grass
After the long return journey
along the sugared rear legs of the honey
The flight in the tree
The wind's empty phrases in the maple's courier-red leaves

A dark field alongside the main road
And the gravel makes room for your tracks
as you scorch your way forward

What rhymes in October?

I'm not thinking of dew
I'm not thinking of water
Not of air
Not of grass
Not of lampposts
or railway tracks

I'm thinking of you

You're the one who rhymes horse with gorse
clover with October
a frosty morning

What is it that is hard and soft wet and dry and disappears into thin air?

It is water
that changes clothes
Water that burns
Water that runs
Water that goes out in snow
You thought perhaps
it went away
when you drank it?
You thought perhaps
you had eaten it up?
But water does not disappear
It is only travelling

You and I are worse off
We are the ones who die
with thirty-seven degrees under our arm
Clothed or naked
With or without safety belts
On holiday or in bed
We lean back
while the water rains
among the poplars
and the lake rises

Who is it laughing under the oak tree?

It's boy in the red wheelchair

Who speaks quietest in the grass?

The apples?
No, not the apples
But out in the horse pasture
stands a bath tub full of water
talking quietly of thirst
So still so still
that not even the crickets
can hear it

The carnival of the animals

**Who was it that always dressed up more
than was necessary?**

It was the fat magpie
on his way to the burial
of his great-aunt

Even when death pressed him down onto the asphalt
he had his best shirt on
like a medal
for the white carrion worms' crusade
of the flesh

**What is it that swallows with its eye
blows with its ear
on its way through the marshland
with great strides?**

It is the frog

jack of all trades and heartbreaker
To eat, to kiss
to catch between its fingers
all through the summer

Unfairly treated
as most softies
crawls in under the fridge
with a broken leg
to dry out among dust and paper
close to the radiator
while you sing and sing in your bath

**Who dances a samba
with the best-looking chimpanzee?**

The ostrich

Who ate an ape
and got stomach ache?

The crocodile

Who can hobble in the gravel
while the rain falls and falls?

You can

**What will you say
when the pig asks?**

You don't know perhaps
For it's not always easy to know
And it's not always easy
to say anything at all
As if we were born to speak
As if we were created
to think really great thoughts
As if words came of their own accord

But the big pig has clear thoughts
about glass apples
and knows that up is up
and down is down

Once in a while
about every Thursday
the pig comes to tea
and says
How odd that the earth hangs in the air
And you say

Hold on tight
Hold on tight
you say
Three spoons of sugar in your tea
And the pig holds on tight
with all four legs
and trusts in gravity

Who is it singing under the bridge?

It's the stippled trout
dreaming of the sea

**What will we say to a snake
that's crying?**

Go ahead and cry
Go ahead and cry, snake

Is a snake not to be allowed to cry
Are its tears always to be held back
and held back
in sealed bottles in the cellar
Vintage upon vintage
Fermented juice with mildewed corks
Redcurrants from a forgotten summer
Blackcurrants from the saddest bush

This bottle is for you
my friend in the grass
captain of rainy weather
skipper of mist banks
Let us sail the bottle-ship out into hair
Back on the brink of cloud cover

**What will you say
to a pig in a cold-sweat in the hammock
while the sun dribbles against the plastic cloth?**

- Oh poor little pig
you can say
and give the pig red apples
from America

Nothing like red American apples
Nothing like fever in the pear orchard
Nothing like a pig
that's never slaughtered
That just goes on living
living and living

**Who is it playing
so sadly on the tuba?**

It's the dog with the horn
But don't feel unhappy because of that

Who is it playing
so sadly on the flute?

It's the blind mole
practising for winter

**Who complains
among the pine trees in October?**

The hungry fox
feeling sorry for itself
The ferns can't console
Nor the stream
Nor the rowanberries
Not even the magpies in the pine trees
have any comment to make

The only one who can comfort the fox
is the tender hare
served with carrots
and parsley potatoes
Now it lies quivering
among the juniper roots
trying to make up its mind

**Who is it whispering in the bushes
Is it you?**

Once again
the fox comes to the hare
in coat and tails
White paws, fine teeth

Dear hare, dear friend
Pray enter this throat's delicate gateway
and feel the touch of the uvula
The massage of the pharynx
I'll give you a chance
of becoming part of my flesh
In that way I can take better care of you
and you through me can be more active
The same body, the same spleen
The same blood, the same heart

We can't get any closer

It's not even certain that I want to have you
says the fox
The fine claw, the white shirt
But if you clean your ears out, my friend,
wipe your nose, smooth your coat
Then perhaps, perhaps then
you'll be granted entry
to the soft acid-bath of my stomach
And I, no less than I the fox will offer you
a tour of the small intestine
A warmer journey towards the squeeze of the large intestine
Just think: the suction of tufts through the blood
The kiss of digestion!

The flesh

What edifice is raised on bones?

The body
a cathedral
where you sit with your prayers
A palace of the senses
borne by bones

When does a pastry begin to sing?

When your waist starts spreading
and your thighs and calves thicken
You apply skin with a spatula
An arm that falls towards the elbow's eye
A river delta in the hand's kefir
where the veins branch out

When you turn round
a swallow plunges down your back
A calf's head is drawn in muscles
A marten disappears
where the crotch begins

You round an arch
with the nozzle of the breasts
Egg whipped with sugar and flour
Two mother's day cakes with marzipan lid
And the vaulted porcelain of the belly

This is your way of baking
Forming two shoulders
Forming a neck
The throat and arm

With the head in the hand
The jellyfruit of the mouth
The vanilla of the forehead
And your voice is a flag
at the top of a mast
when you sing
'Yes we love with fond devotion
our great native-land'

**How many faces
have you got in the cupboard?**

A whole wardrobe
for decoration and deception
Don't look when I'm changing
when I haven't got my face on
When the cheeks are only passive flesh
And the nose has no direction

Don't look till I'm wearing my mouth
weave a smile out of muscles
and put on my lips
in a yes
Yes! Yes!
Now I'm ready
behind my face-shield
With eyes in position
With jaw in place
With back teeth and forehead
Shall I cry, shall I sing
Shall I whisper, shall I lie
My tongue is a semi-soft mattress
receiving language
and passing it on

What's the advantage of having a cold?

It makes you aware of the presence of your nose:
a boiled apple among mucous membranes
hermeticised in the head's saucepan
The palate melted in butter
and the slack muscle of the tongue
much too big for the mouth

To swim one's lukewarm cheeks
through sticky hours
towards the bed's final meal
of cotton and down
The smooth pillow case's Our Father
Thy kingdom come
The duvet's deliver us from evil

**What is it that sees
without being seen?**

The brain, a spy
behind the eyes' lenses
The inverted image of you
as you're crossing the floor
The bloodshot vision
reversed through rods and cones

And the brain follows you with its gaze
from room to hall
where you stand, a vase in the door
where you reveal
yourself in feet and knees
betray your secrets
through your steps up the stairs
The back's letter tells
all, says the brain
and mortgages you
presses your name
up against a slimy palate
The broad tongue's palatal pressure
giving the name its stamp

Where does the thumb start?

At the big toe of course
as I push the thumbtack
into the wall
The taut arch of the thumb
as the tool of the whole body
The weight of the thumb in the flesh
from the toe to the heel
from the heel to the calf
from the calf to the thigh
from the thigh up the back
from the back to the neck
from the neck to the arm
from the elbow to the wrist
and out into a spring:
A two-part trestle
A holder, a pincher
A presser, a pusher

But farthest out
at the thumb's final frontier
there's a grated surface
waiting and waiting
to stroke

the pale winter lips
across the mouth

What tree grows out of the diaphragm?

The bronchial tree
that climbs up the throat
branching out through the mouth
A broccoli in bloom in the rib cage's greenhouse
The ramification of the lungs
As if everything has to do with ventilation
As if the tree bears outwards
through the respiratory passages
As if everything speaks to me of breathing
The grass, the bird, the clouds
The foliage of the sky ferns
The air's invisible beauty
The valve of the throat
That's how I breathe
a slave of respiration
with the wet imprint of the uvula on the sigh
The shadow of death under the tongue
as a reminder

Come on then,
and make the best of it
Convict escape across the square
Convicts at large over the meadow
Let's swing in the topmost branches of the morello
on a July afternoon
Let's run down
down the hill of thistles and straw
with our chests heaving

And you may drink my breath
that smells of oxtail soup and kefir
And you may set about my leaves
cut at my branches till they break
My row of ribs a climbing frame
My breasts' clinging point of fat
And my mouth a berry I split into two
with my tongue, a knife

Who is it that collapses sideways across the table?

Is it you?
Has a Brussels sprout got stuck in your throat, perhaps?
Falling glasses
red-wine stains on the cloth
Peas out of the bowl

like a broken string of pearls

Are you the one gasping for breath?

Leaning forwards

with your chest against the edge of the table

Your arms

Do you give up?

Are you resting your forehead against the roast?

Your chin in the potatoes that you'd mashed in the gravy

You who had so looked forward to the gravy

to the cowberry preserve

You who had so looked forward to the dessert

The stuffed apples, the dollop of whipped cream and the raisins

To the summer with gulls

What do we do now?

Do we thump you on the back?

Stick out fingers down your throat?

Do we try grabbing you round the waist

and pressing our fist

into your diaphragm?

Or do we just stand there looking on

Put down our fork neatly

at the side of the plate

Straighten the cloth that's getting wrinkled

Stop talking

Is it you that's suffocating?

Why are you looking at me?

Do you think I can help?

Ought I to find the Stanley knife

and slice a short cut for your lungs?

Open your chest, throat

and remove the Brussels sprout with tweezers

Just think, a Brussels sprout

Would you rather have fallen?

Plunged into an abyss?

Or be burnt to death?

With smoke as a mattress over your mouth

or simply one Friday morning

not be wakened by the alarm clock

be wakened by the door bell

just stretch sleep, stretch sleep

into nothingness

When is your name a piece of wrought iron?

When I turn and call you back

When the thirty-seven muscles of the face

put on your name

The casting set in motion

The jaw, mouth, eyes, forehead
The muscles
that knead the face into an expression
Groove it out
Cast a mould
A meat pudding
that is squeezed between the fingers
A mouth modelled into lips
to enclose the sound
That is how I call to you
As if at some time I would be able to reach you
Tissue's engorged substance
as gloves on your syllables
Perhaps I am hesitating
Perhaps I am waiting
before the thirty-seven workers combine
Forge the smile from the smile
before your name is sealed
As if you heard me
As if you really heard me

When does a fish taste best?

On the floor of the hall
When you take me in your mouth
and start eating me
A fish you rip open
with your tongue
A piece of raw cod
or a whiting
The salt skin
The tart taste

Before your lorries
thunder up the motorway
two abreast
A roar in the flesh
The flesh that melts

When was enough enough?

That day in August

When you cut off your tongue
and sent it to me
so I could hear you better
A birthday present for the hard of hearing
Light pink, blue-veined red against the wrapping paper
it still wriggled
like the tail of a slowworm
The tongue-tip's last lie

served in plum sauce
The tastebuds' uninterpreted message

Your ear packed in plastic
with the cartilage's Persian fairytale
and the lobe's downy amulet
So that I could whisper to you
all night long
The ear an ashtray for chats and gossip
The ear a basin

I received your eyes as well
two pupils in aspic
Packed separately in cellophane
like boiled sweets for happier days
So you could see me better naked
in front of the bathroom mirror
bent over the washbasin

At the bottom of the bag
the testicles in newspaper
entrails
fish scales
bones
two rotting kiwis
at the bottom of a fruit dish
so I could recognise you better
if we should meet under the bridge
in the month of pears

What room only has room for one?

The snail's shell?
The tiny loo
with the knot-holes in the wall?
Or the closet with the vacuum cleaner?

I'm thinking of the body
as I sit on my own
behind the bones' palisade
This fencing between you and me
of cartilage and bone
This diver's suit of veins and tissue
This fine-meshed pattern
over the hands and up the arms
I've put on
a really tight skin

You thought perhaps
we were closer each other
You thought perhaps we were one
Your arm under my soft neck

As if there was room for two
on board this vessel
As if it was possible
to press our bodies closer together
to interweave beneath our subcutaneous fat
and suck from the same thoughts
look out of the same eyes:
The red sweater on the back of the chair
in the blue kitchen
Would we understand each other better then?

But yet again
you have to stand outside
encapsulated by nose, chin
With our separate bellies
we can call to each other
from the second floor
as usual

The window

But where does the poem begin?

In bed
this early morning of filtered light

What is it that hides under the bed

The grey sock?
The worn slipper?

No
It is Christmas
that lies under the bed
waiting for December
Crawls out a little clearer
each year
nearly bursting in anticipation

Who is it in the room that keeps so still?

It is the small stillness
that would like to have a name

What name would you like then,
my little friend
Any suggestions?

Crane

and Crane was its name

**Who's quickest
over the hills and far away?**

Is it the leopard?
The antelope?
Or the swallow?

Is it the car?
The plane?
Or the rocket?

Is it sound?
Light?
Or thought?

No, you're the quickest
The seven steps to the telephone
Not even light
can compete with you then

**Who has too many letters
for love?**

The glove
If you open it
you can see how empty it is

So empty that it houses a bag
of sweets
or a mini-holiday
with stamps and serviettes
That's not too bad

Perhaps you have an extra G
in your name?

Who's biggest?

The old man is biggest
even though the son
has outstripped him
even though the grandson
has outstripped him
even though the greatgreatgrandson
has outstripped him
the old man is biggest

even though he's horizontal

in a white oaken coffin
with carvings
and brass handles
the old man is biggest

or perhaps not?
Perhaps he was always the smallest
amongst his brothers
Then it doesn't help to be older
than his long-legged son
Then it doesn't help either
to stand on a box

But who's smallest?

The smallest is smallest
The very smallest of the very smallest

So small
that not even the tears are visible to the eye
Not even the tiniest angry tears
not even the saddest tears either

nor even
the tears
cried with one eye

Have you ever tried to wake up a tired aunt?

Tired aunts can fall asleep
in soggy wafers of oblivion
In banana-shaped bowls
on green tea cloths
Bowls of jam
with handpainted peaches
caps with tassels
Envelopes

Maybe you've got an aunt deep inside your eyes
a yawn in the recesses of your tympanic membranes
when the circle finds its own form
round and round the same axis
Where you lie deep down
in the head's hammock
and sway in the breeze
The whole chamber a shell
that catches distant sounds

To fade imperceptibly
into walls of green cupboards

When the head melts in sleep

**Who is it whistles down the road
at six 'o clock in the morning?**

It's not the paper boy
on his blue bike
Recognisable from the chain
and the gravel that tinkles in the driveway

It's the old engineer
you can hear
He's the one who always whistles cheerfully
on his way
on his third and last round
along the fences

His sweater back to front
And hands in his pockets

**Who is it whistles in the storehouse
at ten 'o clock in the morning?**

It's the happy clearer-upper
thinking of his packed lunch
Whistles Dear God all's well with me
too quickly
among the crates

Who is it sighs
farthest in the hall
at twelve 'o clock?

It's the kind store manager
who's forgotten his packed lunch at home
And that was the special one
Three slices of seed loaf
with ham and tomato

But who is it mumbles at the window
at the back of the tram at ten past four?

It's the little hairdresser lady
who's counting the days
till Easter

It's the fourth of February
no more
nor less

Who was most forgotten?

The lady on the sixth floor
The lady in the blue coat
A sock inside out and one not

She lay for two months
on the vinyl
until the neighbour noticed the smell through the wall

The day they broke open the door
they could see way out across the roofs
towards the sea
It was one of those
bright September days with tall skies

How sad is sad?

A Wednesday in March
when everything stopped short
and you saw the red spade in the gravel
The snowdrops in the garden
The magpies

Before the invasion of the moment
Before the fight
The sound, the noise, the hurry

Well at any rate he managed
a trip with the ambulance
before he died

What happened afterwards?

After the flowers
after the cakes
after the songs, the speeches
When the bed is left there newly changed and empty

“Then the ladies become angels
and the men ghosts”
you say with your cat-cap askew
while you look for ghost mice
in the cracks
along the cemetery wall

Who is it snuggling down in the red pram?

It is the fat rat, that's who

that is scrabbling at the flannel
in search of the smell
of milk and acid burps

And the newly born child
in the newly bought pram
turns in its milk-sleep stupor
The veins at its temples:
a light-blue embroidery thread
that looks like a crack

And the child searches with its mouth
Sucks in the air
its whole jaw working
As if it was the mother
As if it was the breast
tight with milk nodes
The wet snout of the rat's head
that the lips are groping for
The tongue's invitation

**What is it that you can't hear
but which rings
thirteen alarm clocks in the room?**

The child
with a toy-block stuck in its throat
The locked tears
The open mouth
The look a tiny bell
The pale-blue colour
The hare in the snare
The shot in the elk
The fox in the trap

**What do I get
if I burn my child**

Nothing
Absolutely nothing

The room

**Who is it waits for you
no matter what you've done
no matter what you've done
Softer than you had thought
Better than you could recall?**

Your pillow

in its worn old pillow case
One single great cheek
of embrace

**What is it that stings your face
when you cross the square in February?**

The wind from the open field?
The cold that is leaking in from everywhere?

Or the other thing
that you are constantly going back to
The locked closet at the back of your mind
That which you don't talk about
not even to me
A trap-door
into a single roll of film

The day has more walls
that there is room for
more rooms than words
more words
than the silent floor
that lifts the mattress

What place plays the trumpet?

Your home in February
When the light is hanging in a damask cloth
right over the edge of the hill
and the winter-baked dikes
are a hole through the head

Is that where you are again?
Tormenting yourself with memories?

When you crouch
it's not because of the snow
or the wind
or the weather
or the winter
but because of your mother
just as you remember her
under the reading lamp

Where does the weekday begin?

In the fall from the yellow tulips
At the balance point between something and not something
When nothing really matters at all

Not the middays at the white plastic cloth
not the evenings on the blue sofa
not the stairs up to the bedroom
When I suddenly stumble
out of the moment
and down onto the floor outside

Then the yellow tulips
are no longer the yellow tulips
but any tulips
at any table

And your hands
And your shirt
And the beauty of these walls
A white impenetrable film
brushed over the picture

when I sit in the birdlime
and consume sadness

**What is it that doesn't weigh anything
but which is a great weight to bear?**

A sack of sorrows?
If you open it, a pine forest will flow
out over the boundaries of what you can manage
followed by a side-skirted bout of rain
from Østerdalen

Or loss?
Like a landlocked lake
of brownish water

But nothing as heavy
as nothing
Not lightly across the floor
of a wide-open space
without underwear through the room
with the white curtains
But heavily, lumberingly
up over the ridge
Much too big boots
Much too big a coat

When everything is a burden
even a harebell

What is it we live?

This years in the intervening space

The red swing
The green-painted table
The yellow lamp
like a spaceship in the room
And a window where you waited
for your father to come home

Where you go on waiting
at a completely different window
For your father
For the summer
For the four advent candles

The grey telephone
The low fence
The wrought-iron gate and the lilac
The white white egg for breakfast

You who wear this body
like a cloak through your days
The echo of a child that's crying
up another staircase
The rows of mailboxes
And you who are crossing this floor
in your stockinged feet

Where have you hidden what you've forgotten?

In the back seat of the car
where memory becomes indistinct

The crumbs and a dry slice of cheese
A raspberry sweet stuck to the carpet
The sand and the summer's yellow snail shell
The smell of rubber, petrol
vomit, apples

Somewhere or other here
there is a trigger
a door handle
in to one of the rooms
where you stood with your back to the wall

A cinema ticket
lies in the gap between back and seat
A serviette with a stain
that looks like a face
A dirty glove, a ten-crown note, a stick
The hairs from a grey-white dog
put down long ago

When memory resembles understanding

When the pieces resemble the picture
When the picture resembles reality
As if there was a pattern
a context
a whole

As if the riddles had an answer
far in under the front seat
An unopened lollipop
between sand and dirt
A plastic watch
a broken pencil
Farthest in to the right
something that shines
It's not your ring
but some cellophane paper

Leaning forward against the blue crack of the front seat
I hear my mother sing
A wild duck swims quietly
near the high coast of the island
Somewhere behind the nose the eyes
it hurts
As if the tears had rusted a hinge
where the wild duck still floats
deep inside the head

The house

Who's sitting in the wall looking?

A teeny-weeny mummy with a fur hat

Who are you that comes into my house even though the door is shut?

Is it your back in the hall door?
Is it your steps on the stairs?
Is it you
that puts illness on my children
Lays out quarrels in the bedroom
Steals the milk from breasts
so that the unweaned child cries itself to sleep
A cold after you across the living room floor
A draught across the neck
The cream turned sour in the cupboard
The roast spoilt

Who are you that dares lead my children
towards the drop behind the house

Who are you that tempts them higher
higher, higher
up the climbing tree
Who are you that waits at the bottom of the road

Is it you
that lays out infection on the kitchen unit
Shoves children down stairs
deceives them with poison
If you blame me I blame you
Lie upon lie across the table

A cross on the chair
where you have sat
A cross in the cup at the kitchen sink
A cross on the floor where you have stood

Who is it that nobody sees?

It's mother, that's who it is
merging with the bowls
saucepans, glasses
Moulded into the kitchen unit
and crucified to the clothes

In this way she carries the house on her back
the rubbish bin on her head
Fish skins, meat leftovers
and the sticky remains of some porridge
In this way she bears the day along
meal for meal

And sits with the hooks
the sharp scissors
rolls out children flat in a dough
This is how I cut you:
A heart, a hare, a horse
This is how I divide you
into one, into two, into three
The mother's steady hand, but unsteady fingers
There it slipped again:
Clips the ears off the son
the finger off the daughter
sucks up the blood
with the sponge of her tongue
Some ointment, a plaster

In this way she kneads us out
one after the other
The grip round the neck
the hand against the back
kneads us out into unequal buns

a childhood in the oven

A bearer, a baker
A queen over stomach and intestines
A ruler in the breast
She is crown in crumbs
in the room that breathes
She is honoured in salt

To then worm us into the night
with hot, dry sugar hands
The wafer of thanks on the tongue
when she folds us into sleep
In through the grace of the flannel
The blessing of rest in the church of the cheeks
An altar in the dark

Who is it looking out of your eyes?

Maybe it's your father sitting in there
leaning forwards as if he is following what's happening
as if he is ready
to take some potatoes from the white dish for himself

Or maybe it's your mother
in the sofa you know so well
Her mouth, nose, hair

Maybe it's her
controlling you with the gaze
across the room and back
Maybe it's her
standing there with the fork ready
The turner, the bread knife

The sidelong glance when you draw back
Someone who hides behind a face
uses the nose as a disguise
Your eyebrows, forehead
Someone who always slips away
Rounds a corner, waits behind a door
A shadow in the mirror at the end of the hall

While you lie resting
far far inside the archives
on a blue divan
Someone who is singing
Tippy tippy too
in a low voice

Let's say you stuff your mother

**into a suitcase
What do you get then?**

A piece of hand luggage
you have to lug up the stairs
through the streets
across squares
right across cities

Perhaps you want to put down your suitcase again
forget it at the airport
lock it up in a luggage box
As if you would really do that
As if that would be enough
Take a bus or run off
Take a new name
Change addresses
As if that would help
Your mother's still there
Your mother can see you
You thought you left her behind
along with the suitcase
but she's still around
half hidden
between your eyebrows

**Who's that rustling behind my back
in a Dracula cloak?**

Is it you, daddy?
The swishing of you in the air
or is it the panel heater?
Your steps
or a window banging?
Are you fond of me
or not?

Are you still part
of my back?
Is it you
I can hear coughing?
When I run
is it towards you
or away from you?

**When did you last ask the mirror
who was who?**

A vague point of the voice
when you took me as clay
into your hands

Thus you kneaded me
thus you formed me
A cup for your mould
A mirror on the wallpaper of tongues
When you fashioned me in your image
As if I was some material
As if you were my creator
As if there was not any difference
between wanting and not wanting
My eyes fixed with tacks to the wall
so that I should see you better
My ears prised open with pliers
so that I should hear

As if my weeping was dangerous
As if your chisel over the cheek
was a caress
The mouth carved so as to smile
The tongue you cleft in two
To clothe your will
with my lips
As if weeping
cannot be useful

Did you know then you were were trampling
among the heartsease with your big boots on
Trampling down the snowdrops
Wading through crocuses
lilies of the valley, bleeding hearts
on into the diaphragm
Was that how you wanted to have me?
The stamp of the soles on the lower lip
A scar round the mouth of sixteen stitches
The tongue in chains

What sweets last the longest?

The brownish
camphor of weeping
in the hidden mouth
behind the mouth
This secret palate
where what is sad is blanched
in sugar
As if weeping
cannot be a source of pleasure

The town

Who is it that takes

one step at a time?

It is the thoughtful cashier
on his way home

When does the town look like a confectioner's?

In the light of a May morning, in the pigeon hour
When the pigeons bend the town into arches
When the last ones come and the first ones leave
Then the town gets up from the streets in its dressing gown
In layer upon layer of sugar and dirt
A Welsh pastry, a custard slice
a party cake of marzipan and cream
Happy birthday to you
Congratulations congratulations
The man o' war, the shop assistant
the lady with her arm in a sling

This day of drawn back curtains
This day of captain's biscuits and great daring
Tumblers and twine
A half-eaten piece of bread and cheese on a saucer

A cream puff on the second shelf, a mazarine
And the punch bowl made of old scraps and crumbs
welcoming you to coughing and a headache
The greasy dishes
The bowl of leftovers
Small of fish. Glue
Welcome Welcome
to the slow process of digestion
The loo in the hall
Five floors of stairs
A jubilee of crushed glass and urine

A turnover. A cream bun on a stair
Where the bridal couple shed their shoes
On the middle of the green-painted step
A cake with lighted candles
A cream villa for happier days
The bliss of linoleum

What's halfway between the sky and the earth?

The body of the town stretched out
Moored on high
Riddled by the underground
Tormented by the chains of the streets
Built of dust
Raised out of noise

Crucified
between tower and cellar
Here you shall dwell. Here you shall live
In the span
between the plastic cloth and the chestnut tree

A back which said: I will carry you
When the view peels off the windows
When the house falls from the walls
When the back garden gets loose at the edges
Then I will carry you

Along the banisters:
the outstretched arms of the saviour
Along the cracks in the walls:
the flight of the angels

When does the town look like an old man?

In November
When the precinct dressed in grey
hangs its shoulders
Breathing out
through stained gateways

With threadbare socks
With worn hands
Dirty ears and black-edged furrows
the town is on its way home
to croon itself off into a brick's winter sleep
under quilts of plaster

The half-open door
The hum of the fridge

Who is it you can hear at two o' clock in the night diagonally across the street?

It's the shy one-legged man
and his crutch
He's the one whistling
Among hills and mountains down by the sea
The night that cracks
Then you can't hear him any more
Just the swish
of light rain in the birch grove
It is Thursday
The fourth day
of the fourth month

What is it that goes and goes and never gets there?

It is the park
passing through the evening
so quietly you scarcely notice it
A movement deceptively like another one
A movement reminiscent of a film
Seen from a car window in passing
Or from a bridge
Slower than a film
quicker than a drawing

What's the resemblance between remembering and forgetting?

The contours of a half-thought thought
are the depression in the asphalt
Or the wound in the wall
where the plastering is gone
The cylindrical heart
Visible, distinct
Is anything ever going to be explained?

In the backyard
stands a green lady's bicycle without a saddle
Against the wall:
a red and white plastic bag that has been tied
Everything whispers to me
The string
and the eight knots on the string
The bottle in the corner. And the cardboard box

I can hear something I can't hear
The swish in the pipes. The rain in the stairway
The staircase that sings

Sleep

When does the day dive?

When daylight's oblong fingers on the table
slam the book shut

Then light crawls backwards out the window
taking the room with it
in tow
out into memory

While the moon puts on the night
A dive from the oak tree

And you
start a quarrel
under the lamp
in the hall

What do you always carry with you?

The pictures, the lamp, the hall mirror
The familiar bed from the bedroom
Here is your kingdom
between the walls of a childhood
Is this where you go?
Is it here you hide?
In the corner between the sofa and the wall
Behind the high armchair
As if that helps
As if you could ever
hide yourself well enough

The sound of feet on the staircase
The bottom note on the piano
The spoon with your name
Is it you crying?
Or is it the walls?
Is it you singing
Or the bowls on the bench?

The fridge
The kitchen curtains
And the door that leads to the other side
As if you could already see it then
As if it had been there all the time
Your hand distinct on the handle
Are you going to open it?
Or hold back?

Just in glimpses
you look right in
A shaft through the head
Where the light boy in a striped sweater
jumps up and down
in the red chair
When the girl with the crooked fringe
swings through the pine tree
on into the sky
Is that you?
Was that you the whole time?

What is it that falls

Is it the mountain that's falling

through your chest?
Is it the mountain that's crashing
through your diaphragm
A moraine on its way to the stomach?

What is a swan?

So now we give things their names again:
Sea, swan, stone, star
This warm stone down by the beach
where you moor summer in May
Anchor the words
in the bare rock-face
As if words belonged to things
As if the poem drops its anchor in the sea
in the seaweed
In the flats behind the reeds
where you pitch reality like a tent
and fix it with pegs
into the dry year-old grass
The spring-moist hill

This jetty out into the water
where we carry the flowers
and through them into the sea one by one
As if beauty is a place out there
As if something is lovelier than something else
More important

The gulls floating on their wings
The worn timber of the jetty
The crows two by two out of the leaves
As if this is a dream
where you are standing under the cherry tree in a white jacket
The grey-white house
almost transparent against the evening
As if the moment is already a memory
Glued into an album
The swans which swim in circles
you are the one lighting up
The satellite you thought was a star

The jasmine lifted through the breast
where you hand out beauty
bountifully through your gaze

When is death exactly like a back?

That day in August
when death stands in the back garden

between the gooseberry bush
and the pear tree
Half hidden
and with his back to you in the precipice of night
Perhaps you think
What are you doing here?
What are you waiting for?

The next day
when the garden is empty
only your father stands there
his cap in his hand

What riddle is the last one?

This one

WELCOME TO THE MIRROR!

Gro Dahle (Norway)

One of those days

The ape grew up with a pillow. The ape grew up next to a wall. When he looks back, he is still on the run. On a sloping branch across the room he makes friends with a twig. The ape grew up in a window. The ape grew up next to a door. In the floor there is a gully where the days disappear. And the wall whispers: Cement! Cement!

There is the bowl with water, and the bowl with food. There is a difference between what are hands and what are feet. There is a difference between knowing and believing. Between what is possible and what is true. The days run down into the gully. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Black, white, green, red. There is a difference between what has been and what is to come. The ape cowers in the corner. Something in the ape has always been there. Something in the ape is moving on.

The ape wakes up in a flake of sun. And light separates from shadow like the white of an egg from the yolk. It is yet another morning under the roof's rigid realism. And the ape sits in the corner and the walls kiss at an angle of 90 degrees.

He sees the walls change from grey to yellow, the sky become blue. And the ape clasps his knees even more tightly in the sure knowledge that they are his knees.

Reality is no characteristic. Expectation is only a thought. On this white morning light the ape is lighter than he normally is. And the shadows are browner. Everything indicates that the sky will not fall down. Everything indicates that the sun isn't a hole. Everything indicates that everything will continue as before, on this day too. And the ape bends inside his own shadow. Turns away. Rocks back and forth. A movement of the arm, the hand. Perhaps he means something by the movement. Perhaps he doesn't.

If he falls asleep, will he wake up in the same place? In the same body? Can I count on that? he thinks and keeps himself awake. The day passes close by, almost within reach.

He scratches the back of his neck with a long, hairy arm, and his backside is red and smooth. He remembers where he has been. He expects something more. He looks at the yellow-grey wall and discovers a rough pattern. And this has been in front of me all the time, the ape thinks in amazement. The pattern resembles a face. His face. Or a cloud. A small lake. It could be anything, he thinks. It could be a map. Somewhere out there he already exists. Somewhere out there he is standing under a willow-tree singing. Somewhere out there he is walking over a bridge with a bag in his hand. He watches himself sauntering through the park. He is wearing grey trousers and brown shoes.

The ape is sitting on the red chair, eating crusts. The chair is an extension of the ape's body. He thinks of the chair. And the chair is inside the ape's head. That's about all there is room for.

The sky travels from west to east. And the ape sleeps between two thoughts. He didn't find out what was the most important today either: the brain, the heart or the stomach. In every fibre it is evening, and in in his dream he puts on wings and flies out. High high above the yellow crane.

My thoughts can go wherever they want, the ape thinks. He leans back against the wall with the day in front of him. The wind dances in the trees. The wind dances with a white plastic bag. And the plastic bag lets itself be tossed across the square. Dust and sand, leaves and paper. One day I'll teach myself how to count, the ape thinks. Add, subtract. One day I'll teach myself how to talk. One day I'll move to the big city and go up seven floors to a three-room flat. He lets himself be enticed by a green sofa against bright yellow wallpaper. Apples in a big bowl on the white tablecloth.

Water in a glass on the table. The bubbles rise gently and burst as they reach the surface. And the ape drinks. A flag flutters slightly on the other side of the square. A long lazy morning, and the ape catches a fly in the glass and listens to it buzzing. He has two thoughts in his head. Two thoughts in his head at the same time. That's some sort of a personal record.

He lets the fly out of the glass and lets it fly out into the lilacs. Behind him a pale-green shadow grows diagonally up the wall, and the ape takes off his face in a yawn. Just empty the fruit into the cement floor, the ape thinks. Just empty the fruit into the floor and leave me in peace.

Keeping your balance is no easy matter. Keeping upright on two is an art. But the ape knows what he wants. If he doesn't rise to his feet, time will run away from him. So he straightens his back. From now on he can do two things at the same time. He can walk - and when he walks he can swing his arms.

Suddenly the ape begins to talk. The sun is high in the sky, and there are birds everywhere. The sounds grow in his throat. O. E. And the broad tongue works away between the teeth and the palate. Cloud piles up on cloud. Sky behind sky. And his lips form the letters into words. He says: 'I,' he says with his hand on his stomach. He says:

'I am the Ape. I raise my back through your body. When I smile, it is out of fear. My thighs bear the weight of seven thousand years. I follow the feeding-time charts. I eat the fruit. I ask for presents. And when the light is turned off, I know it's night.'

Then they open the door for the ape. First the little door. Then the big, heavy one. The air's full of white flowers. And the ape hauls his shadow along with him out of the city.

The day has yet to be named.

'You can call me whatever you like,' says the day and stands wide open.

The ape pulls up his trousers, tightens his belt. He is ready to look someone in the eye.

'Everything's possible,' says the ape with his hands on his feet. 'Everything's possible,' says the ape with long arms.

He is planning a leap from ape to man. From man to God. Flings himself from a tree-top, swings into the tram and takes the lift up into the clouds.

The ape tells of days that hover between rain and dry spells:

'I am the ape. I drive the bus across the plains. Every place has its own places. Every time has its own times. I see children run across the grass of the playing field. I drive the bus right out as far as the sea. I am the ape. I have a bag of sweets in my pocket. I bag of filled sweets in my pocket. I don't know how serious it is. I don't know which life is worth living. Just now I'm simply sitting in the bus,' the ape says.

The sky whirls past. The trees twist and buckle. And suddenly it's winter.

There's someone padding about the petrol stations at night. There's someone disappearing amongst the bushes in the park. There's someone sitting on the cathedral steps in the yellow light of the outside lamp. It's the ape. And the darkness strokes and strokes his back. The big ape with the long arms. The big ape with the short legs. His back is itching to become man.

Somewhere out there

Once, a long time ago, the ape went out on his own. Found a face he pulled on like a stocking and a tongue that could roll Rs. But he is still afraid in the dark and sleeps with a light on in the hall. And when he goes off into dreams, he drops down out of the tree. Something he constantly carries around with him.

This life on the ground upright and sway-backed. All this problems with his lumbar region. Slipped disc. Sciatica, lumbago. Megalomania.

Some things he doesn't ever tell anyone. At the breakfast table he's the same he always was. And if anyone asks him if he'd like a banana, he says yes please.

The ape runs way outside the city limits. Along the roads, stooping. His long arms. Every step is a fall. Thus he progresses.

He knows about the gravity of all things. Not even the yellow centre line protects him. Nor the signs along the road.
And the sky topples over him with its entire weight.

The ape has put on his blue parka. Now he pulls the zip up and down because he likes the sound. For apes can be scared, too. Even if they have a roof over their heads. Even if there are bananas hanging in the cupboard. Even if they have a soft bed and a warm duvet. For they are all going the same way. Which is why the ape pulls the zip of the blue parka up and down and holds on to the sound.

The ape is to live in one of these houses, behind one of these windows. In one of these narrow corridors there is a door with his name on it. And the ape sits down in the green sofa. Everything is strangely familiar. He feels the walls, stamps on the floor.

Outside, the apples are falling towards the ground. Outside, the grass is receiving as grass always receives. And down by the bend the tree is standing as it has always stood.

'That's just the way it is,' he says to the water.

'That's just the way it is,' he says to the sun.

But the water doesn't care and nor does the sun. Nothing cares - nor does the ape. Is the absence of thought also a thought? And there thought has formulated itself into a point - and thought is a mosquito on his right shoulder. He waves it away. The sun lies two centimetres above the trees on the other side. But it's not the sun that is awake, not the sky. Not the water. It is my thought that's awake, the ape thinks and feels happy. He spits into the water and the rings spread out across the entire lake.

'Le style c'est l'homme,' the ape says to himself. He has his new suit on and his black shoes. It's all a question of style. When he walks past the other apes in the

park, none of them recognise him. He waves to them, throws some peanuts, talks in a loud voice. It's all a question of shoes, the ape says to himself.

He walks through the city streets. He walks past the parking lot. He walks past the post office and the telephone exchange. He strolls through the museum. It's all a question of trousers, the ape says to himself. At the café he orders a drink and toasts with himself.

'To Darwin,' says the ape and drinks.

The ape's greatest wish is to whistle. If he could whistle, nothing else would matter at all. That is what he wants the most in all the world. To swing his arms and whistle. Walk with long legs and whistle. Lean against a wall and whistle. The Marseillaise. The Internationale. Or the first movement of Mahler's Fifth. If you can whistle, the ape thinks, you're invincible. He puckers his lips, presses his tongue against his lower front teeth, makes his oral cavity larger. He blows cautiously. If you can only whistle, the ape thinks, it doesn't matter at all that you can't fly.

The ape considers the table. He wouldn't change it for all the world. For the ape is in an enviable position, one where he can stretch backwards until his back creaks and bend forwards right down to his toes. He can bend his knees and roll his head. That's not bad going.

Inanimate objects lack something important, the ape thinks. Poor table that can't hop. That can't run. After that, the ape is more kindly disposed towards the table. And when he wipes the table over, he does so with extra diligence.

Little by little, summer has arrived. And the ape walks more and more often among the trees. It is a fine day for humans. It is a fine day for trees. Nothing is chance. Nothing is decided. It just turns out like that. He eats his packed lunch on his way through the cemetery, and everything quivers with smells. Hedgerow and lilacs. Everything crowds in.

If I'm to die in two years' time, this is my next to last summer, the ape thinks.

Everything becomes strangely beautiful. And under the magnolia tree in the corner a green bench begins to blossom.

It could have been anywhere and no one. It could have been anyone in large shoes. It is the ape, who comes in and sits down by the window. The darkness turns all the windows into mirrors, and the ape sees himself shake the rain out of his hair. It could have been anytime at all and never. The ape pulls the table in closer to him. His neck is so tired. It's heavy bearing the weight of a head. And his back aches under the centuries. A load of planks, scaffolding.

It could have been anything at all and always. And the ape drinks coffee on his own, while the rain works out the rain.

Somewhere out there I exist as a you, the ape thinks and looks out. Somewhere out there a you is standing at a bus stop feeling cold. The days are long for those who are waiting, but the nights are even longer.

Is that you whistling, ape? Is that you bending forwards with big ears? Once we passed each other on the same pavement, trod on the same crack in the asphalt. Once we went up the same staircase just one hour after the other. Stood in the same queue at the post office. Hand on the same rail. Kicked the same stone, but at different moments. Stumbled at the same time, but in different places.

Somewhere or other in the dark you are leaning your head against your knees. Is that you sleeping, ape? If we sleep at the same time, is it the same sleep? If we both dream about the tree, is it the same tree?

I used to recognise the female ape by her red backside, the ape thinks. But I would surely recognise her again by her red mouth too, he thinks and places his long, hairy arms round a waist. They dance on the dark planks. It's easier to waltz than it looks, and the ape remembers everything it is possible to remember - and a little more besides.

The evening glides imperceptibly into night. And before they know where they are, they have begun to quarrel.

The ape sits down on the side of the bed and takes off his dark shoes. First one, then the other. He places the shoes under the bed and goes over to the window. The day is gently going out over the hills and fading in the trees.

Out on the dark lawn the children in white jackets are still shouting. The grass carries them home. And the ape follows them with his eyes right to the door.

In front of the mirror the ape see his face change. Once he was someone else. In two years' time he'll be somewhere else completely. This body is changing from second to second. Bending over the washbasin he sees the water disappear into the gully.

Can an ape cry? He lies down on the bed and listens to his breath breathing. All evenings have to do with this single evening. He looks at the walls. He looks at the ceiling. Three flies are buzzing round the lamp. Everything is possible, is true. Everything that isn't true doesn't exist. Where do the flies fly to when the light's turned out, the ape thinks and shuts his eyes for the night.

Everything in its own time

The ape sleeps in one of the darkest of night's rooms. And the ape is his own world from limit to limit. Suddenly God switches on the light. And the light fills the room. And the ape wakes up. 'It's so bright in here,' the ape says.

The ape and God sit next to each other on the bed. They watch the grey morning slowly grow between the curtains. They learn to whisper from the curtains. 'Do you have any wishes?' God asks.

The ape looks at the floor. A thought gradually forms. He leans over towards God. Not even the curtains can hear it.

Out there on the grass God is standing under the cherry tree. It could have been a shadow. A speck in the field of vision, something imagined. It could have been the branches in the tree. It could have been the sun. A dazzle. And the ape opens the window to see.

'Is that you?' the ape asks.

'Of course it is,' God says.

He looks at the ape like a door seller. And the ape scratches one of its ears. And the grass is still wet. And the leaves are twisting towards the light. It's not how the world is that's so mysterious, the ape thinks, but the fact that it's there at all.

'This is your gift,' God says to the ape. 'All this life you have lived. Up in the trees, down on the ground. Up in the trees, down on the ground.'

And God crowns the ape with a little green hat of thin paper. In the garden the roses blossom like mad and the clouds divide the sun into two.

Then each of them takes out his trumpet and plays. The earth turns and turns, and nothing tallies. Though everything's in tune.

'What about man?' the ape asks one afternoon in the big garden.

'Everything in its own time,' God replies and is in no hurry.

The days are long, much longer than any time since. And the skies taller and bluer. And the grass greener than the ape had ever thought possible. Beauty insurmountable. Behind each question there is a new question. And in each answer there is a limit to what can be said. A limit in thought for what can be thought.

This is the sixth day. And God has just created a vase of light terra cotta clay. He puts flowers in the vase. It looks really nice, God thinks. 'You see?' God says to the ape. But the ape doesn't quite know what he thinks about it. He looks at the vase and feels that God has tricked him. What can't be said in an answer, the ape thinks, can't be said in a question either, can it? He lies back in the grass in a deafening silence.

The ape takes God with him to the lake on one of these hot July days. And God washes his feet in the cold, clear water. And the beach is so white, so white. And the ape has such a hairy back. It's a wonderful day for instincts. The air quivers with heat over the stones. The sky can be touched with the fingers. At such moments it's impossible to think of misfortunes. The ape wants to ask God, but cannot bring himself to do so.

Later, at the plastic table, God reads the newspaper while the ape dozes under the parasol.

'Is this how things should be?' the ape asks.

'Yes,' says God. 'Exactly like this and nothing else.'

The ape takes the woman with him to God. And God strokes her breasts with the palm of his hand and sees there's plenty of life in them. And God presses her nose and feels that it is made of firm material. And God looks her in the eyes and sees that she's there. When he comes to her back, he strokes down it with a finger and sees that it's straight.

'This will carry you far,' God says.

The light flickers in small patches on the ceiling, and outside the window the angels are bickering as usual.

'There are people who want to get past,' God says, holding back the ape. But the ape doesn't want to wait. The ape is eager to get to where he wants. The ape wants to be first. Out of the train. Into the train. First to the North Pole. First to the South Pole. First on the moon. God shakes his head. 'take it easy, take it easy,' God says. All these competitions.

The ape walks along a narrow path. God walks in front of him. An insect is sitting on a large leaf, its wings quivering. Well, fly then, the ape thinks and walks past it carefully. Treads carefully over the frog that's panting in the grass. It could have been me, the ape thinks. The sky is grey, without any gods except the one walking ahead along the path. The ape follows without thinking. And God's back is broad and big.

'I think I'll stop here,' the ape says suddenly.

'Do whatever you like, as far as I'm concerned,' God says and walks on. Soon he is completely out of sight. Then the ape places his ear to the big maple tree and hears it sighing. And right inside the trunk he can hear a faint ahhh.

Some hours later the ape meets God behind the house. And God is watering the flowers in the flower bed.

'Well?', God says, straightening up with the watering can in his hand.

'ahhh,' the ape says, and God gently nods.

The ape longs to go back. The ape dreams of the lost paradise. Then there was nothing to talk about, and the words fell onto the ground like exaggerated sounds. The animals that stream in and out of the meadow. And everything was sated stillness.

Every day we are driven out, the ape thinks. Every day, every hour of the day. Out of Paradise. Out, out. An incurable flaw in everything. A lack. And the ape hides from God.

'Why are you sitting among the bushes?' God asks.

'Why are you lying behind the stone?'

'What are you doing behind the tree?'

but the ape pretends he isn't here. He pretends that God doesn't see him. And God pretends he doesn't see. He walks past. And the sins fall as silently as rain.

The ape talks. And the ape talks and talks.

'Why do you talk so much?' God asks.

'I'm getting tired out,' God says.

The ape is too. It takes a lot of words to keep the dark at a distance.

And there are such a lot of words, the ape thinks in despair. There are such a frightful lot of words. I choose the wrong word all the time, he thinks. And everything is crying out for a name. When he walks, he looks over his shoulder. When he runs, he always looks behind him. Sooner or later it will catch him up. Sooner or later it will pounce on him from behind. Every step is a flight. Every flight is a postponement. And nothing will ever end before the end is there.

God cuts the cards. And the ape deals. No deal is just. Nobody gets what they deserve. The apes scream. The apes scream in their cages. The dogs fight. Smoke spreads through the streets.

'Go home to your tree, ape,' God says. 'This is nothing for you.'

The ape carries his cases through the streets. Along the wet roads. Under the changing clouds. Quick steps through the shadow of a bike and the water. 'Don't cry for me,' the ape says, 'don't cry for me. Don't think of me.'

And the water runs down from the roofs. Everything is erased. Everything is washed away. Where all the paths open up. Home to the tree. Home to the tree.