

*Theo Monkhorst (translated by Joy Misa)*

## **Buddy love**

A monologue

*(A man in a small room, white floor, ceiling, walls, with a bare chair and table)*

This is it.

No one.

Four steps. Forward, left, right, whatever. No more.

Empty. Respite.

A chair and a table of course.

You need to sit somewhere.

But a table? What for? Well, it provides support.

You sit behind it. Or better still, at it.

Otherwise you would sit suspended in space. It may not be very big, but even here a solitary chair floats. Resulting in dizziness.

I hate dizziness.

No focus, not alert, that can never be again.

It doesn't matter, they say. A little dizziness can't harm. It does me. A lot of harm. Before you know it, you've had it. If you don't watch out for even just a moment, you've had it. Forever.

A straightback chair. Not an armchair. In an armchair you sink. Here you sit upright.

Sit upright, behind a table, in a small room, 4 by 4, with white walls.

That's it. Don't think. Don't think about anything.

You've got to learn that. Think of nothing.

Not that I can do it. But I practise.

Sit just so, see nothing, for there's nothing to see here. Don't think, for there is nothing here to think about.

Ha, ha, ha (laugh out loud).

Of course I know you can think when there's nothing to think about.

Nothing around you, I mean, only empty space. Yeh, ha, ha, I know, I'm sitting here, therefore the space is not empty. I guess I'm something.

I can think about myself. I don't mean my whole self, though that's possible, but I mustn't do that. That whole story! It would drive me crazy! But I could think about bits of myself.  
My knee, for example. Or my foot. Or the absence of my knee or foot. How long would it take to think of all the parts of myself, so that in the end I could think about my whole self without going crazy?  
What an insane thought.

The idea was not to think of anything here. To reflect the empty room in my brain. And to think about my foot or my knee, even if they aren't there anymore, is an activity that can go on forever. Therefore that is anything but nothing.

I have now spent a lot of time thinking about thinking, and that was not allowed. I was not supposed to think, also not about thinking. Not even about nothing, if that were possible, because nothing is the absence of everything, so you cannot think about that.

What I mean is that soon I will have to be among people, and then I will have filled my precious time in emptiness with thinking, instead of with emptiness. Instead of white, it has taken on all the colours of the rainbow. Pink the colour of flesh, red the colour of blood, blue the colour of a bruise, only yellow is missing still. And I'm after white. The white of nothing.

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Ah, children! The innocence!  
What wealth, what sadness.  
Curious, disobedient, naughty, delightful.  
Sometimes I feel for him. Innocence is a blessing, but after that...  
'Daddy, he says and I look as though I understand what I see.  
Big blue eyes, promise, hope. Pain.  
Yes? Should I say yes? Dad?  
'Yes', I say. Of course I say yes.  
As if I just returned from hell - yes call it hell, you know what I mean -  
and then say it was nice.  
Was it nice? Well, yes, nice, we had good laughs.  
Of course we laughed.  
Laughing was the best.  
Laughing hurts, but it feels better.

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Sometimes pain is the best.  
Is that what I am looking for?  
Looking for pain in this white emptiness with only myself, a table and a chair?  
Pain is love. That's what it's about. Buddy love.  
The same focus, same fear, same hope.  
One for all, all for one.  
I miss Angry Dan. God how I miss Angry Dan.

My son is whole. Whole from head to foot. Handsome, tall for his age they say. He goes to school, learns how to live among people. He plays to become strong. My big, innocent son, hope of his mother.

But there is so much to lose. That's why I feel for him. When I think of all he still has to lose. Perhaps not an arm or leg, but for sure promise. One day promise will be lost.  
Then it will be what it is, plus the memory. Of promise.

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The first time. About six. The sergeant who screamed that we had to get up. I was terror-stricken and knew it would never be the same again. My dreams are over, I thought, others rule my life. I did not yet know then how dreams can hurt, later when you dream your own story.  
In any case, when that sergeant screamed me out of my sleep, I got up and didn't know what was happening. An enormous icy place with bunk beds, men in underwear who hurriedly pulled on their uniforms.  
Suddenly I understood: this is real.

I still know how frightened I was.

I didn't know why. Feeling a kind of cold, my breath cut short, I wanted to flee. Too late. I was underway.

I still know how I sat hunched forward in that plane. I didn't want to experience it, hardly dared to look. They already sat around me then. Luitenant Jack, Sergeant Rod, Charley, Angry Dan, Big Mac. Frightened birds just like me. Buddies, without knowing we were. After a while, the frightened birds looked up. Mac began to laugh. I loved him already then. Laughing was all you could do. Everyone laughed. Without knowing why.

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Thinking of nothing is better. Not thinking of nothing is the best.  
Emptiness. Emptiness in your head. Without love, pain.  
But that requires training. Discipline. Will power.  
Which I have enough of. They taught me that.  
Love is something else, this is about emptiness, the great emptiness.  
About nothing.

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Jane doesn't understand. When I'm at home she hovers around me nervously. 'What are you up to?', she asks. 'Why did you paint that room white? What do you do there? Are you alright?'

I must confess that I feel just fine. Better than I ever have since I returned.

'It's as if you keep a mistress there', she even added.  
I have to laugh, show her the bare room.  
But it sets me thinking.

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Can you picture what it is, emptiness?  
Shall I experience it only when I have found it and then forgotten it?  
For when you find total emptiness, you will have naturally forgotten looking for it.  
Emptiness is emptiness is nothing. Just like death.  
Once you have found death, you will have forgotten it.

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Then we all returned to the hangar full of waiting women. We looked at each other, laughed, an uneasy laugh. Except for Angry Dan. He couldn't laugh anymore.

For the first time, we parted ways, each one looking for his own woman. I saw her standing there, small, blond, between two darker women. She waved.

We looked at each other, as though we were saying goodbye, apologetically. Charley, Big Mac, Luitenant Jack, Sergeant Rod. Then we waved back. Except of course Angry Dan. He couldn't wave anymore.

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I couldn't believe what I saw. When you have stared for months on end at pictures, they become part of yourself. They become bigger than life. That first nude photo. Bashful. That white wedding dress. She behind me on the bike. Ryan as a baby on a rug. And the memories that break you up. That scream during the delivery. That animal, teeth bared! Was that Jane?

Images. Sounds eventually fall away. The open mouth is a scream. The picture is etched into your memory, you take it with you to your grave. That's for sure. Those wide eyes and that scream.

Where was Jane? I couldn't believe what I saw.  
Is this Jane, this girl in tears holding a boy to her breast?  
'Daddy.'  
With my eyes closed I embrace them. Warm bodies. Maybe I'll remember something. But I can't believe what I see. I have to begin again. And she too, of course.

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Is this a funeral parlor? Queens were buried in white. Who am I burying here? Angry Dan, my leg?  
I really should paint a sandy road on the wall. With armoured cars. You can see that they move forward slowly.  
We left early, three armoured cars and a jeep. Routine. To the village, let them see we're here. Greet the village elder, give candy to the kids. Peacemakers.  
Why did that bomb explode under the second? Big Mac at the wheel. What did he do wrong? *Did* he do wrong? If one does something wrong, we all do something wrong. Together we are a machine, a fighting machine. Alone we are nothing. Focus or die. Angry Dan is never angry anymore.

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You can grieve for a dog. Some people bury him in the yard. Under a stone or a stick. *Here lies Fido, we will never forget him.*  
Can you mourn for a leg? *Here lies my leg, my left, I shall never forget him.*  
Where have they put my leg? He's gone, but I still feel him.

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'Do you still love me?'  
What should I answer?

'Of course,' of course I say 'of course'.  
'Just as much as when you went away?'  
What should I say? 'Just as much'? or 'more'?  
'About so, a lot, oh I don't know.'  
'Don't you know?'  
'Yes, yes, I know for sure.'  
What do those words mean?  
Why do we ask those questions now?

When I sit in my white room and try not to think, these questions arise spontaneously. As though I doubt. One didn't ask those questions before. I love you, but of course, as soon as you've said it you forget it again.

But now we ask those questions.

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When she reads to Ryan, like they are one body, I could cry. I didn't carry that picture *there* with me. I didn't know it yet, didn't know I missed it. I missed so much *there* of *here*.

Now I miss *there here*.

Like how we cried together, us buddies. After the roadside bomb, when Angry Dan became Dead Dan. Crying together, like women. It almost felt good. Dan was dead but we were together. Together in misery. When I saw Luitenant Jack crying I loved him. No one said anything. Safe in the compound behind the walls. We sat and lay down together. Mac didn't laugh.

After an hour we went for the bottle. Then Mac laughed. No one knew why, but everyone laughed - and cried. Together.

When I see Big Mac crawl forward, while the bullets fly around, I am proud of him. That's how we do it. Together, for each other. One focus: kill! And then cry together. Never asking: do you love me?

What would they do now?

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It didn't rain there. It rains here. Gently. Or it storms. Lightning is the enemy here. I'm afraid of the enemy, but I don't let on. It creeps closer, rumbles in the distance and suddenly a thunderbolt like a sniper's bullet in your back.

‘Why do you crawl in the room when it thunders?’ Jane asks. She laughs. She thinks it’s funny. Ryan also laughs. ‘Daddy is afraid of thunder,’ he says, when I lock myself up in the silent white room without windows.

‘Come stay with me,’ says Jane.

But I go to the emptiness.

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It feels like I still have my leg.

Luitenant Jack plays his harmonica. Luitenant Blues.

Big Mac lies on his back reading a car magazine.

Looking for a car in which he would fit. Ha ha.

Angry Dan laughs and lights a fag. He looks at photos of his new baby, a surprise number. Any moment something can explode.

But we pretend we don’t have knots in our stomachs.

You were still there. Beautiful leg. Jane was proud of you. ‘You have beautiful legs’, she said, ‘they arouse me.’ Jane loves hairy legs on men. My leg was hairy. I still feel him. His toes move, he can move each one individually. An acrobat of a leg. The special thing about two legs is that they take turns moving forward and backward. One leg can go only one way.

Except in the mind. Then I run like a hare. After Big Mac, from boulder to boulder. Apparently there are no snipers, maybe they’re asleep, preparing for the next attack. Mac and I, spotters for the team. Close together, his large body makes itself small to give me room behind the rocks. Nothing in sight. Not a soul. A hare. Before you know it, he kicks a bomb and flies through the air.

‘Let’s put out hares. They will clear away the bombs.’ Laughter.

I miss you, beautiful left leg. I know how you feel. Where are you?

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‘You are free,’ they say. ‘And safe. Makes a big difference, doesn’t it? Be glad. You’re so quiet.’

When I don’t know what to say, I remain silent. They call that quiet. You must talk. If you don’t talk, you don’t count. They’re afraid of silence.

Just like us before. 'It's so quiet, what are they up to? I don't see anything, but that doesn't mean anything, in half a minute the bullets are whizzing around your ears.'

They say that we're safe *here*. Safer than *there*. Here we have democracy, peace. There it's war. There you live among murderers. That's why you can do only one thing, murder back. Here there are no murderers, only colleagues. And your colleagues are your friends, they say. But why are they then so afraid to be quiet here? Why do they talk all the time? The whole livelong day. Maybe they lie. But that doesn't seem to be as bad as silence. They're afraid of silence.

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When I missed her I loved her.  
What was that? What did I miss? Sex? But of course.  
But what really? What was behind it? When I thought of her, I usually didn't think of sex. I thought about the very first time. Blond curls, hopeful brown eyes. When I saw her standing with her friends and she suddenly looked up and saw me. As though she was startled.  
That's what I thought about. That is fixed in my memory and that's what I thought about at night, when I would hear Angry Dan snoring and Mac tossing about in his sleeping bag.

You don't realize how much I missed you.  
'Do you love me?'  
Why do you ask that, why I should I talk about that?  
You'll never know how much I missed you and Ryan.

I still look for those eyes from the first time.

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They ask if I want to be boss. Department head. Of the assembly.  
'You have all the qualifications', they say. 'Discipline, reliability, craftsmanship, you don't talk too much and they look up to you.'  
It scared me.

They look up to me because they think that I carry a secret. The secret of the murderer. The mystery which makes you bigger. He who has killed carries a secret. He is quiet, his eyes are never cheerful. That's why they do what I ask. Ideal for a boss.

It frightened me.  
I said no.

If I were the boss, I'd have to deal with people and I like machines more than people. When I lie on an engine and marvel at its wonderful construction, it feels almost intimate. I know the engine, know why, what and how. An engine does not talk.

Focus, that's what it's about. These colleagues ruin your focus. Fill the emptiness with small talk. I like those silent engines. Miracles which work and when you have to repair them, you work on a miracle. You can't work on people. You must give them orders, and I can't do that. I'm not Sergeant Rod.

They take this against me. The boss and the guys. I'm crazy, they say. I came back crazy.

A garage is like a platoon. Colleagues are friends. Team spirit, says the boss, we have *one* goal: get rich together. But everyone works for himself. I can't deal with that. They lie.  
Strangers, not mates. No focus.  
I don't like them. They can go to hell.

They don't talk anymore. They stand with their backs to me and look over their shoulders. Because I'm crazy. Murder has gone to his head, they say. No idea what they mean, but at least they've stopped with that bullshit. It's become quiet.

You mustn't resign, says Jane. If you do that you won't get a settlement. You should let them fire you. But the boss won't do that. I work hard, I know what I do. Even if I'm crazy.

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The silence has been filled by taciturn mates. My jeep, my leg, Dan, Mac, Rod. My jeep and my leg are just as familiar as Angry Dan or Big Mac. I've never really liked Sergeant Rod, a braggart who talked about rods rather than guns. No one liked that. A big mouth, but if we were free in the compound, he was usually quiet. He didn't cry. Sergeant Rod was the only one who didn't cry. There was something wrong with him, we didn't know what. But he belonged. Everyone belonged, even a bastard like Rod.

I can talk to him here.

What's wrong with you? Why don't you cry? Have you cried enough?  
You can tell me.  
But he doesn't answer. Even then, he belongs. Here in my outpost.

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Jane likes to watch the news. Ryan and I don't. We'd rather watch the Teletubbies, although Ryan is actually already too old for it. We sit together on a poof. A poof is filled with sand. It feels like the desert. I make myself small for him. Together we are one. I don't think when I watch the Teletubbies. 'Dad,' he then says and smiles.

Jane isn't jealous. She's pleased when Ryan and I watch TV. 'Finally peace,' she says. 'I missed you so much when you were there. If I didn't get news, I thought you were dead. Sometimes you didn't send a message for a whole week. I became thinner everyday. Until I knew you were in hospital. No leg, but alive. I didn't know what to think, but at least you were alive and couldn't die anymore. And now you're so quiet, who do you think of?'

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I'm closest to my mates in my outpost.

'Listen here, Dan, you can now say they're gone, but they crawl like ants through the sand. Maybe they've burrowed into it. They have only one purpose: to kill. To kill us.

How do you say *kill* in Arabic? *Jiie*? At least that's what Luitenant Jack says, who looked it up. 'The one who is most focused lives longest. They're just as focused as we are.'

Dan doesn't say anything back, but still I hear him.

'Actually they're mates. They're just as focused as we are and have the same goal.

The only thing is they pray three times a day. Maybe that distracts them. Let's hope so. I don't know.'

Dan ends everything with 'I don't know' and even then he was not a skeptic. Rather a sage. Perhaps because he was older. Older than Luitenant Jack, who was really just a kid. A skinny little man, but clever. The only thing he couldn't do was give orders. Sergeant Rod had to do that. And there's nothing he likes better to do.

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Why don't you let him in? Jane asks. He misses you. Ryan stands at the door. Ryan is crying. Daddy, he cries. Of course he can't. Though it hurts. My outpost. I don't want Ryan to be here, among the mates. This is the

world of pain. Not of Ryan, though he hurts too. Another pain. My pain makes new pain. Father to son pain.

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Where could Rod be, and Mac and Jack? I know where Dan is. In heaven says Jane, in the ground I say. Luckily I know where. Because we were allowed to carry the coffin. The last time we put on our uniforms. Charley had grown a beard in that short time and his hair was already longer. Luitenant Jack had changed a lot, or maybe it just seemed so, he was just insecure. He'd already found a job very quickly and his uniform didn't fit anymore. Would he still play the harmonica? Mac was Big Mac, nothing wrong with that. Unpolished copper, unpolished shoes, even at the funeral of his best friend. Rod wasn't there. No one knew why.

I already knew then that only Dead Dan and Big Mac would remain with me.

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'It could have been worse,' says Jane. 'I was afraid that you were dead. That would have been worse. Now you still have one beautiful leg. That's enough for me. It excites me.'

She's right. I can still walk on two legs. One real leg and one of plastic. I feel two legs. Everything's okay. I don't miss him. I do miss Angry Dan. Just like I missed Ryan in the compound. It's never right, is it?

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A jeep is fine, even better than an armoured car. A jeep is made of cardboard, an armoured car of steel. Though it doesn't really help. One bomb is enough and you fly three metres through the air. My leg had a will of his own, he flew a metre further. At first I felt nothing. I looked at my leg and thought: look, my leg. After that I passed out.

Here in this deadly-still emptiness, I still see my lonely leg. As though he never left. I also feel him. So I actually still have him. The only thing is I can't stand on him anymore.

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Why don't you let us in? asks Jane. Ryan and me. Don't we belong with you?

I can't explain it. Do you love us? asks Jane. What a question I say. But Jane doesn't believe me. You live in another world, she says, we don't belong there.

She's right. But she should leave me alone. I love Jane and Ryan, but also Angry Dan and my lonely leg. Here my buddies, there Jane and Ryan.

You're crazy, says Jane.

In my white void, I empty my head.

Jane won't have sex anymore.

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Do you hurt? the doctor asks. What do they mean? Do you hurt? Of course I hurt, what did you think? I miss my leg, Angry Dan. That hurts, but also gives me warmth.

Because I love my lonely leg and Angry Dan, even if they're not around anymore.

That's not what they mean.

Do you sleep well?

Fine, better than *there*, quieter, though *there* sometimes comes back, at night. Then I go to my white room and think of nothing.

They listen to my heart with a stethoscope. Nothing wrong with my heart. It's been beating all my life, it sympathizes with me, sometimes beats faster, then it's just as scared as I am.

They think I'm sick. It's got a name which has nothing to do with me. I'm not sick, I'm this. This soldier in his white world, where his heart beats because he's alive.

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You talked again, says Jane. I often talk in my sleep.

She couldn't make out what I said. As though you hurt, she says. A high shrill little voice. What did you dream? I don't know, I say, but I do know. Women couldn't understand that.

I dreamt of course of *there*. A village with soft houses. The houses there are softer than here. If you scratch on the wall, a little heap of sand forms on the ground. I scratched on a wall, it felt good, the wall was warm, like a person. The more I scratched, the closer the house came to me, the more it became mine. But the house didn't like it and took revenge, for suddenly its walls caved in on top of me. I lay under the enormous stones in the blazing sun and heard sneering, as though all the stones had

mouths and made fun of me. I couldn't move, there was no one to save me and I slowly burned as if I lay on the barbecue of the compound.

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The army is at the door. Excuse me, ma'm, is your husband home? Does he have some time?

I have all the time in the world.

A woman in uniform, captain. More senior than Sergeant Rod and Luitenant Jack.

Does she sometimes cry?

She's been *there*, she says. Four months. She knows what she's talking about.

Are you sometimes afraid? I ask.

She doesn't answer, after all it's about me.

Shoot, I say, what do you want to know?

She'd like to know why I resigned.

That's not so difficult.

Do you plan to go back to work?

I don't know. I'm just like Dan, 'I don't know.'

How's your marriage?

How's my marriage. Do I love Jane? Ryan?

Fuck off, bitch, it's none of your business.

Mad, for the first time since I returned.

This bitch has made me mad.

I know. She's afraid that I want money from the army because the army made me ill. Well, maybe I do want it. For sure when they ask such questions.

The joke is that she thinks I'm sick and that's the reason I want money. I won't help snap her out of her dream. She's not a buddy. She doesn't have focus.

Did Big Mac and Sergeant Rod call in sick?

Even though they're not sick, any more than I am. But the army doesn't know that.

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Angry for the first time. Really angry. Inside it churns, storms, heaves. Wonderful.

Thanks, bitch. Finally furious. Cursing. I'm drained, the plug has been pulled out.

Captain Bitch has pulled the plug. I'll be back, she says.

It's up to you.

Ryan is crying. He crawls behind the skirts of his mother. Jane pulls him into a corner, big eyes. She's afraid. Afraid of me? I'm her husband, would never lay a hand on her. Why is she afraid? I won't hurt you, I say. She nods, but her eyes are wide with fear. She grasps Ryan. I won't do anything Ryan, I say. Jane pushes Ryan further into the corner. Ryan cries.

I'm not mad at that bitch anymore. I'm in stitches. Like a crab she creeps backward towards the door. I'm not angry anymore. I'm happy, finally furious. It feels so good.

Why are Jane and Ryan still afraid? I'm not mad anymore, I say. Come to me. They don't believe me. What do they see? An angry man or a laughing man?

I shriek with laughter when Captain Bitch leaves. I laugh about my victory. Jane pulls Ryan with her up the stairs. I can only laugh. Laugh like crazy. I'm mad.

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A lunatic in a white room. I wonder how Luitenant Jack is. And Big Mac? I'm sure Sergeant Rod stayed in the army. He knows nothing else. Give orders, shoot, run. He was not afraid and still has all his arms and legs. An experienced military man, that's what they want. He wouldn't make fun of a captain. Only soldiers do that. *There* he was a buddy. Not here, I've lost him.

Not Big Mac. I should know how Big Mac is. My only mate, besides my lonely leg.

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I must focus. On emptiness. Even if only for a second. One second totally empty. Should be possible, but it doesn't work. Think of nothing, not of Dan, Mac, not of Jane, not of Ryan, not of Captain Bitch, not of anger.

This is my outpost. There is the enemy. I scramble up to Mac. It seems quiet there, but you never know. They're more clever than you think. First dead quiet and then a sniper. Lie lower, Mac, you stick out above that boulder. If you make a mistake, I go too. I trust you like my

brother, if I had a brother. But I have you, here, in my outpost, where it's safe. Safer than anywhere else in the world.

There wasn't anger. They'd like that, those on the other side of the road. They'd like to get us angry. But anger is emotion, which blinds your focus. Don't let them wind you up says Luitenant Jack. Don't let your focus get blinded. Stay cool, concentrate. When you return you may cry.

This white room isn't empty. They're all here. Now I can think of nothing anywhere else but here, where all my mates have gathered. Here you may cry in rage.

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On the way to Big Mac people looked at me as if there was something they'd never seen before. I knew what: a murderer. Not that I cared, but I know that death shows from my eyes. Blood-red like the setting sun. When I shot them like hares, the mates from the other side, soldiers who pray three times a day, became mine. Now they look through my eyes. And people see that.

You can never explain that to a woman, says Mac. He can talk, he doesn't have a wife. Only girlfriends, very many girlfriends, he says, and they don't ask questions. He laughs and drinks vodka. Mac is always laughing, even when he's out of work he laughs. When I look at Mac, I see death in his eyes. He laughs with his mouth, his eyes are angry.

I think I'll go back, says Mac. To the focus, the mates. The dead, he means.

He's talked to them already. They do want him back. As a corporal. Promotion.

They've already drawn him into their web.

I'll miss him when he goes back.

Come with me, he says. It's a job. I'll take care of you.

With one leg?

You have two legs, says Mac. And you can lose only one now. Ha, ha.

Laughter. With Mac, you always laugh.

Must I abandon Jane and Ryan?

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I dream I'm in the shower with Angry Dan. Scrub my back, he says. His back is so broad, his skin soft. The soap froths away between his buttocks. He sucks me with his body to him. My arms are in the way, I

put them over his shoulders, feel his smooth chest. Slowly he sucks me in, the foaming water squeezed away. My skin becomes his skin. Together we die.

What did you dream? Jane asks. I don't know anymore, I answer. It's not possible to explain.

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This time I don't want emptiness here. I want to lie here and dream the dream again. My eyes closed and feeling our two bodies as one. Dead Dan isn't dead anymore, my life brought him to life. Here in this outpost we live as long as I lie on the ground eyes closed and think of him, of his blood which flows through my body, my heart which beats in his, a terrific pump for two, I hear it slurp, blood in, blood out through my head, my legs, Dan has given me two legs. Ryan knocks on the door, I want to lie here forever, now that Dan is here, if I get up and go outside he won't exist anymore. I ignore Ryan's call, listen to our heart, our wonderful pump. It's too late, Dan slowly disappears, Ryan has taken down Dan. But he doesn't know any better.

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Outside they stare at me. They see it. I've got to watch out, because outside I'm not protected. Except when I walk on the street with Mac, naturally. Big Mac. He looks like my bodyguard.

*There* you are safer, all your mates are your bodyguards and you are the bodyguard for all your mates. If I don't go with him, I'll have to protect myself. And Jane. And Ryan.

Here in my white room I'm safe. Even when Mac is away. Except if they follow me - then they know where to find me. Don't underestimate them. They creep through the gardens and alleys, are experienced, in guerilla tradition, hit and run snipers from roofs. When I bring Ryan to kindergarten I always look around and up at roofs and balconies.

Why are we passing here? asks Ryan, as I try to avoid a fixed route. For a change, I say, or because I like this street.

He always wants to go home quickly because mommy has chocolate milk and cookies.

Daddy acts strange. Sometimes he just suddenly takes off running down a street.

Come, he then says, let's run.

He doesn't understand why I sometimes suddenly stand still, or hunch down and pull him with me behind a hedge. Adventure, I say, but Ryan doesn't understand.

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Here I'm not afraid. I can just breathe. When I try to empty my head. Luitenant Jack knew exactly how to do it. Concentrate on breathing through your belly and think only of your navel, he says. Let everything loose, your feet, your legs, back, shoulders, no fists, let loose! Sometimes it works, but sometimes Jane stands at the door. Are you coming to eat? Ryan has to go to bed. I need to talk to you.

Jane won't have sex anymore.

Go away, I call out, she doesn't understand, I must focus on my navel, then I'm not afraid.

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It's easy to follow me. It doesn't matter where I am. Whether walking on the street, sitting at home or here in my outpost, my telephone betrays me. A present from Jane, when I returned. My Iphone. Of course they know where I live. And where Ryan goes to school. I don't pick up Ryan anymore. Jane does it during her office breaks. It's safer not to go on the street anymore with my telephone. For example when I go to Big Mac.

Jane screams. What are you doing? Do you know how much that costs? My present.

It hurts me, but I have to do it. Stamp hard on it until it's totally destroyed. I could cry, it lies like a dead black insect on the ground, a trampled beetle. Ryan wants to pick it up. Leave it alone, I say. I don't know why I say it. Ryan cries, Jane cries, I cry.

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In this house, outside this room, changes are taking place of which I know nothing. I hear it when I seek emptiness here. Something happening which is beyond me. It resounds especially in the quiet outside this room. As if Jane and Ryan don't live here anymore. As if I'm alone.

At night Jane sleeps with Ryan.

I have a new job, says Jane. Whole days, in a department store. Ryan is going to the crèche. You don't have to do anything anymore. I make money and Ryan is sheltered. She talks to me as if I were a stranger.

You can't live in two worlds. Having two loves doesn't work. Jane is right. Jane has chosen for her own life with Ryan. I love Jane, I still know how I missed her. I don't know if she still loves me.

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I do love you, says Jane. As you were when I first got to know you. Sexy, cheerful, always full of plans. We must talk. I can't take it anymore. Being only with Ryan.

What do you mean only with Ryan? I ask. You have me.

You're my second child, says Jane. Who I don't understand. Maybe you can't do anything about it. You've become someone else. I can't take it anymore. Think I'll go to my mother. With Ryan. Ryan is afraid of you.

Ryan is afraid. Jane wants to leave. What should I do, Angry Dan. I don't want to be angry. What would you do? You would get mad, I know that for sure. But I don't want to. I don't want to scream at Ryan. Concentrate, says Luitenant Jack. Don't get wound up. I don't want to hit Jane, but she's so mean. I don't love Jane anymore. Why did I shoot all those hares, death in my eyes, everyone sees it. Also for Jane and Ryan. For freedom, democracy, also for Jane and Ryan. Jane won't have sex anymore, she's going away, to her mother. If I tie her down she can't leave.

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You're crazy, says Big Mac. You can't tie down your wife.

Last night was the most difficult, I say. And Ryan couldn't sleep.

I'll go with you, says Mac. Mac is my buddy. Who takes care of me. Mac is going back, as corporal. He unties Jane. I watch.

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This is it.

No one.

Four steps. Forward, left, right, whatever. No more.

Empty. Respite.

A chair and a table of course.

You need to sit somewhere.

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Translated by Joy Misa

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