

A Letter  
from America

Burn me, burn me, burn me, the old woman sings and turns while singing, nice and slowly and circumspectly, and now she flings the wooden clogs from her feet, there they fly in an arc up to the fence, and she turns now even faster beneath the little apple tree. Burn me, dear sun, she sings as accompaniment. She's pushed up the sleeves of her blouse and swings her bare arms, and small, thin shadows fall from the boughs of the little tree, it is high noon, and the woman turns with small steps. Burn me, burn me, burn me.

In the house a letter is lying on the table. From America. There you can read:

My dear Mother. Inform you that we will not be traveling to you. It's only a couple of days, I say to my wife, then we're there, and it's a couple of days, I say, Alice, then

we're back again. And don't they say: Honor mother and father, and even if father has died, the grave is there, and mother is old, I say, and if we don't go now we'll never go. And my wife says: Listen to me, John, she says John to me, it's beautiful there, you've told me that, but that was before. Man is young or old, she says, and the young person doesn't know what it'll be like when he's old, and the old person doesn't know what it was like in his youth. You've become something here, and you're not there anymore. That's what my wife says. She's right. You know, her father transferred the business to us, things are going well. You can have your mother come here, she says. But of course you've written, Mother, that you can't come because at least one has to stay there because all of us are gone.

The letter is even longer. It comes from America. And where it comes to a close reads: Your loving son Jons.

It is high noon, and it is beautiful. The house is white. A barn stands at the side. The barn too is white. And here is the garden. A little way down the mountain stands the next farm, and then comes the village, alongside the river, and the highway turns up towards here and goes past, once more towards the river and back again and into the woods. It is beautiful. And it is high

noon. The old woman turns about beneath the little apple tree. She swings her bare arms. Dear sun, burn me, burn me.

In the parlor it is cool. A cluster of artemisia dangles from the ceiling and buzzes with flies. The old woman takes the letter from the table, folds it up and carries it in to the kitchen to the stove. She walks back again into the parlor. The mirror is hanging between the two windows, tucked in there in the lower corner left, between frame and glass, a picture. A photograph from America. The old woman takes the picture out, she sits down at the table and writes on the reverse side: That's my son Jons. And that's my daughter Alice. And underneath she writes: Erdmuthe Gaupate née Attalle. She tugs her blouse sleeve down and smooths it out. A pretty white material with small blue dots. From America. She stands up, and while walking to the stove waves the picture a bit through the air. When Annus came from Tauroggen, way back, and stayed here, way back: It's because of the arms, he said, there weren't any such white arms, up there, where he came from, and not here where he then stayed. And he talked about that for thirty years. Annus.

Man is young or old. What does the old person need then anyway? The daylight becomes darker, the shadows become

brighter, the night is no longer made for sleeping, the roads shorten. Only two, three roads more, at last one.

She places the picture on the stove, next to the folded-up letter. Then she fetches the matches from the chest and places them alongside. We'll boil up the milk, she says and goes out, for some wood.