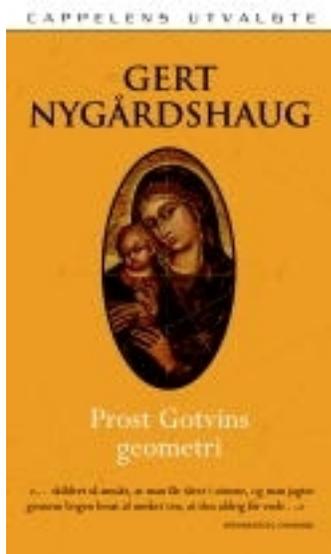


## Prost Gotvin's Geometry



### Father Gotvin's First Journey

The train ride from Madrid had been hot and strenuous, and even I, who had always enjoyed train rides, felt a certain discomfort by having been squeezed into a corner of a compartment intended for six, but which had, until the train reach Zamora, accommodated nine people. I was elated to see that no less than seven people left the compartment when the train stopped, including the four men wearing Spanish army uniforms who, through their drunkenness and foul language, had not missed any opportunity to embarrass and disgust their co-travelers, myself included. This all but emptied the compartment and I wasted no time taking a seat by the window.

This is where I would spend the rest of the ride.

Enjoy nature and the unfamiliar scenery.

All the way to Santiago de Compostela.

My journey's destination.

To be quite frank: I had, from the very beginning of my trip, from the minute I boarded the train at Vanndal train station, felt a certain unease, not anxiety, but rather a shivering internal commotion over what I was about to embark on, and which now, as I was approaching my journey's destination, had by no means subsided, I tried to calm myself by explaining this unease through my lack of traveling experience. This was in fact my very first trip abroad. Although I had reached the age of thirty-two, my studies, my vocation, and my office had, until now, kept me in my native country and native township. I had never felt any urge to travel. Where would I go? I enjoyed my daily

duties as vicar of Vanndal Parish. So the unease, the shivering internal commotion, could be explained quite easily.

Could it?

Wasn't there something else?

The apprehension tied to my destination, the miracle of Santiago de Compostela?

Why should I, a Protestant, well and safely anchored in the Evangelical-Lutheran doctrine, seek out a sanctum in a foreign country, and a Catholic sanctum at that, where a miracle was supposed to have taken place? I was not, as the train started moving again from Zamora, able to explain this. Nonetheless, Compostela, Spain was my first travel destination abroad; this was fact, an undeniable reality founded on an irrational determination that was just, all of a sudden, there.

I tried to concentrate on nature, the exotic scenery gliding by, the fields with their vines in tidy rows, did they make good wine here? I highly appreciated good wine in modest amounts. Through the years, many people have made the comment that this proclivity is coded in my name, Gotvin, which of course it isn't. My parents knew better. Besides, my father knew only one form of alcohol, moonshine, a type of drink he never abused. I kept my eyes fixed on the scenery, the mountains to the south, reddish brown mountains, and did not notice the woman who had entered the compartment and taken a seat almost directly opposite me. She had come in quietly, without a suitcase. I beheld the mountains; could it be the Sierra de la Culebra? The Snake Mountains? I had studied the maps thoroughly and what little Spanish I had memorized before my trip helped with the simpler words and expressions. Besides, I had a picket dictionary. It had to be the Sierra de la Culebra. What would walking in these mountains be like? Snakes?

I sensed the smell.

Turned around slowly and saw the woman.

She wasn't old – around twenty-five?

She was reading in a book.

I wasn't just the smell, although this was what first made me aware that another person had entered the compartment. The smell was mild, not overwhelming – lavender? Then I found myself having closed my eyes just to sense the smell. How could someone smell like this? In this heat? Was it perfume? Of course it was perfume. I opened my eyes, but was careful not to look in her direction for, as I mentioned, it wasn't just the smell. Again I let myself be transported into the scenery floating by, slowly. The train ran along at a comfortably leisurely speed. A gray river. Which one could it be? I recalled the map. Rio Aliste. Might there be trout there? Possibly, but probably no grayling. The unease, the internal shivering was gone. For the first time on this trip I felt totally relaxed. Was it the smell of lavender? This cheerful thought made me smile, but out of the corner of my eye I could sense that the woman, the girl lifted her eyes from her book and looked at me. I half closed my eyes and let her look at me.

She was looking at me.  
A long time.

Then she moved to sit right across from me. She put the book she was reading open on the small table graciously provided for window-seat passengers. She put the book there and continued reading. This was of course the only reason she had moved. Holding the book had made her hands tired and she could more comfortably read by putting the book on the table next to my magazine, the popular scientific magazine I had bought at the newsstand at Oslo's Central Station, and which I until now had hardly glanced at. The scenery outside the train window had been more interesting. Nature had always been one of my great interests. God's creation held many enigmas and humankind was not granted the knowledge of them all.

Now I reached for the magazine again.  
Calmly and without trembling, I lifted it from the table.  
Opened a page at random and started reading.  
She was reading.  
Her smell. Her feet. Her legs.

I was reading. Avidly I concentrated on an article about a strange creature living in South America, a reptile called a basilisk, but which was also known as the Jesus lizard. As a theologian, I couldn't help chuckling softly over the story and the name the critter had been given. The lizard had the remarkable ability to walk on water, as it were, and this is why they called it the Jesus lizard. I read the article thoroughly and with great interest but held the magazine low enough for it not to cover my eyes. I read that the basilisk was about twenty inches long, that it weighed between three and four ounces, that it ran across the water at a speed of over six feet per second, and that this is fast enough for air bubbles to be sucked in under the animal's feet when they make contact with the water surface. They form air cushions that prevent its feet from sinking into the water. That's how it was, that's why it was called the Jesus lizard. And, if I wanted to do the same trick, I would, with my 175 pounds, have to run across the water at 70 miles per hour and exert 15 times the muscle power a running man normally does, which meant that Jesus' feat on the Sea of Galilee still remains a divine miracle.

A divine miracle.  
The magazine in my hands shivered a trifle.  
I gently lowered it to the table.  
She was gazing into the air.  
At a point behind and above my head.

I was unable to continue reading now. Her book still lay open, page 118. I turned toward the window: green pastures, olive trees, endless rows of vines, whitewashed houses, cattle – were there donkeys? I had never seen real-life donkeys, this was

interesting. I squinted and stared out the window. We were the only ones in the compartment now. Did my foot touch hers? Or had we been in this position since she moved? Was it her foot that had moved? I did not understand these thoughts. Why had the inner shivering stopped? Why didn't the unfamiliar scenery interest me any longer? How far were we from Santiago de Compostela? Two hours?

I noticed that she was looking at me.  
That her eyes were large and brown.  
That her skin was smooth and golden.

I twisted my body to my left, stretched toward the corner of the compartment where my jacket hung, and determinedly pulled a book from the inside pocket, prayer book that accompanies me everywhere. I glanced at her briefly, smiled, and sat back down in exactly the same position except with my feet pulled far back, to put them at a safe distance from hers. I opened the book, leafed back and forth absentmindedly and finally found Matthew 10:42: "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." Precisely. That's how it was. We were in danger of searching too distantly for opportunities to act in charity. Reaching for the edelweiss, we trample the daisies.

Reaching for the edelweiss.  
Again I felt the unease.  
Did I trample the daisies?

### **Father Gotvin's First Journey (continued)**

She looked at the prayer book in my hands. I closed my eyes and found the right thoughts, not thoughts of worldly love, of lust, but thoughts of God's chamber, the infinite space where the fire of True Love was burning. By staying close to this fire our lives could burn for all those living on the plain, for the daisies – our words would be the fire. They would have the power to light many a heart on the road to Emmaus, so that we together might board Elijah's chariot of fire. And wasn't it true that had we only a little more celestial fire, celestial love, we would also have more power on earth? I let my thoughts flow in free association over the quote from St. Matthew in a stream of pleasant thoughts and images. Images that could be used in future sermons for my congregation in Vanndal but suddenly they were interrupted.

Her foot.  
The tip of her shoe was again touching the calf of my leg.  
Discreetly, I peeked down and saw her smooth, golden skin.  
My eyes stuck there.

I cleared my throat and it sounded extremely loud in the compartment that had been

quiet for over an hour. Indeed, thinking back, I remembered my hawking as downright vulgar, but how could clearing ones throat possibly sound vulgar? No one but God knows the thoughts behind such a sound. Had he heard it? If he had, would he still want me as His servant? My thoughts right afterwards were a jumble and the sound seemed to echo from the walls for minutes. But the red tip of her shoe was again touching the calf of my leg, pressing firmly against a point right above the top of my sock, against the meaty part of the back of my calf, to be precise. The tip of her shoe seemed to stick there; it was glued to my leg regardless of the at times rocking motions of the train.

She had a beautiful neck.  
A well-developed bosom.  
Floral-print dress.  
Edelweiss? Hardly.

I have never been unaffected by female grace. Many are the times I have felt my blood effervesce, but my shyness toward the opposite sex has bothered me ever since adolescence, thy explaining why there was still no vicar's wife in my life. But the absence of one has never been prominent in my mind. I was certain that when the Lord determined the time to be right for that sort of thing, he would also grant me a woman to share my bed with. Although, to be quite honest, I had lately started to doubt whether this indeed was the sort of things that one might reasonably expect to find on the Lord's schedule, for wasn't the time right soon? I decidedly thoughts so, although, as I mentioned, it had not weighed heavily on my mind. Besides, and I mean no disrespect, the selection of young, unmarried women with a certain spiritual inclination in the Vanndal area was not overwhelming. This, of course, did not excuse my status of bachelor. The fact was that I, in awkward but lucent moments of self-insight, realized that my relationship vis-à-vis the opposite sex, or lack thereof, was caused by extreme shyness. Especially when fishing grayling from the river next to my farm at home, I saw this fact vividly. Standing on a rock in the middle of the river with my fly rod, it happened three times, no less, that passing youths had shouted "vicar fag" at me. Which was thoroughly unfair, but was that the reason I had made up my mind to go on this journey? To rid myself of my shyness? Not likely. Not to Santiago de Compostela, to the miracle and the cathedral to get rid of my shyness? Was this trip an escape or a yearning? And why was I sitting on this train soon to arrive at Orense in northern Spain right across from a very beautiful Spanish girl? And felt no trace of unease but with my shyness a watchful beast under my breastbone? Was she also going to Santiago? Was she a pilgrim?

I kept leafing through my prayer book.  
I noticed that she scrutinized me with curiosity.  
Weren't foreigners fairly common down here?

Tens of thousands of people went on pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela every

year. To this town where the bones of the fisherman/apostle James were found in the ninth century. Santiago was the Spanish name for James. Compostela was from Latin, campus stellae, the fields of stars. Was she going to kiss the holy reliquary? Fields of stars, the sheer poetry of the name allured those who knew their Latin. It made a couple of the members of Vanndal Church Council think of compost - fertilizer – which wasn't quite as poetic. The train rattled on along a steep hillside. Far down in the valley I could see the river, still brown.

"I beg your pardon – what are you reading?"

The question made me jump. She had put one of her hands across her own book and was looking at me with large, brown eyes. Not gravely. There was something merry, something playful about her face. She spoke English but I noticed her Spanish accent. I jumped and dropped my prayer book on the table. No one had yet talked to me during the entire trip.

I cleared my throat again, softly.

Met her eyes.

"Some Christian texts," I replied.

"Christian? Are you a believer?"

"I am a minister," I replied. "Protestant. From Norway."

"Minister? From Norway?"

This information seemed to disappoint her. Then and there I was compelled to interpret it that way because three things happened at the same time: The pressure from her red shoe on my leg disappeared unquestionably and abruptly; her gaze became remote; and she concentrated once more on the book she was reading. I tried to catch the title but that was impossible since the cover and spine were facing the table. On the other hand, I caught her face. Yes "caught" is appropriate because I audaciously dared to look at her. I examine her entire face, from her forehead via the bridge of her nose, cheeks, earlobes, chin, lips, on to her neck and the low cut of her dress, her bosom calmly rising and sinking. This is the perfect woman, I thought, completely without any felling of shyness and apprehension. She must have known that I was staring at her so intensely, relentlessly. How dare I? But she continued reading. We had passed the hamlets of Ginzo and Sadianes. Soon we would come to the larger town of Orense where the train would stop. Would she get off there?

"What is your name?" I asked suddenly. My tongue did.

She did not move her eyes from her book but replied: "Lucienne Lopez."

"Beautiful name."

"Gracias."

These seconds, minutes when my courage when facing an extremely beautiful woman, a stranger, knew no limits, were a mystery to me. But far greater mysteries were to

come. I naturally had no idea at the time. The only thing on my mind as the train reached the station was whether she would get off the train here. To my relief she remained sitting even when the train came to a halt. She remained focused on her book and its secret text that was flowing into her mind. What was it she was reading? Much to my astonishment I noticed that she had put a hand on her thigh, right above her knee, but she did not let it rest there. It pressed her dress against her skin and slowly, exceedingly slowly, moved upwards, pulling her dress along as it moved, to reveal more and more of her thigh. I could not help looking. It felt as if my body were levitating weightlessly from the clammy seat. It rose and became one with the Psalms of David, now I could not, must not look any longer! I squeezed my eyes shut and whispered internally: Sin, this is Sin, which clothed our Redeemer's head with thorns and pierced His heart, which put Him through suffering, sorrow, pain, and anguish!

Her breath.

Her lisp, the invisible droplets.

And incessantly, lavender. I knew I would never forget this smell. In all the world's herb gardens the smell of lavender would overshadow all other scents.

"Es un tren directo para Santiago?" A stranger's voice rumbled into the compartment and an older gentleman with a gray moustache and a briefcase sat down next to her.

She answered without looking up, but her hand pulled her dress back down. I tried to find something interesting to watch in the bustling activity on the platform during the few minutes the train was at rest. A woman selling whole-roasted, smoked piglets waved towards my window. I shook my head. Wasn't I hungry? At least eight hours since I last ate. What would happen if I had a piglet brought in through the window? And put it on her book? Grease spots, I thought. Why would such a thing occur to me? Why indeed did such insane things occur to me now? My life had by no means been characterized by spontaneous and absurd impulses. On the contrary, rather. The train set in motion again and the older mustached gentleman immediately fell asleep. Where was I to look now? Outside, Gotvin Soleng, outside – you must look outside! Follow the unfamiliar scenery. Soon you will be at your journey's end. The cathedral. The miracle.

"Minister?" She glanced from her book again. "From Norway?"

This information seemed to have sunk in just now although a half hour must have passed since the words were first uttered.

"Si, señora," I answered softly.

"Señorita," she corrected.

She said no more, she just sat there gazing into thin air. A smile was still pulling the

corners of her mouth – what did this smile hold? Was this the way she truly was? The everyday her? To all strangers she happened to meet? Probably. I was not likely to be an exception. Why should I?

Then she asked if I had a pen she could use.

I produced a pen from my breast pocket and handed it to her.

Then she leafed through her book to the last, blank page and started drawing. She drew quickly and precisely. What could it be? Circles and lines; it looked like geometric figures, complicated patterns. The terrain outside the compartment window glided past but I paid no attention to the changing scenery. I tried to follow the lines, her movements, her slender fingers – no rings, discreet nail polish. She was drawing meticulously and determinedly while lifting her eyes from time to time to look at me, making sure I was paying attention to her. This interaction, I felt certain must lead to something or other.

She was done.

She nodded, apparently satisfied.

Then she carefully tore the page from the book and handed it to me. I took it and thanked her. But for what? I naturally did not know at the time that I should not only have thanked her; I ought to have sunk to my knees and kissed the floor beneath her shoes. The drawing I held in my hand, of which I understood absolutely nothing, despite having examined it closely, was destined to, over the following days and months, precipitate a revolution in my soul. I remained sitting with the piece of paper in my hand until the train, quite unexpectedly, stopped at a tiny, nameless spot outside Santiago. Then, hastily, the girl got up.

"If you decipher this drawing, you shall learn what truly is concealed in Heaven," she said.

Then she smiled an impish goodbye and stepped off the train. The platform was on the opposite side of the compartment so I didn't have a chance to wave before the train forged ahead.

I was still sitting with the curious drawing in my hand as the train pulled into the station in Santiago de Compostela.

### **Father Gotvin's First Journey (continued)**

It was almost eight in the evening, it was the middle of June. A soft, warm breeze greeted me as I stepped off the train at this unfamiliar place, still feeling pretty dizzy

and still with this enigmatic drawing in my hand. I had draped my jacket casually over my shoulder and in my left hand I carried the small suitcase that held the bare necessities for my trip. I remained standing on the platform with my head lifted toward the mild breeze. In the middle of this busy beehive where a plethora of languages contributed to the buzzing, stood I, Gotvin Seleng from Vanndal. Father Gotvin, as my friends called me, although "Father" is a Catholic appellation and not used in the Lutheran Church. This "Father" thing had stuck with me ever since my childhood when I, already at a tender age, started to officiate eclectic ceremonies, as it were. "Here comes Father," they said when I as a ten-year old arrived at soccer practice. But I thought it was a nice moniker, although some of my minister colleagues had suggested I discourage the practice among my friends. The idea, however remotely academic, of being mistaken for a Catholic was no laughing matter for sober Lutherans.

My very first trip abroad.  
I lifted my face to the wind.  
My lips whispered a short prayer.  
A 'thank you' to the Lord.

I was hungry. I hurried along the platform, in through a door, the main railway station, sought out the clerk, one who might direct me to a moderately priced accommodation for my three-day stay here. I found him and spoke English with the polite man. Hotel Gabriel he wrote on a slip of paper. That was where I would be staying, inexpensively and comfortably, he assured me. A taxi would be best, he opined. I thanked him, walked out on the street, and found one.

A few minutes later I enjoyed the pleasure of entering a clean, nice room and a bible on the nightstand. A room to be mine alone these three days. I gently stroked the bed pillow, put my suitcase on a stand next to the bed, and knelt with my hand folded on the Spanish bible on the nightstand. "But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot," I whispered, "and she returned unto him into the ark. Then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark." Is the story of this dove also mine? I thought, have I come to the ark? But what do I carry? Nothing, not even a green olive leaf. God's window will always remain open, God's hand is reaching out. Even the soul who hath naught to offer Him can find shelter and rest under God's roof.

I had found shelter and rest under God's roof.  
Ever since my confirmation I had been a firm believer.  
All the years of my adult life I have been His servant.  
The congregation in Vanndal was small.  
Hardly ten people regularly came to services.  
The parish's population was over five thousand.  
Where did all the doves fly?

I rose from my prayer and my thoughts. I stroked the bed pillow again, on it was a

sheet of paper that until an hour ago had been part of a book I didn't know in the hands of a woman I didn't know. She had torn out and drawn on the last, blank page, this drawing she had given to me, a casual traveler – a pilgrim? Peculiar patterns, geometric structures, and by the figures her beautiful handwriting: "Trelleborg", "Eskeholm", "Fyrkat", and "Aggersborg". Down at the bottom of the page was a name: "Preben Hansson". I understood nothing. Denmark? A reference to something Danish, but what were the geometric figures supposed to represent? I felt the unease again, the murmur under my breastbone; was it hunger? I had to get something to eat, a good supper, Spanish, and a small bottle of wine? I left the sheet of paper where it lay, on the pillow, but before I left, I bent down and smelled, put my nose right on the paper.

Lavender.

I found a restaurant almost directly across the street, El toro, typically Spanish, and I ordered duck in orange sauce and a half-bottle of the local red wine, plus a large glass of water. The unease was there while I was eating, the food filled me up, and the slight intoxication from the wine settled my thoughts, but only for a moment because truth was knocking, inexorably. I could not flee now, when, finally, I had reached my destination.

A miracle has occurred here in Santiago de Compostela.

Last year, September.

A great miracle.

Great enough to make the local newspaper in Vanndal.

A miracle on the square in front of the cathedral.

A Catholic miracle.

One joining the line of hundreds of other Catholic miracles, how could such miracles possibly be? I remember thinking when I first read about it. Read about the fiery orb appearing in the sky one bright morning, slowly descending, descending, descending until it was hovering above the square directly in front of the main portal of the cathedral, where it remained suspended above the heads of the pilgrims who, trembling with fear, threw themselves on the ground praying. But they could not help seeing that there, from the center of the fiery wreath emerged the Virgin Mary, her hands lifted, and she showered benedictions over the pilgrims and a delegation of Japanese business men, who were not pilgrims at all, but who weren't able to find shelter from the holy downpour. However, the benedictions had not been of any help since the Japanese later expressed doubts whether it indeed was the Virgin Mary they had seen emerging from the luminous circles. But what else could it possibly be? To this they could not find an answer, but the others, the pilgrims, were thoroughly convinced. Four hundred and thirty three had without a doubt seen the Virgin Mary, Jesus' mother. Something, however, happened that put a temporary damper on the general elation over the Holy Virgin's visitation: when the brilliant wreath of light reverted to a fiery orb, faded, and became one with the sky again, two small children also vanished. They had been with

their mothers and fathers, on the cathedral square and, as the glowing ball disappeared, so, inexplicably, did they. A girl, Celestie, of six from Belgium and a boy, Thomasi, of eight from Verona in Italy and no one has seen the children since. The Pope later received the parents in the Vatican where it was explained to them that Celestie and Thomasi had followed the Heavenly Mother home to heaven and that they would both be canonized as saints, and, the Pope explained further, one has for centuries expected a miracle like this to happen in Santiago de Compostela where the disciple James the Elder lay buried. Now that the miracle had finally taken place, everybody rejoiced except the delegation of Japanese businessmen plus three or four other non-believers who had happened to behold the wondrous events, for these three or four could not remember having seen the Virgin Mary, but something entirely different altogether.

The news of the miracle in Compostela reached Vanndal.  
I pondered this in surprise.

### **Father Gotvin's First Journey (continued)**

Over the next weeks I read, with increasing amazement, everything available about the strange incident in Spain and, as a theologian, I ought not to doubt that the mother of Jesus had indeed appeared. Unfortunately, there was no one to discuss it with in my area. The Vanndal Church Council was loath to make a statement and, although I attempted to solicit my Christian brethren in the valley individually for their opinions, they tend to react by pursing their lips and lowering their eyes. They became older than they already were when questions about Catholic miracles were brought up and, frankly, my church council consisted of pretty long teeth as it was. I had calculated the average age to be sixty-three. The more I read about and pondered this miracle, the more worried I became. How could it be that the Catholics were the ones who throughout history had been honored with divine wonders? Why didn't the Holy Virgin ever pay us Protestants an occasional visit? I know, Lord, that these are heretical thoughts. Only You in Your omnipotence can possibly understand, but these were the thoughts that made their way into my mind.

I had to go.

I had to go in person to the scene of a genuine miracle.

With this decision, the unease also started.

The almost imperceptible shivering.

What would I do here? This I still didn't know as I sat there satisfied and mildly intoxicated after the meal. Would I see the cathedral? Most certainly, the architectonic masterpiece erected almost a thousand years ago on the gravesite of an apostle, James the Elder – what business had taken him to this part of the world? Very important business. James the Elder was the most devout one of the disciples. James viewed the story of Jesus' sufferings, Jesus' passivity as they bound, flogged, suspended, and pierced him as an expression of active devotion. He wished to imitate this. He knew that

such dedication, as in the Eucharistic sharing of himself, exceeded the limits of human finiteness, was the courage from which grew pure love, and, with the message of pure love, James the Elder found himself here almost two thousand years ago. Thus was the cathedral a symbol of James' devotion. Thusly I would interpret it when I finally would behold the steeples reaching towards Heaven, but what existed above the steeples? The heaven of light, the miracle descended from the blue sky, "If you decipher this drawing, you shall learn what truly is concealed in Heaven." the woman on the train, her departing words struck me as a thunderbolt. I jerked back my hair.

The geometrical figures.

Were they in some way connected to the miracle?

Had she in fact drawn the miracle itself?

Had she been on the cathedral square last year?

In September?

In the company of Danes?

But "Trelleborg" was a place in Denmark, wasn't it?

Who was Lucienne Lopez?

Then and there, in the precise instant, I realized I must find this girl. Somehow I had to trace her, agree to meet her somewhere. Meet? I would as her, had she seen the miracle? In this restaurant, El toro, in the middle of Compostela's busiest street, I made a decision. I would do everything in my power to find this girl again. This was a very courageous thought. Never had I, Gotvin Soleng, had thoughts this powerful about any woman ever. Then again, and the Lord my God knows I mean no malice. Vanndal wasn't exactly brimming with twenty-five year-old women who inspired powerful thoughts, but this gnawing unrest – did it hold the possibility of such an encounter? Was that the sign God was giving me, "Now the time has come, Father Gotvin"? Possibly.

I did not understand what I was supposed to do in this town.

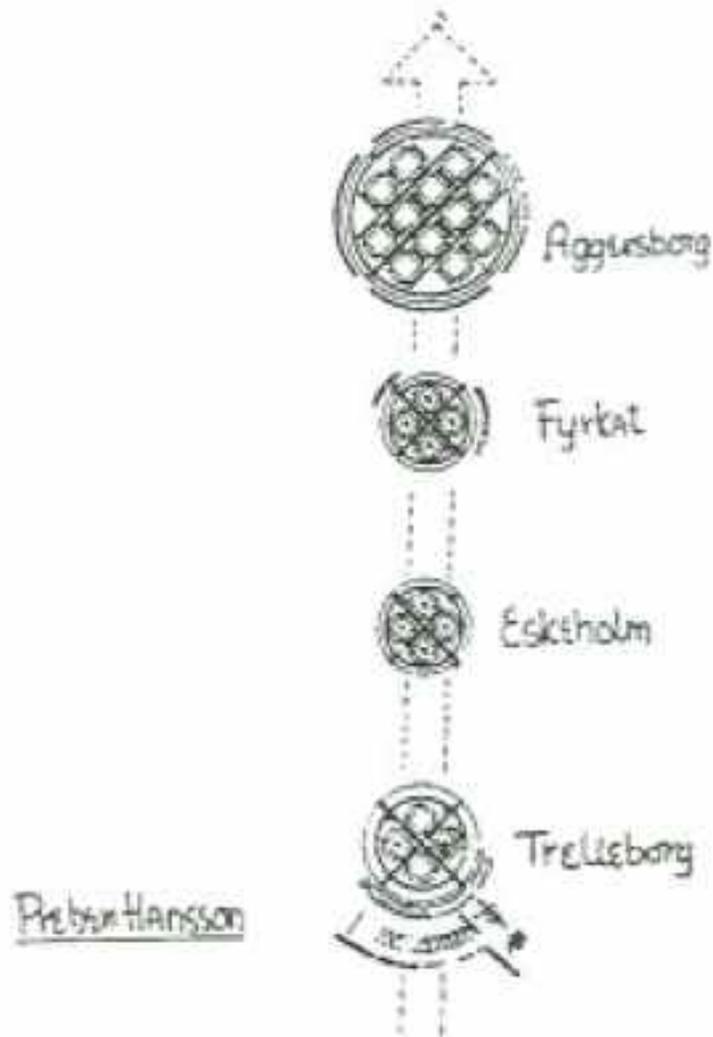
Other than admire the cathedral.

Pray at St. James' grave.

I signaled the waiter discreetly. A cup of coffee, white, then I would go to bed. Coffee had the opposite effect on me compared to most people. It made me sleepy, especially after having had wine. I drank my coffee in small, quick sips. This wasn't cream, it was milk. Half coffee, half milk while checking my inventory of cash. My traveling budget was rather meager. I realistically could not afford this trip at all. My father's debt was still not paid off. Poor dad, he had not been able to manage his farm or his purse very well and now, in his old age, was suffering from nasty calcifications in his brain, creating a world of his own. An eccentric, inaccessible world. Just before I left for Spain, he persuaded me to purchase a metal detector for him. My father, Kastor Soleng, had directed his old-man obstinacy toward making me buy, of all bizarre contraptions our modern technology has produced, a metal detector. What he intended to use it for he never told me.

Funds were meager.  
I had to live inexpensively.

In my hotel room I undressed and took a shower, stood at the window for a while, peered down into the rear court filled with cats, then knelt by the bed and said a silent prayer. A prayer mentioning most of those dear to me: my brother Violon who was working as a wood sculptor in Oslo, my other brother, Ludens, from whom no one had heard for fifteen years, but who was probably somewhere in South America (where are you, Ludens? Why don't you at least let us know you're alive?!) and then my father who wasn't well at all. God had already taken my mother. She was only thirty when she died, two years after I was born. I then crept under the comforter, closed my eyes, but opened them again, lit the lamp on my nightstand and reached for the drawing. I held it upside-down, turned it sideways, studied it from all possible angles, but was none the wiser. Danish names, there was no doubt about that. Was she trying to tell me something about Denmark? Ludicrous. Absurd. But she had appeared to be very serious when she drew the figures. She had made great efforts to get the proportions of the figures just right, I remembered. The more I thought about it, the messier the inside of my head felt, so I resolutely put the drawing away and the lights out. What I obviously did not know at the time was that this drawing was to become Document Number 1 in the secret drawer of my *escritoire*.



When I woke up, I did not know where I was, of course. This always happened when I woke up in unfamiliar surroundings and this morning was no exception. Only after having leafed through a few pages of the Spanish Bible did I realize I was at the destination of a journey. But no sooner had I grasped this before also realizing that this was when the journey really started.

Thus the new day started the same way the previous one had ended: with chaos filling my head and I was startlingly close to even forgetting my morning prayer which had been a ritual since my studies at the Lutheran School of Theology. The ritual consisted of first carefully picking a passage from the Bible, reading it out loud, and then forming a

prayer based on this passage. I considered this a creative process that had inspired many of my sermons and I did indeed complete the ritual even this morning, although the prayer that emerged was somewhat abstract: "Lord, You are our Father, you will always remain the same, immutable and faithful God and Father. Never will you reject me, your love is tender and untiringly faithful, God, you are the same as when I was a child." After this prayer I shaved and put on a tan t-shirt with a picture of a cross and a candle, examined myself in the mirror for a long time. A young man, blond hair falling down my forehead, the bridge of my nose slightly humped, precisely like my father's, gray eyes, full, sad lips, and two pimples below my right temple. Everything was normal. Then I packed an extra t-shirt, green, also with a cross and a candle, plus a pair of slacks in a plastic bag and walked out on the street where I immediately witnessed an older woman being run down by a delivery van traveling much too fast. The accident was brutal. The poor woman fell under the car and had one of her arms torn off and at the same time one of the tires crushed her head. I cracked open like an egg and her brain sprayed the street all the way to the tips of my shoes. This was the second time in my life I had witnessed a pedestrian being brutally run down by a car. Startled, I backed away three feet and lifted my arms above my head. This gesture was, for some reason I don't know, misinterpreted by a policeman who came running and pushed me up against a wall with such force that I collapsed and remained sitting there.

I sat there and watched as people flocked to the scene.

Watched police cars and an ambulance arrive.

The body of the poor woman.

It was wrapped in a dark plastic bag.

I was watching.

How the driver of the van was taken away by the police.

Afterwards the blood and the brain were wiped up.

Traffic was running again as if nothing had happened.

I got up and stumbled down the sidewalk like a drunk while mumbling something that should have been passages from the Bible, but which probably were self-constructed ethical words of comfort adapted to the horrible episode I had witnessed. I walked in a haze until I dropped into a chair on a sidewalk restaurant where I eventually got a glass of beer. The beer was rancid and had not much of a head but I emptied the glass in one, long swill. This was something the chairman of Vanndal Church Council should have seen, old entrepreneur Magnus Stormarkbråten. He would have been sure to raise his authoritative forefinger. Beer was about the worst thing Stormarkbråten knew, second only to poaching for grayling in his part of the river. But Stormarkbråten was not here. He was, and had always been, far from the Fields of Stars, far from Santiago de Compostela, from an old woman who, just having bought her daily bread and olives, had had her brain smeared across the asphalt. The church council in Vanndal was far removed from miracles – the miracle. Why did I co-associate these unseemly, seemingly disparate incidents? Where was my humbleness? Was I being ironic? Sarcastic? Sardonic? Where might this journey end if these thoughts continue? Had I not awoken

with a conviction that this was the true start of my trip? What had I embarked on? But my feelings of opposition grew no weaker and contrary to all my principles, I ordered another glass of beer and downed this one in one swill as well. The journey has only started, Gotvin Soleng!

I asked a young man for directions to the cathedral. He pointed and I walked slowly and studied the bustle of people, the sounds, and noticed the smells/ So this was Spain; strange. Now I could see the steeples of this enormous structure. It must be even bigger than the [Nidaros Cathedral](#). This one was supposed to have been built according to a divine geometry, - "divine principle". What did that mean? I noticed that my pace quickened and I was sweating. The unfamiliar heat also affected my mind. I reached the cathedral square and beheld the two mighty portals funneling into the sanctuary, all the people – a stream of people, pilgrims – and I stopped.

I could feel the splendor.  
All of a sudden I knew my own insignificance.  
My humbleness forced me to lower my eyes.  
This cathedral was God's own edifice.  
His lines, His striving toward perfection.

"In whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord." Ephesians 2:21. I mumbled a quiet prayer about Heaven being shared among use all when we realized that what we were building was God's temple and by His blessing did we work. That's how it was. I lifted up my eyes past the steeples towering high above me, unto the blue sky, but why had the Virgin Mary taken those two children with her? Perhaps One of them had been standing in the precise spot I was standing right now...> I could feel the pressure of tears behind my eyelids, swallowed, Lords, Your strength is our inadequacy. We will not understand, must not understand! But why shouldn't we? I slipped into a line moving toward a small fountain while fumbling with my plastic bag. The woman directly in front of me unabashedly pulled her dress over her head and off, put a new one on and washed her hands in the fountain: "He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded." We were disciples.

I quickly pulled off my own jeans, changed into what I had been carrying in my plastic bag and immersed my hands in the fountain, the water of Jesus, the way it's supposed to be. I had become new, pure. An older gentleman stumbled and fell in his fervor to tear his old garments from his body but two nuns immediately rushed to help him. Did even the nuns change their habits? No, they just sprinkled themselves with water. I followed the queue toward the blazing bonfire; that was where we would burn our old clothes. I threw my relatively new jeans into the flames along with my t-shirt, worn perhaps five times. The line moved slowly. We approached the portal representing Purgatory. When the line almost came to a complete standstill, most people crossed

themselves, their lips moving in prayer. Catholics were pained with this tortuous notion, this purifying, eschatological fire that the Lutheran doctrine, in its wisdom, had rejected and removed from our belief. Now we arrived at the great portal with Jesus and the apostles. St. James himself by the Tree of Life, all hewn in marble, and here, we, the pilgrims, would touch the rock. We would press a finger against the very root of the Tree of Life. My turn came and, to my amazement, I noticed deep holes in the rock, worn into it through the centuries by millions upon millions of fingers touching this precise spot. A young woman in front of me started sobbing – who knows for what reason – but was immediately taken care of by her husband? Father? We were approaching the climactic stage. We were in the actual cathedral; the air as heavy, damp. The little sounds we made were projected toward the massive arches above us and were transformed into muffled, hollowed steps up behind an enormous altar. Authoritative, reticent guards directed the line and then we found ourselves in front of the 700 year-old painting of St. James. He was wearing a jewel-studded gown that we all were to kiss. I felt a certain repugnance about placing my lips on what thousands of other lips had touched and, Lord forgive me, I wiped my mouth on my sleeve afterwards. But, alas, the shrine, the coffin where St. James' earthly remains lay, the skeleton, they did not let us see or kiss. I was placed in an undercroft underneath the cathedral. Were they really the apostle's bones? A complete skeleton as the Pope claimed? The truth, may the Lord forgive me again, was that the bones throughout the centuries had been scattered, sold as relics. A substantial portion, the cranium?, ended up in the great mosque of Cordoba, but then all the pieces were collected and reassembled here. The skeleton of the fisherman apostle James was now safely stored in the crypt deep beneath the cathedral. But why was there a big hole in the back of the skull – a hole from a bullet as was claimed by those who had seen it - the forensic scientists? And how could pieces of its hipbone possibly have been carbon-dated to the mid 19th century? The Pope, John Paul II, had not given an answer to these questions when asked, for, second only to the sancta in Jerusalem and Rome, the reliquary under the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela was the greatest in all Catholic Christianity, even counting the left arm of St. John the Baptizer on display in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul. I was not able to escape these thoughts as the queue snaked back toward the exit. The great theologians Lubas, Congar, and Karl Rahner who had contributed to the liberation of Catholic theology from the narrow framework of neo-scholasticism had had the same thoughts. As a student of theology I had read their erudite works, so, Lord, I am not planting seeds of doubt about Your signs and Your will. So many things are unfathomable and some questions shall never be given an answer, just as Pope John Paul II knew. That is why he did not answer this question.

I was again outside in the sunshine.

Three hours I had spent in the cathedral.

I was sweating.

I was standing where I had to be, on the square in front of the church.

Where four-hundred-and-thirty-three pilgrims had been standing.

Again I glanced up toward the blue sky.

The Virgin Mary in a wreath of light?  
Celestie and Thomasi.

### **Father Gotvin's First Journey (continued)**

I felt exhausted. The impressions, the splendor, God's presence made my bones ache. I bought a bag of oranges, peeled two at once, and pushed the juice in between my dry lips. They would have mass tonight and I looked forward to it but how would I find her again? Lucienne Lopez? I knew I had to meet this woman again, she who had perhaps seen the miracle. She might be able to tell me. Wasn't I here precisely for that reason – to investigate the circumstances around this miracle? Wasn't that the reason I so abruptly had decided to make this trip? Despite the church council's reluctance to have their minister make pilgrimages to catholic sancta, I never revealed my innermost motive to going: I wanted to examine the circumstances around this miracle.

I petrified.  
My fingers squeezed the orange in my hand.  
Yellow juice ran down on the pavement.  
Didn't I know this until now?

All the while I had been pondering on my motives for this trip without daring to supply the answer. The answer that had been there all along, ever since I read about the miracle in the newspapers. I had suppressed it. This was the cause of my unease, the shivering. I, an insignificant minister from a remote valley in eastern Norway, I was going to investigate one of God's wonder. I would rise high enough to examine a sign from the Lord and, as investigator, I would also have the freedom to interpret, to doubt – to doubt! Had I become Thomas? Was I questioning God's inscrutability? I kept squeezing the orange until there was no juice left to squeeze. A woman stopped and looked at me and stared down into the yellow puddle on the sidewalk. Her gaze rested a moment on my hand and the orange pulp, and hurried along, apparently relieved when she realized what was the source of the yellow liquid. "My sin is greater than I can bear," Lord help me, take me away from this place! I heard voices from inside of me. I was standing there being small while something else grew.

Doubt.  
The doubt!  
And with doubt, anxiety was certain to follow.

But I was not afraid, not then, as I was standing there paralyzed, bewildered, for a moment, because I suddenly knew why I was here and what I must do. I had known all along, but had not dared letting that certainty surface. And suddenly I grew firm, determined, the Lord would grant me strength to complete this journey. This was His will. I was new, I had burned my old clothes. In Spain, in Galicia, Gotvin Soleng had,

without batting an eye, thrown his relatively new jeans and t-shirt into the fire. Renewed, I would return to Vanndal and my dear congregation strengthened in my faith in God, my Holy Father. However, first I had to look into this miracle. That's how it was.

I left. With determination I directed my steps toward the nearest sidewalk café, where I, in Spanish, ordered an ensalada de espárragos plus a beer and, in my mind, I drank a toast with Stormarkbråten, the entrepreneur, the factory owner, the chairman of the church council, and who owned the only business of any size in Vanndal, a factory manufacturing floughs, but in whose opinion beer was the origin of most sins committed by mankind. I drank to him without a trace of guilt or regret. This was a wholly new and strong sensation that immediately brought a smile to my face – the first one that day.

After the meal, the waiter gave me directions to the telegraph station. I had to call Margit Nederstuen, the wife on the neighboring farm. She had promised to look after my father while I was gone. After considerable effort to understand how to order, receive, and pay for international phone calls – why didn't they have plastic cards here? – I could finally hear Margit's voice in the receiver. Everything was just fine, but there were some problems with Kastor, my father, at night. He didn't want to go to bed. He wouldn't let go of this contraption, the metal detector, which he apparently was using from morning until late night. He was possessed by the idea that there was an old car buried in the field behind the barn; a green Hillman delivery truck, model 1934, he contended, which of course is pure nonsense. Margit Nederstuen could not remember anyone having buried any truck in any field. It was out of the question, no one had even heard of a vehicle of this type, but what was she to do? Kastor was stubbornly walking around with the metal detector for hours at a time and talking incessantly with himself. Wasn't it time to put him in a nursing home? Yes, Gotvin had been thinking about that possibility, but as he was in Spain at the moment, there was nothing he could do. Margit just had to be patient with Kastor and, if he insisted on taking the metal detector to bed, by all means, let him. Otherwise there was no news. I hung up shaking my head. A 1934 Hillman delivery truck? Where was my father? In a totally different and strange world. I hesitated for a while then dialed a new number in Silkeborg, a town in Jutland in Denmark, to a Danish colleague of mine, Niels Ingeby, who every summer came to Vanndal to fish grayling. Luckily Niels was in his office. Did the names Trellebor, Eskeholm, Fyrkat, and Aggersborg mean anything to him? What about the name Preben Hansson? They were Viking fortresses? Fortresses from the Viking era surrounded by circular mounds? Trelleborg was a Danish national monument, didn't I know? No, I didn't. Trelleborg, Eskeholm, Fyrkat, and Aggersborg were all great fortresses from ancient times. Niels could tell me that the archaeologists did not exclude the possibility of them having been built on top of monuments from even older cultures, possibly cult sites from the Bronze Age. But he didn't know Preben Hansson. Was he Danish? Possibly, I answered. I thanked him for the information and told him he was welcome to Vanndal in a month or so – he had it in for the Giant Grayling. So that's how it was. Lucienne Lopez had drawn him Viking fortresses. Amusing. She probably considered him a Viking. Maybe she didn't know much else about Norway and Scandinavia except that's

where the Vikings once lived. But why had she drawn it with such care? And why had she said what she did just before she left the compartment? "If you decipher this drawing, you shall learn what truly is concealed in Heaven." What might she have meant by this?

Back out on the street I again wiped sweat from my forehead. I had turned three o'clock; mysteries and miracles. I felt slightly excited but the time had come for some moments of devotion. I took out my prayer book and bowed my head for the Creator hidden from view behind a garbage container reeking with rotten fish and rancid oil

I was no pilgrim.

I was a snooping voyeur.

I was a doubter.

This role felt foreign to me, but now, long afterwards, thinking back to all this, I cannot but admit that I also felt free. Strangely liberated, this feeling of freedom was what would carry me on, what would give me the strength to see it through, this, my first journey. But this new role did feel foreign and I did not recognize myself. I had never been what one would call a rebel, an insurgent. My views on certain religious matters might have been liberal, but in no way controversial or offensive. In the interpretation of God's word, as it spoke to us and encountered us in the Holy Scriptures, I have always advocated the immediate as an instrument for the kind of preaching that is intended to reach people. For me, the Scriptures have had the function of bearing testimony inspired by God about the Word of Life, the totality of Jesus Christ, head and body. I had always considered the Scriptures to be what they purported to be, and in my faith, as in many others', this had come to mean this: understanding the texts as testimonies from the Holy Spirit delivered through people about Yahweh's bond with his chosen People of the Covenant. And, in the highest sense, about the fulfillment of this covenant in the divine-human co-immanence in the person Jesus Christ, although I wouldn't have minded seeing the Israelites of our day squeezed out of the occupied Palestinian territories. In that sense I had been, and am, in staunch opposition to the views held by most men and women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, but in this matter I had never fallen into the same trap as the Alexandrines, who had rejected the dual nature of Christ. For only through his dual nature were his miracles, the Catholic miracles, possible, and only because of this was I, still with a certain dignity and with a feeling of being on safe ground, able to assume the role of investigator.

I found a park.

I sat down on a bench in the shade of a big tree.

Until now, I hadn't taken the time to study the town, the people, and the nature. Santiago de Compostela was a beautiful town, that had to be admitted. But why were so many people wearing black? Around the town were vineyards and fertile fields. Everywhere there were stands offering the most delectable fruits and vegetables, but it

was the smells, all the unfamiliar smells that made the strongest impression. Despite not being well-traveled, I had read quite a bit, seen films and pictures, but the fragrances were totally new to me. Some places were pungent and strong of varieties of citrus, while others heavy and sweet of the olive family. The houses were white and there were flowers everywhere. The Fields of Stars – the description struck me as appropriate – but didn't it rain often in this area? I had read somewhere that the area was also called El Orinal de España, the Urinal of Spain. What did it look like when the apostle James brought the gospel here? The Holy Iago, he was a fisherman who devoted his life to evangelizing, but the Spaniards had known how to employ his strength and commitment in fighting their own enemies. Time and again throughout history, James had materialized, descended to Earth, and helped the Spaniards. He had been observed riding alongside the Spanish army in the heat of battle and King Ramiro I swore that Holy James had played an active part in the battle of Cavijo in the year 844 where the saint single-handedly had butchered about sixty thousand Moors and, over the next six centuries, the fisherman apostle from Galilee is supposed to have participated, armor clad, in more than forty battles earning him the name Matamoros, the Moor Killer. That's how it was. He was even supposed to have made appearances in the New World where he assisted the conquistadors in the slaughter of a handful of Indians. Thus had James evangelized his way through history as a virtual Rambo. This fact was unfortunately impossible to overlook. I had already seen several statues in town depicting the Holy Apostle in full knight's attire. This was the Catholic faith and conviction and the Catholic Church represented a significant portion of Christendom.

I felt shivers and murmurs under my breastbone thinking these thoughts under the tree in the park, a few hundred yards from the cathedral and the undercroft where the apostle's osseous remains were kept as the third greatest sanctum of all those administered by The Vatican. "Dear God," said the voice inside of me, "let not this darken my soul. Let it not create obstacles. Are Catholicism and my faith really two substances fighting each other?" St. Augustine came to my assistance: "Let them no longer assert that, when they perceive two wills to be contending with each other in the same man, the contest is between two opposing minds, of two opposing substances, from two opposing principles, the one good and the other bad." You are right, venerable Augustine, it's not like that, it cannot be as simple as that. We are one flesh, one blood. We are one big family with different views on God the Almighty Creator's complex modes of manifestation, but perhaps you were right, Magnus Stormarkbråten, I should have not started this journey.

Doubts.

The tree above me.

The green branches reaching out.

High up there, the top.

I suddenly felt like climbing it.

I took hold of a branch right above the bench and easily pulled myself up to the trunk,

then I started climbing cautiously, intently. What kind of tree was this? The smell was unfamiliar, the leaves small and heart-shaped, but the tree was tall – very tall. It made me think of a primitive tribe of New Guinea, the Korowai people. I had just read about this tribe – in a book? A magazine? Exotic cultures have always fascinated me. The Korowai live in houses built high up in the tallest trees they can find to get as close as possible to their gods and their gods are the airplanes of modern civilization. Planes that from time to time pass overhead. Over the last fifty years the Korowai have regularly seen airplanes, gods that they started to worship and eventually they moved their houses up into the trees. In earlier times they used to live on the ground like everybody else, but now it had become imperative to get as close to their gods as possible.

I was climbing. Was I climbing to get closer to my god? Had I become like the Korowai during my short meditation on the bench below? Unlikely. I was propelled by an indeterminate power and the skills from childhood were still there in my body. Innumerable were the crows' nests I had looted for eggs as an eight year old. I had even found a crow chick. I adopted it and baptized it in a solemn ceremony, to my father's deep despair. Andersen the Quack was the name of the chick and it died after a week because it refused to take nourishment. The branches were getting thinner. Hadn't I reached the top and the grand view? The view of this town, the view of Catholicism, the miracle-fields of Christianity. I, the investigator, would go all the way to the top, would feel freedom like I never had before. "Careful now, Gotvin," I whispered to myself. Korowai, Andersen the Quack – two will contending within the same substance. The tree was swinging. I was almost there. Two more twigs. I stopped and looked down. A not insignificant number of people had gathered in the park below and they were all staring up at me, pointing.

I lifted my eyes and looked around.

Toward the mountains on the horizon.

The I shouted as loudly as my voice was capable of, out across the Field of Stars:  
"Lucienne Lopez! Lucienne Lopez!"

Thinking back to this act, this totally absurd whim that led me into a number of unpleasant situations, I still feel it was precisely the right thing to do, then and there, right place and right time, but the hours immediately afterward were filled with feelings of embarrassment, shame, and regret. Being the center of that much attention was not at all enjoyable. People flocked around the tree I was in, police and ambulances were called in, and being done shouting, I had to climb down again – there was no other way out. The police were not exactly amicable; I was thrown into a patrol car and taken directly to jail. Several hours passed before I finally got a chance to make a statement. A second person was in the cell with me who, the moment the barred door slammed shut behind me, came up to me, slapped my shoulder, and said something I didn't understand. I attempted to speak English but stammered and stuttered unintelligibly until the man finally led me to a bunk where I finally managed to calm down with a paper cup of lukewarm water.

I drank.

The man was older than I. Approaching fifty?

Nice clothes.

An alert and reliable-looking face.

His left arm in a cast up to his elbow.

I sat there deep in agony, my face in my hands. I had never before in my life been involved with the police; never been anywhere near a jailhouse cell. I fumbled around in my mind for some comforting words. The Book of Psalms 34:19: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." That's how it had to be. All the misfortunes of the righteous opened up for something glorious, but was I one of the righteous? Now? "The prisoner is not only delivered, he finds an angel awaiting him at the door, and with each deliverance there is a material blessing; one angel was Faith, another Love, another Joy, yet another Longsuffering; one angel was Gentleness, another Kindness, another Meekness, another Temperance, and another Peace, and each of these was saying: We have come out of great tribulation."

"Not very crowded here today," said the man. He stood smilingly in front of me; had he heard my chaotic thoughts? "What crime did you commit, son?"

"Crime?" All of a sudden I felt completely calm.

"You don't look particularly dangerous," he continued, all the while smiling, as if royally amused over the situation he and I were in.

"Dangerous? No, not at all," I got my tongue straightened out. My English, such as it was, became more fluent. "I am a minister from Norway and I suddenly got this urge to climb a tree in the park to, well, get a better view, but then I happened to shout something and then the police came. It all happened very quickly and now I don't understand what business I had up in that tree."

The man laughed and put his hand out.

"Sebastian Sebastol. I am the instigator of the illegal strike at the oil pressing plant. They arrested me this morning at the square as I was passing out leaflets. Did you call for God up there in the tree or did you hope the Virgin Mary would descend down to you?"

I took his hand and shook my head.

"Gotvin Soleng from Vanndal, Norway," I said quietly.

"Oh well." The man sat down on the bunk by the opposite wall, "A lot of loonies come

here to Compostela.”

I did not feel offended, although I according to señor Sebastol qualified as a “loony”, but wouldn’t someone come and unlock that door soon and let me explain? Show them my passport. It was almost seven o’clock and mass was in an hour. Besides, I was hungry. Would Norwegian authorities be notified of my arrest? Newspapers? “Vanndal vicar arrested in Spanish sacred city for disorderly conduct” – that’s what they’d write. Again I searched around for some comforting words but none found me. Instead I started listening to this man who was sitting across from me. Should not I, a minister, a humble and devout Christian, accept God’s and the Holy Mother’s multitude of manifestations? What rock was it I was trying to push anyway? My own?

Martin Luther threw his inkwell.  
At Wartburg he saw the Devil.  
On the chamber wall in the tower.  
He hurled his inkwell at the Evil One.  
The Devil never again visited Martin Luther.

I put my forehead in my hands, leaned on the table, and closed my eyes. My incurable curiosity – where would it lead me? The smell of camphor and the stifling heat, the breath, the breathing of the people around me made me feel queasy for a minute. But after a few sips of water, I straightened my back and continued to leaf through the books. After all, this was source material far beyond the assortment at Oslo’s School of Theology and the Devil was an entity I and most others of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Norway had rejected long ago. But why had we thrown out certain things while having kept others? Why had we rejected the miracles which all through history had been “writ in the sky” and which the Pope and every last cardinal believed in and swore by? I was no stranger to the history of the Catholic Church. I could well remember the decree on the Church delivered on November 21, 1964 during the Second Vatican Council. Pope Paul VI’s solemn promulgation stating that, “the Catholic Church is the only true church, the Catholic Church alone preaches infallible truth, the Catholic Church is necessary for salvation and is entrusted the riches of heavenly goods, the Catholic Church alone holds the Spirit of Christ and possesses the full and adulterated truth.” Thus went the decrees and the memory of it did little to cheer me up. But, if this were true, it would certainly explain why God’s miracles were given to them, the Catholics. Still, my faith is just as strong as the Catholics’. You know it is, Lord Father! Would you enfold in your grace your insignificant, strayed disciple Gotvin Soleng, who is battling difficult thoughts in a library in Spain? Would you give me a sign, Lord Father? Lest my faith capsize. A sign? A tiny little sign? Now?

The cathedral.  
The geometry.  
Lucienne Lopez.

Did I not see all the signs around me? Hadn't I best simply follow the path I had started walking? Yes, that's how it was. The books in front of me, the typefaces - some Gothic, other Latin - erudite words. Had she been wearing a floral-print dress on the train? In the compartment? My blood hammering hot against my temples, my pulse like a hare's. You are like a hare, Gotvin, but this afternoon you are going to the baths. Swimming trunks? I hadn't brought any on this trip. Would I be admitted to the municipal baths without swimming trunks? Almost two billion people on this earth called themselves Christian, not an insignificant number but very few among this enormous number of people ever visited the archives of theological science. And was it true, that which was claimed by the critics of the Christian faith: that our Bible, The Holy Bible, the words of our God, did not contain a single religious or moral idea that wasn't already present in one form or another in the writings of earlier or contemporary religions? This could be true, of course, but God had existed since Creation and His commandments and will were manifested among people in different ways. That's how it was. But then why these rigorous, merciless statements from the Council and Pope Paul VI where it was stipulated that salvation and truth could only be found within the Catholic faith? Truth? Were these miracles true or figments of mental imagery induced by religious ecstasy? Figments of mental imagery - the term stunned me. Were aspects, important aspects of Catholicism founded on fantasy? Imagery formed by people, in people? What figments of mental imagery existed within my own, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church? This question was not on the agenda now as my investigation was about the Catholic miracles, and primarily those sprung from phenomena in the sky above us.

I did not believe in these miracles.

The gods of the Korowai were our airplanes.

Our airplanes were not gods.

The Korowai's faith might be just as strong as ours.

This logic was crystal-clear but lethally dangerous, this I realized, because the miracles was faith's most precious child. But every scientist admitted that undiscovered physical phenomena might exist - why would the Church deny it? And if these unknown, but by no means divine phenomena were really at the root of the majority of the strange tales on the table in front of me, how many cornerstones was I pulling from under the Catholic Church? A lot of them. It meant that a lot of saints had received their halo on false premises and the popes who throughout history had approved canonized and deified quite normal physical phenomena would be left little glory to show for. Their spirituality would appear precisely as powerful and credible as the Korowai's visions of metal gods crisscrossing the skies above the treetops.

I was sweating.

The thoughts I was thinking were fanged thoughts.

Never before had these thoughts entered my mind.

I longed for the simplicity of the School of Theology.

I had to get out of there.

Now.

Hands trembling, I handed all the books back to the woman at the front desk, fumbled and dropped something on the floor. The water bottle, it was leaking. That didn't matter, she smilingly signaled. I hurried toward the exit door, out into the sunshine and the heat. I remained on the sidewalk for a few seconds without knowing in which direction to walk. I was no pilgrim. My presence here in this holy town, in the Fields of Stars, was a scorn of God and His Omnipotence. What right had I to come here and ask questions? "The one right, Gotvin, of being a living, inquisitive child of God, yearning for knowledge and wisdom. You are a human being of flesh and blood, with a head of your own and thoughts of your own," I said out loud to myself there on the sidewalk, causing two passers-by to stop for a moment and stare at me uncomprehendingly. Let them stare. I was all they saw, but it was getting hot and rivulets of sweat were running down my forehead. My shirt was glued to my back. A bath? The thought sent cold bolts of lightning down my spine. It was just after two o'clock. There were still several hours to pass before I'd meet her. What would I say to her? Nothing. From her point of view there was no excuse for what I had done. Would I dare look her in the eyes? Probably not. Should I even go to see her? Couldn't I just steal away and change hotels? Then she wouldn't be able to find me. The police had probably told her where I was staying. No, I could not hide; I had to put an end to my cowardice. Was she really going to go for a swim at the municipal baths? Maybe she was working there, maybe there was a café there where we could sit down and discuss these Viking fortresses, whatever might come out of it. I was looking up the street, down the street, and then consulted my pocket dictionary and stopped a young boy.

"Excuse Me, where can I buy a pair of swimming trunks?"

"Huh??"

"Trunks. To swim." I made swimming motions.

"Compre? Calzon de baño?"

"Yes, precisely, buy swimming trunks."

Finally he understood what I meant and pointed; two blocks up and then to the right. "Magazin Bennetton," I thanked him politely. I stifled my hunger, at this point pretty insistent, by munching the rest of the bread and washing it down with water. I found the store, presented my errand, and finally had three clerks help me select a pair of trunks. I bought an orange pair with blue vertical stripes which cost an outrageous amount of money, an amount that made me sweat even more. But the pressure from the three clerks was strong so I paid and left. Now I definitely could eat nothing but dry bread and water for the remainder of my trip. So be it. I was used to a Spartan lifestyle. The swimming trunks were nice; she would be impressed. But did they fit me? I had not had the courage to ask for a fitting room as I wasn't at all sure if it's appropriate to try on swimming trunks. The clerks thought the trunks were my size, but weren't they a tad large? Maybe they'd shrink? I let these ridiculous thoughts worry me as I drifted through the street of Santiago de Compostela, waiting for the time to approach six. Wasn't there

a certain garbage man I intended to see. Pedro Urz? On the cathedral square? But the fangs of miracles had dug pretty deeply into my soul.

I was scared.

Scared to learn what a real witness could tell me.

Nevertheless, well before five o'clock I was on the square looking around restlessly, drinking holy water from a number of fountains, and looking at tabloids at the newsstand. "Microorganisms Found In Mars Meteor" announced a front page. I had already read in-depth about that: a rock from a volcanic eruption on Mars had been found in the Antarctic and in this rock were allegedly traces of life, primitive life forms, but what other life forms could possibly live next door to a volcano? What had the Martian biosphere looked like at the time? These are the thoughts I had been thinking and I had even mentioned them to the members of the church council in Vanndal. Their enthusiasm hadn't been overwhelming. Magnus Stormarkbråten had looked at me sternly, his mouth puckered in a line. The others evaded the whole issue with talk about whether mountain pasturing would be too early for the sheep. Besides, a bear had been observed in the East Mountains. The whole issue of possible life on Mars was, in other words, rather alien to my church council. I strolled away from the newsstand and sat down on a bench. No sooner had I sat down than I saw a yellow pickup truck which was missing a front bumper. It stopped fifty yards away from me. From the truck emerged a man, relatively young, wearing a yellow cap and blue overalls. He walked quickly toward some garbage cans and was about to lift up one of them when I gently tapped his back.

"Señor Urz?"

He looked alert. He could be around my age, but now had no teeth, a fact he tried to conceal by holding the back of his hand to his mouth, which he now did, as I in my best Spanish stuttered out my question about the miracle in front of the cathedral. Had he actually been here at the time? Seen it for himself? I was afraid of what he might answer.

Pedro Urz backed away from me.

He grabbed the lid of the garbage can.

His eyes shifting.

He did not reply.

Pedro Urz was scared.

I tried a friendly smile but it didn't help much. He backed away even further and then he turned around and ran to his truck and disappeared in a cloud of blue smoke and scorched asphalt. I was standing there feeling rather taken aback. Had I said something wrong? I repeated to myself the words, the phrases, but could find nothing that might frighten or offend. Nevertheless, Pedro Urz had panicked and fled in terror.

But talons dug into my chest.  
My soul was bleeding.  
I wanted to go home.  
To Vandal.  
Tomorrow I would leave.  
One day earlier than planned.

There was nothing more for me to do in this town, in Spain. I had asked myself a question and it had been answered but the answer had asked ten new questions, ten new abysses devoid of God's, my Lord Father's presence and help; chasms where all signs from God to us, His people, would be reduced to physical or psychological phenomena – to airplanes flying over the jungle. No, I wanted to keep my *anima ecclesiastica*, my pious soul the way Jesus Christ had taught me; the catholicity of my hope, which held far more than dubious Mary-manifestations, for dubious they were, undeniably. But why had Pedro Urz been so panic-stricken? Two scared people on the cathedral square. I was hungry but all my plastic bag held was a pair of orange swimming trunks with blue vertical stripes. I glanced at my watch – five-thirty. The municipal baths – how could I get there? Again I had to resort to asking people who happened to be around. I picked two nuns who looked like locals. They were carrying a basket of eggs and two tote bags full of...leeks? Pilgrims or tourists probably would not have bought that much leek. The nuns nodded and listed to my question. The baths, the municipal baths were on the outskirts of town to the southwest. Fairly far to walk – outside the area covered by my map – but weren't the baths closed during the summer, wondered the nuns? I peeked down at my bag – the trunks. I had no other option; I had to take a taxi even if it bankrupted me. I had to see Lucienne Lopez again. This courage, this resolution surprised me. So I thanked the nuns, ran along the street, hailed an unoccupied taxi, and asked to be taken to the municipal baths. Quizically, the driver looked at me but started driving very fast - driving like a friggin' maniac, to be honest! As the time approached six, the cab veered into a picturesque park and stopped in front of a whitewashed Moorish-looking building and it struck me that I was no longer in the holy town built in the honor of St. James, but rather in a very secularized area where the pilgrims had little, if any, business.

"The baths are closed," said the driver.

"I know," I replied and gave him money.

"You're still bringing swimming trunks?" He was speaking in English and glanced into my bag.

"Yes," I replied.

"You aren't going to break in, are you?"

"I don't think so," I said and got out of the cab.

I must say I was pretty surprised. Municipal baths in more beautiful settings must be very hard to find, but Santiago was a wealthy town. I stood there for a while admiring the building and the surroundings. Weren't there any people here? Not a trace of people

anywhere. But there, half-hidden behind a stone wall was a red car, a relatively new Fiesta. Could it be her car? I could feel the ants of nervousness under my skin. I was still sweating and my mouth was dry. Was there drinking water anywhere around here? Had she deliberately arranged to meet me somewhere deserted, without anyone else around? The dizzying possibility made me no less uneasy. I remained glued to the red gravel in front of the entrance which was guarded by two lion sculptures. "This is dangerous, Gotvin!", I told myself. Where could I seek support now? "If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy." This verse from the Philippians occurred to me. Completely absurd, as absurd as my own person and presence here but it was the only thing I could think of as a quote of support there and then. I was glued. The time was after six but one of the doors behind the lion figures was ajar and all I had to do was enter. I heard the clamor of children playing further into the park. A gray, scruffy dog with running eyes came up to me, sniffed my shoes, and started to wag his tail tentatively, but I signaled zero mutuality so he skulked off. My thoughts were a great, big vacuum. I noticed that I started walking up the stairs and past the lions. I felt my mouth, my lips assume a whistling shape but no notes emerged. No "seemann, komm bald wieder", my favorite song when I was out in the river fishing. I did not stop at the door but pushed it gently open. The room was dim and I smelled the acrid odor of chlorine. I saw the vestibule, clerk-less ticket counters, and the tiled floor which was still Moorish and beautifully adorned. I took off my shoes and shuffled noiselessly across the room toward the next door. Was there music?

I stopped.  
There was music.  
Soft gentle notes.  
Mozart.

The music came from somewhere inside, from somewhere behind the door in front of me. With my shoes in one hand and my bag in the other, I tiptoed up to the door where I stopped and listened again. It was Opus 21. I closed my eyes. Was that a splashing sound? I grabbed the door handle and pushed the heavy door open and was bathed in a beam of light which blinded me for a moment. The room had a pool of azure water ringed with white marble tiles. The ceiling and one of the walls were of glass. Part of this wall was pushed aside so one could walk directly out onto the green lawn. I stood there, breathless; my tongue swelling in my mouth. In front of me, at the poolside, lay a floral dress impossible not to recognize, a pair of red shoes, and a pair of light blue panties. The Mozart melody came from a tape player next to the clothes, and the splashing...

An arm in the water was waving, a face, a smile, a naked body - naked! I dropped my shoes and the bag, I have since wondered how this could possibly have taken place but the facts remain: I dropped my shoes and the bag, tore off my shirt pants, socks, and briefs. My body as white as the marble tiles, I stood at the side of the pool for a second

before diving in with an almost perfect dive. While underwater, I opened my mouth; it was freshwater. I let go of all caution about unwanted intestinal bacteria and drank four or five big mouthfuls of the water. Still under the water, I sawn and then let myself sink calmly to the bottom. Pressure against my eardrums, the insides of my eyelids pricking – how long could I stay under water? I had no plans of surfacing. I caught a glimpse of a tanned body above and to my left. My chest and temples were pounding while a flash of thought cut through my brain: This is freedom, Gotvin Soleng! And with no clue about what was about to happen, I swam up, broke the surface gasping, and sneezed violently four times drowning out Mozart. She was at the side of the pool four yards from me. I met her eyes and she laughed.

"I thought you would drown."

"Right. No. Oh, well," I bleated.

"You look like a swan, a white male swan the you're huddling up."

"I really didn't mean to shout your name!"

"But you did shout?"

"Yes, I don't understand what came over me."

"It was good that you shouted."

Suddenly I felt calm and understood that I was nto about to be confronted with shame or embarrassment. I saw her face smile, her eyes holding no reproach nor ulterior motives. I saw this woman, her breasts, her naked body semi-concealed in the water and heard a prayer pushing its way from deep inside of me; a prayer more sincerely real and strong than I could remember having felt in a long, long time: "Lord, my dear God, how beautiful she is, never take me away from this woman!!" This utopian prayer rose toward the glass ceiling and heaven along with the certainty that I would leave the town tomorrow. I would go home, home to my parish in Vanndal but she was so enchanting. She was no whore – whores did not having around summer-closed municipal baths. She was playing with the water surface and her palm sent a splash of water at my face. I winked the water away and smiled. Was I as white as a swan? Yes, I had not sunned for at least seven years, not that I had anything against it. An occasion simply hadn't offered itself. She was tanned, delightfully tanned. We were just looking at each other. She with her back against the side of the pool and I a few feet out in the deep end treading water as well as I could while using my arms in relaxed movements to stay afloat. I was floating! The duality of this common verb dawned on me and I smiled again encountering her smile.

"One of my students told me," she said.

"Told you?"

"That you had been up a tree shouting my name, causing the police to come and get you."

"Really?" I replied and took a few strokes out away from the side.

"Several of my students were in the park," she continued.

"I see." I was treading water again.

"It was beautiful. A young minister from Norway sitting in a tree shouting my name all across town."

"You have a beautiful name."

"But no one has thought it beautiful enough to shout it out from treetops before."

"I'm sure a lot of men have shouted your name from treetops, you just haven't heard," I protested.

"But this time it was a very handsome man who did it."

This left me in want of an answer. I let myself sink into the water but came back up at once.

"You're pulling my leg," I dismissed.

"I saw it on the train, I saw what you call a soul."

"Is that why you moved?"

She nodded. "I never do things like that."

"Soul." The word sounded inexplicably unfamiliar to me now.

"That's why I gave you a riddle."

"Of which I understand absolutely nothing."

Then you must solve it and give me the answer."

"I don't think I'll be able to do that. Viking fortresses are not my forte."

"You're, uh, well, barking up the wrong tree!"

I blushed a deep crimson.

Suddenly she laughed out loud and threw herself headlong into the water. Immediately I let myself sink all the way to the bottom. There I turned my head and glanced upwards and saw her body above me, aimed for her foot. Slowly my hand approached it. My lungs were desperate for air but I wanted to stay down here. Then she started coming down toward me. With weightless movements and in slow motion, she was all the way down by my side. Her face drew closer to mine. One second? One minute? Our faces were close – what did we see? We embraced then she swam to the side doing the breaststroke. She grabbed a towel, dried herself, and then put on the floral dress – and only the dress – and waved.

"Come," she said.

She ran through the open glass wall and onto the lawn in between the cypresses. What was I supposed to do? Follow her? I was gasping, trying to control my breathing after the long stay underwater. Of course, why was I hesitating? I pulled myself out of the water and shook myself off like a dog. Handsome? Did she really find me handsome? No one had ever told me anything like that before: none of the women I had studied with at the School of Theology, nor any of the unmarried female ministers I had met; nor was I particularly handsome, for that matter – that's something every mirror I had ever encountered could confirm, but she had said so. I ran over to my clothes, pulled on my slacks and nothing more. I fumbled with important buttons as I treaded out onto the grass. Barefoot on Spanish grass, Gotvin Soleng! Again with an exultation of freedom washed over me, but where had she gone? I was standing in the low evening sun

looking around. A beautiful garden with cypresses, hibiscus, bougainvillea – all foreign, sweet fragrances. The garden was enclosed within a dense perimeter of deciduous trees. On the lawn and by the bushes were beautiful sculptures. Copies of Greek sculptures? I recognized Plato, Aristotle, and Sophocles and the historians Herodotus and Diodorus? I listened but heard only Mozart from the poolside and the faint humming of cars. Should I shout for her? Had she just left? Was this it? An unfathomable disappointment had started to build in me when I heard a teasing voice:

"Aren't you coming?"

"I'm coming," I replied and walked in the direction of the sound.

I found her hidden between the jasmine bushes, on a small path in lawn that was small enough to be completely covered by her blanket. There she lay and in front of her was a basket of fruit, cheese, and wine. I just stood there. Had she arranged this for me? Or did she do this often? She heard my thoughts and said:

"This is my sanctuary. I come here everyday."

Looking around, I asked, "How do you get in?"

She laughed. "My uncle is the director of the baths. The apple of his eye. He built the place and made it what it has become."

"But it's not open to the public – there's no one here?"

"It's closed during the summer, from May till September."

"Schoolchildren?"

"Yes, the schools in the area use the facilities, plus all the institutions for disabled people. The town is teeming with them. The sick are always waiting for miracles and, in the mean time, they can bathe."

I listened and she talked. I listened to her voice which was quiet and soft. I hesitantly sat down on the blanket, on the edge of it. She told me she taught summer classes and the university – archaeology. She had a degree in archaeology specializing in ancient cultures – the Viking fortresses! She also said that teaching in the summer was quite arduous with the heat but she needed the money. Fortunately she was able to stay at her uncle's. The rest of her family lived in Madrid. Besides, he let her use the baths as much as she liked and she had the whole thing to herself all summer. Everyday after classes she borrowed her uncle's car and come up here where she swam and ate or just sat around on the grass reading. That's how it was.

"Don't you want a little wine?"

"Yes, please."

She handed me the bottle and I drank. I was thinking.

"Why?" I asked.

"Not just because you shouted. But I never would have found you if you hadn't."

"Why did you want to find me?"

She didn't answer. She was drinking wine. We were drinking wine. It occurred to me that all the questions in my mind ought perhaps not be asked, not now. How could I remain this calm?

"Jasmine, real jasmine," I said and smelled the air and the bushes around me.

"I think you are a very special man."

"Ministers aren't especially special," I replied.

"I'm no thinking minister."

"OK," I replied. There wasn't anything else to say.

"I believe in intuition." She stroked her fingers across the blanket.

"Often?"

She laughed.

"No, as a matter of fact, you are the first man to be here with me."

We sat silently for a long time and I had my eyes fixed on the blanket and the basket. Thinking back, I believe that everything that remained unspoken was what we felt at ease, made me feel that I had known this woman for a long time and that she knew me. The intensity of being this close to her made my skin tingle. Did she feel the same?

"Are you hungry?" she whispered.

"A bit, perhaps."

"Help yourself."

I looked at the cheese, her breasts, her nipples pointing against the fabric of her dress. Slowly I moved closer, closer to her but, as I grasped the basket, she lifted it up and put it behind her. She smiled and leaned back on her elbows.

"Closer," she whispered.

This won't do. I cannot come any closer, I thought. Nevertheless I put my hand gently on her calf and she took it and pulled it up and put it on her abdomen. This put me in an uncomfortable position – half lying and half sitting with only one arm for support. I could hear her breath and my breath. I could feel the warmth through her dress where my hand rested lightly. How long could I maintain this position? I caressed her carefully, moving my hand up toward her breasts and felt the hardness, the firmness – my own hardness! I closed my eyes and let my thoughts come to a standstill focusing on one idea: This is not me, Gotvin, it is not you experiencing this, Gotvin Soleng, it is not possible. But it was possible. Those were her soft hands finding the back of my neck, my hair, my face and mildly stroking my skin. No words. There were still so many questions to be asked and words to be spoken but then everything might have gone very differently. Now everything was going fine. I was stroking her tenderly. My caresses were gentle, calm and she made me feel safe by the way she was moving. Forgotten was my pledge to God, given many years ago, never to be intimate with a woman until we were bound in matrimony. Such a pledge had never been! Her dress slid up over her thighs and her belly. Gently I laid my head on her chest. Lavender, the

smell of lavender from her gentle hair. My pants. We were naked but no one could see us here. I was a virgin and it did not all work perfectly the first time but she understood and was patient. My hardness, my firmness soon returned and I was strong. She was soft and warm and our movements were perfectly synchronized. Lasting, lasting, lasting. It had turned dark but we held each other tightly as we would never relinquish this rhythm. Again and again I felt the lust, the desire mount within me. I saw her eyes. All this time our eyes were interlocked. Tears? Suddenly her eyes flooded with tears and she opened her mouth in a silent cry while pulling me toward her with all her force. A last cascade flooded in her. The smarting joy let go of my body and we relaxed and lay motionless.

For a long time we lay like that.  
Listened to the grasshoppers.  
My fingers intertwined with hers.  
This is how it must be.  
Forever.

"Are you hungry now?" she whispered teasingly.  
"Extremely."  
"Help yourself." We both laughed.

We had wine and cheese and bread while talking quietly. She told me about herself candidly and solemnly. There had been three men in her life but the relationships had been utter misunderstandings. She had certain demands but some of these demands could not be expressed verbally. However, she could feel; she knew when something was right or wrong; she felt that what had just happened was right but what was to happen next? Her intuition was strong. She had to take some chances despite not knowing me at all and despite how quickly this had developed. She too was surprised and she was only twenty-eight. I nodded in agreement, but where was my God? Gone – he was not with us then and there. I could feel only her presence and the inexpressible joy of being a man. I munched on some cheese and followed the movements of her lips. She had opened up to me. I too was open and could speak without embarrassment. There had not been any other women in my life. She had gathered as much and appreciated it but how come I had made such a skillful performance? "Skillful"? I giggled and looked down. I didn't want to understand what she had meant nor could I give her an answer. Our soft, almost whispering, voices and the cicadas melded in the balmy darkness under the jasmine bushes, beyond time.

"Why did you really come here?"  
"To confirm that I don't believe in miracles."  
"Don't you believe in Mary's appearance?"  
"No, do you?"  
"No, but are you a believer?"  
"Yes, I am a believer. I am a minister, as you know."  
"Do you believe in me?"

"Yes, I believe in you, Lucienne."

"But I am not a Catholic woman. I would be a whore if I were."

"You are an honest person."

"In your eyes I'm an infidel, a lost soul."

"Don't talk like that. What do you believe?"

"In what I see in you. In your inquisitive nature. In truth."

"Truth is God. I am merely his instrument."

"But you still seek to understand."

I held back for a moment. Being this close to her made clear, rational arguments impossible. For my Christian point of view, my reservation with respect to Catholic miracles – God was not present except as a notion and for this I was sorry. Yes, I was still seeking and she must know what for, surely? The way we were looking at each other, the depth of our gazes, our hands intertwined, all the smells...

"Will you promise me something?" she asked.

"Promise?"

"Yes. Promise me that you will believe in me."

"Of course I'll believe in you."

She looked down. There was something she wanted to say, something she didn't say. She looked solemn and squeezed my hand as if her life depended on it. I knew it had something to do with the promise I had given her but she had said as much as she was going to and I felt no urgent need to know. She started to talk about her profession, about archaeology. Her specialty was settlements – remnants, traces of a time far, far from our own. She was a paleoarchaeologist which meant that she concentrated on settlements and cultures from before the last ice age, a period fifty to a hundred thousand years back in time – the Quarternary Period. Could it be possible? I listened with interest as she explained that, at the time, our ancestors the Neanderthals were still around and that they were not all that different from us. As a matter of fact, the brain volume of homo sapiens neanderthalis was actually larger than ours and one must assume that they had formed communities and settlement structures from which one might still find traces. This was her speciality; a largely unexplored branch of archaeology and one that she was rarely given the opportunity to pursue. But theories too were important and the theories seemed to indicate that the Neanderthals had been particularly numerous in Northern Europe, especially in Scandinavia. Consequently there might well be remnants, although much had been destroyed by the glaciers. It made me happy to hear this. Maybe it might attract her to my own area; perhaps she would be able to find traces of them in the mountains around Vanndal? I did not tell her this, of course. I listened and nodded. What were my own particular professional areas? Christ's suffering on the Cross and the daily suffering facing all of us, spiritual guidance, marriage counseling, weddings and burials – these were my areas. This she knew, of course, but did I sense something in her eyes, something impish? Something teasing when I talked about this? I bit the tip of her finger softly and she threw herself around

my neck. Again we held each other tightly and she laid down on her back, pulling me with her. My desire, my inscrutable lust sent hot pulses through my body as I felt her soft, moist womanhood receive me, and again we were one rhythm, one body. How long could it last? Long, long, long.

Again we lay silently.

It was night.

We were lying on the Fields of Stars, watching a sky of stars.

Tomorrow I would leave.

Today. It was almost dawn.

"You have to go?"

I nodded.

"I'll go also. We're going on an excursion to the caves at Mondonedo. I and my seven students. Can't you come with us?"

"No," I said quietly.

"No," she rejoined.

"You cannot call or write to me."

I startled, froze, for a moment. It was as though everything collapsed around me. The night turned cold and painful, but then she was there in front of me on her knees. She put her arms around my neck while tilting her head and smiling mischievously.

"You cannot contact me until you have solved the riddle."

"The riddle?" Then I remembered.

"You must find out, you understand?"

"No," I replied. "I don't understand."

"You will understand. That is one of my demands."

"Absolutely?"

"Absolutely."

"And if I'm not able to?"

"Then I shall cry. Cry so long and loud that you'll hear me and then you'll be able to."

I laughed – relieved – and kissed her gently. We got up and packed our things together, walked up to the pool, and got dressed. She locked the place up. I got into her uncle's car, a red Fiesta, and she drove slowly through empty streets very slowly. She too knew that a goodbye remained to be said, a goodbye that neither of us wanted, that neither of us knew what it might entail. That's how it was, but had not these hours forged a bond, a tie, a connection too strong to ever break? That's how I felt. Still, I felt like crying because I didn't know and she didn't know. Slowly she pulled up to Hotel Gabriel and stopped. We turned to each other and just looked without touching.

"Gotvin."

"Lucienne."

The hotel, my sleep, the departure from Santiago de Compostella, and most of the train ride to Madrid and on to Barcelona must have taken place in a state of total emptiness where no thoughts existed. I was thinking, naturally, but I did not reflect on the thoughts I was thinking. I took in very little of what happened outside of my own self, which was centered on the image of her, a static image. Could love be this spontaneous? Did I pray? Did I remember my prayers? Where was the Lord my God? I did not know. Thinking back, I'm pretty sure I followed my rituals and did what I was supposed to do. We were approaching the French border when two things happened almost simultaneously that made me wake up. I ate my breakfast which consisted of dry bread and water and tried to read a little in a magazine I had found at the station in Barcelona. But the letters did not form words. Instead everything smeared into a gray, meaningless matter. Then her sentence appeared again, the one she had spoken as she stepped off the train after our first encounter: "If you decipher this drawing, you shall learn what truly is concealed in Heaven."

The riddle.

I must solve the riddle.

That was a demand, an absolute.

Viking fortress in Denmark.

"Barking up the wrong tree," she had said, and I blushed again, but they were names of Viking fortresses in Denmark, weren't they? Niels Igneby wasn't likely to be mistaken. I pulled out the drawing from my pocket; it was crumpled, worn, but perfectly legible. What could she possibly mean? She was absolutely serious about this, that much I had gathered. I could not call her or contact her in any other way until I had solved this riddle and found out what Heaven truly conceals. I noticed I was feeling nauseated. There was something here I ought to watch out for. I perceived an inner voice telling me to be careful. Should not I, of all people, already know what is concealed in Heaven? Were there more than one Heaven? Unlikely. I couldn't eat anymore bread but thinking about his riddle and the words that went with it awoke me, brought me back to the real world. The real world was the train home to Vanndal, where Father Gotvin was to resume his vocational duties, his daily routine, but an unsolved riddle had the power to disrupt all that. I couldn't contact her, wasn't allowed to hear her voice on the telephone – she had been adamant about this – and suddenly I knew just as a traveler entered the compartment where I had been the only occupant; he was an older man, heavy set. I knew I would never again see Lucienne Lopez unless I did what she had demanded; which meant I could not go home to Vanndal, to Magnus Stormarkbråten, my father Kastor, to my neighbors Margit and Anders Nederstuen or my friends who were calling me "Father" until I had solved this riddle. That's how it was, that was reality. I must stop in Denmark and find a man called Preben Hansson. Did I have the money for a few days' stay in Denmark? No, but I could have a small amount transferred.

"Am I disturbing?"

The older, corpulent man was addressing me, looking at me through a pair of thick eyeglasses while lighting a slim cigar. Tobacco smoke never bothered me. On the contrary rather. Did he want to talk to me? He spoke French, which I could handle tolerably well. Would a conversation with a stranger about neutral subjects help me forget my own thoughts? Hardly, but I could try.

"Not at all," I replied.

"Bullfighting," he said, "is a noble sport."

"It is?"

"I have just been in Barcelona and seen El grande matador, señor Rodrigo Gavista."

"And what's the other bull's name?"

The man laughed and was not offended by my, for me totally unexpected, ironic remark. Irony had never been part of my discursive arsenal. Who had I become? He introduced himself as painter-artist Dupont from Bordeaux. Then he continued and I received an in-depth lecture on the finer points of bullfighting; its sublime aesthetics and ethics; the corrida was a theater in its most elevated form, un lanca de capa and natura con la izquierda, to say nothing of the masterpiece brindis del toreo. This was ballet – that's how it was – and, with regards to the ox, the bull in question, he personally would, given a choice between being a regular bull and one destined for bullfighting, without a shadow of a doubt have chosen the latter. Bullfighting bulls lived all their lives as kings and died as kings whereas bulls whose fate it was to become beef lead a paltry, miserable life and died in surroundings reeking with urine, excrement, blood, and terror in the butcher shops. Had I ever been to a Spanish butcher shop and looked for myself? No, that I hadn't, but where was I from? He noticed my boreal accent.

"From Norway," I replied.

"Vacation?"

I nodded. "Been to Santiago de Compostella."

"Really?" He blinked eagerly behind his glasses and pulled closer. "A pilgrimage. A visit to the scene of a recently proclaimed miracle. Did you see anything?"

"No." I squirmed, feeling uneasy.

He moved even closer screwed up his eyes until they became narrow slits, and continued in a muted voice.

"Let me tell you something, stranger, stay away from places like that. I can be fatally dangerous for non-believers, but perhaps you are a believer?"

I nodded and looked away.

"Then let me tell you a story you should know. I myself happen to have been interested in these phenomena. I have certain connections; reliable sources and, with respect to the incident in Fatima in October of 1917, I'm sure you have heard about it. There were also present among the onlookers non-believers, dissenters, dissidents who interpreted the phenomenon differently. They were free to do so as long as they did not go public with their views, but four men independent of each other, did. One of them was even a

professor of philosophy. Afterwards they were visited by lackeys of the cardinals in Rome and were tortured in unimaginable ways. João Herreira had his balls cut off and they were all threatened with even worse things befalling their families unless they put an end to their public heresies. I happen to know that the cardinals Timoteus Villalobos, Jaroslaw Tugor, and Alfons de Montesquieller personally participated in the ball lopping. They are all dead now, victims as well as villains. I know it's not a comfortable story for a believer, but one you should know about because these things are supposed to have happened in Santiago de Compostella as well. There were three or four infidels present when the so-called "Mary" appeared in the sky.

I had turned away.  
I did not want to hear.  
I was freezing.  
I wanted to hear nothing.

"Two of these infidels who witnessed the miracle on the cathedral square on September 20th of last year are dead – perished under very mysterious circumstances. Did you know?"

I did not move.  
I did not listen.  
I saw the scenery flicker by.  
"You did not know? Well, now you do." He hissed like a snake and I felt his breath – garlic – close to my cheek.

I rose and took the magazine.  
Rolled it up.  
I struck as hard as I could.  
Hit him on top of the head.

He wasn't hurt; his glasses fell off; he picked them up, got up, stared at me in astonishment, put out his cigar, bowed, and left the compartment. I was shaking and my knees buckled under me. I sank down on the seat and buried my face in my hands. "Lord, my omnipotent Father, help me. I beg You, Lord Jesus Christ our God, Father of glory to grant all us insignificant humans the Spirit of Revelation to truly know you and grant our hearts enlightened eyes." My mind was roaming freely in the Ephesians, other epistles, scraps of quotes I knew and loved commingled into a clutter of works. Finally I managed to collect my thoughts to a real prayer: "Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident, dear God Father: I trust you in all things. You are my shepherd and the temptations You put to me I shall resist." Then I wept silently, without tears, for a long time, but I knew I had found my God again, that he was still with me; no one would ever be allowed to remove me from Him. Again I dared look up, rose to my feet, and pulled down the window – the cigar smoke had to get out. I put my head out of the

window and beheld the vineyards around Narbonne. I was seized by a strong, intense homesickness. I wished Vandal would be the next station, that Magnus Stormarkbråten would be there waiting for me, stolid and reticent, but secure. Then we could talk about the water level in the Vandøla river, about fishing grayling and trout and the possibilities of catching the big one, but that's not how it was. The next station was Narbonne, southern France, and the feeling of bliss and terror were fighting a battle in my chest. She was there, would always be there, along with God, but I had struck a human being; not dangerously, but struck nonetheless. I was at the window as the train stopped at Narbonne. I stood there remembering the terror in the face of the toothless garbage man, Pedro Urz. What had happened to the other two infidels? I still stood there as the train again set in motion. I felt like shouting out loud about the glory of God as the train picked up speed through the suburbs. Instead I whispered her name into the air. Then I sank back in my seat and curled up in the corner and fell asleep.

At the Gare du Nord we had a longer stay. I might have used the time to see a little of Paris, instead I remained in a café in the waiting hall with a bottle of wine, a large glass of water, and a loaf of Parisian bread right from the oven. I was tired. I had just phoned home and talked with Margit Nederstuen. My father had dug up half the field and she was at her wits' end. The metal detector had become an obsession with old Kastor; rusty bits of iron were accumulating on the kitchen table; everything he found had to go there. Were there traces of a green 1934 Hillman delivery truck? Margit Nederstuen was desperate – wouldn't he come home soon? Yes, he was on his way, but had to spend a couple of days in Denmark so would Margit be kind enough to extend him a short-term loan? Deposit a thousand kroner on his account today or tomorrow at the latest? Sure, no problem. She'd take care of everything, but what would I do with my father when I came home? I drank wine and water and waited for my train to get ready for embarkation. Next stop was Copenhagen, then a different train to Trelleborg, which, according to the map was in the southwestern part of Zealand - what was I to do there? Stroll around a Viking fortress? As around for the enigmatic Preben Hansson? Yes, that's what I had to do. Where was she now? I closed my eyes for a moment with my wine glass on my lips. She was on an excursion with her students to some caves where Neanderthals had possibly once lived. What was a Neanderthal? A human, a human being like me, created in the image of God. What came before the Neanderthals? Homo erectus, I seemed to remember, and before that there was homo habilis, and if one went ever-further back in time, three-four-five million years, a breathtaking time span, we would find homo australopithecus. Some time, a few years ago, I had read about this, about evolution the way paleontologists through their excavations have demonstrated, could homo erectus be classified as a human being? Yes, it probably could, but what about habilis and australopithecus - were they even our distant relatives? Created in the image of God? I had experienced doubt and I still had no clue, but where was the delineation between man and beast? Did such a demarcation exist? The transition from ramaphitecus, who resembled modern apes, to australopithecus, who resembled us humans, and who possibly was a human being – the transitions here were almost indiscernible and spanned millions of years. Was it possible to put down a

demarcation and say, "There, precisely there emerged the first people, Adam and Eve, created in the image of God." Was it really possible to surgically bisect this row of continuous, minute biological transformations somewhere in this evolutionary chain and categorically say, "You are an animal, you are a human being"? Was this possible? What did Lucienne think about this? Were Adam and Eve Neanderthals? Or even australopithecine? Images of God, God's parables weren't all equally easy to understand and my inquisitiveness had often taken me into cul-de-sacs where my inadequacies had not been able to find a way out, and sitting here at the railway station waiting to embark a train, I again found myself stumbling around in these cul-de-sacs. Stumbling around blindly with a strong desire to know where in the evolutionary chain to fix the borderline between beast and man, between non-soul and soul, and I knew that this was emerging because I might, some time in the future, talk with her about it. This was her territory, our future topics of discussion – paleoarchaeology. I didn't want to appear ignorant, least of all I wished to appear dogmatic in my belief, but here, too, were borderlines. I held onto my thoughts on the evolutionary chain while drinking the last few sips of red wine. These thoughts had usually, despite only being the result of my own naïve inquisitiveness, made me feel uneasy, but this time I felt completely at ease. Far better to think these thoughts than to recall the terror in the face of the garbage man Pedro Urz.

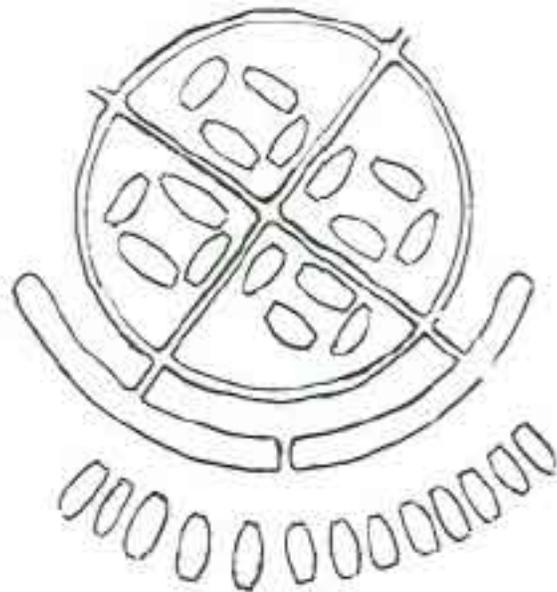
The PA system announced my train.  
I got up and walked to platform eight.  
Found my compartment and my seat.  
In the corner.  
Four youths with Euro-passes plus me.  
I hung up my jacket and put my head behind it.  
I wanted to sleep.

I closed my eyes in the darkness behind my jacket and smiled. Was she thinking about me right now? Probably. I could hear her voice, feel her thoughts. I was going to Denmark to solve the riddle, but why did you have to make it this difficult? Why this game? Certain demands, she had said; this was one of the demands. Were there more? Probably not. "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, fear not though the light appear weak, worries are strangers to no man. Lord my Father, never again shall I enclose my fear within me, but seek You and follow the way Jesus Christ has shown." Thus was my prayer before I fell asleep.

Thinking back, I remember the train ride from Paris to Copenhagen as a pleasant alternation between sleeping and dozing. I got off early in the morning, feeling refreshed and rested. The train to Trelleborg would depart in about an hour which gave me enough time for two sandwiches with wonderful Danish salami and a cup of tea. Afterwards I fumbled a while in a phone booth trying to call the Danish directory assistance. Preben Hansson; there were two Preben Hanssons on Zealand. One of them

was a hairdresser here in Copenhagen while the other one actually lived not far from Trelleborg, in the small town of Korsør. Was this the Preben Hansson I wanted? He's the one I'd put my money on, but I didn't have the nerve to call him now. What would I say to him? First I had to go to Trelleborg. But the question remained whether I would have to visit the other places as well. If so, I would have to travel all over Denmark. I made up my mind there and then – I must solve this riddle, no matter what. Today was Saturday and I had to be back at my desk in Vanndal the day after tomorrow. If time proved too short, my substitute, a young student, Laura Lønnevig would just have to stay on another couple of days. That's how it had to be. I hurried toward the platform where my train was ready to depart.

I spent the entire trip to Trelleborg in the restaurant car with my half-bottle of red wine and water. The flat Danish scenery whooshed by. Again I was Gotvin the Investigator. What would become of this little detour? I had hastily grabbed a few tourist brochures from the information counter at the railway station in Copenhagen – brochures about the Trelleborg fortress, one of Denmark's historical treasures, they said. The Danes had three such landmarks; the other two were none other than Fyrkat and Aggersborg, all classified as fortifications from the Viking era. This caught my interest and I studied the ground plan of Trelleborg.



This was precisely the way she had drawn it. Later I would copy this plan and put it in the secret drawer of my escritoire with the other documents. But now I was sitting there examining the peculiar geometry. What might have been the Vikings' intentions with it? Everything was so perfectly symmetrical – circles, crosses, and these figures, the stones resembling obtuse rowboats. Thirteen in an outer circle and four in each quadrant of the innermost circle. Vikings? This place was a good haul from the coast and didn't the

Vikings build their fortresses along the coast? I knew next to nothing about these things, but I wanted to learn. I got off the train at the right station and asked around for cheap accommodations. I found a small inn, "Mosegaard", where I immediately took a shower, shaved, and changed clothes. Then I walked to the nearest payphone.

"Bodil Hansson," was the answer.

"Excuse me, is Preben Hansson available?"

"Are you a Norwegian?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry, Preben is at his store," informed the lady.

"Where can I find it?"

"Here in Korsør, of course. Do you want the number?"

"Yes, please."

She gave me the number. Store? What kind of store did Preben Hansson run? Was this the Preben Hansson I wanted? I hesitated a moment, then I dialed the new number.

"Hansson's Glass; how may I help you?"

"Thank you – uhm – my name is Gotvin Soleng, from Norway. I'd just like to ask – would you in any way happen to be connected to those Viking fortresses? Do the names Trelleborg, Eskeholm, Fyrkat, and Aggersborg mean anything to you?"

Silence.

Then laughter.

"Do they ever! Haven't you read my book?"

"Book? No," I replied, taken aback.

"What, then, is it you want to know?"

"Well." I cleared my throat. "I'm on my way back from a trip to Spain. There I met a woman who told me you would be able to tell me what truly is concealed in Heaven..."

Again silence. And laughter.

"A Spanish woman, eh? Not bad! Where are you now?"

"At the Mosegaard Inn. Would it be – uhm – possible to have a word with you in private? You see, this is very important."

"You sound very cryptic, young man. Very well, I suppose so."

Again silence. I waited in trepidation.

"Are you afraid of flying?"

"Flying? No..."

"Then meet me at five sharp tomorrow afternoon at the airstrip outside Korsør."

"I'll be there, Mr. Hansson, and thank you very much."

"You're welcome and I'll see you there."

I wiped the sweat from my forehead and breathed a sigh of relief. Bull's eye! I had caught the mother grayling on the first throw. Thank you God for lighting my path. I was going on a plane with Mr. Hansson the glazier? That's what it seemed like. He was an uncommonly nice-sounding fellow. He'd written a book? I had to get a copy of it immediately. I froze. Was this the book she had been reading on the train? Right across from me? It was possible. I half ran through the streets of the idyllic little Danish hamlet; a bookstore – I had to find a bookstore immediately, but there was no bookstore. The closest I came was the souvenir kiosk at the entrance of the fortress. I ran there, tried to calm down and strode inside where I asked the attendant woman. Was she acquainted with a book by Preben Hansson? She looked at me brusquely, nodded slowly, and told me, leaving no doubt, that that was not the sort of books they carried there. Besides, she had heard that it was out of print. But could she at least tell me its title? Again she nodded brusquely, "Nonetheless, they were there" – this was the title of the book, but as she had abundantly made clear, this was not the kind of establishment that dealt with that sort of literature. It made me wonder, but I wasn't about to question her further. I thanked her and sauntered away from the kiosk in deep thought. "That sort of literature"? I must admit that my curiosity only increased as I strolled up and down an alley hedged with poplars right outside the legendary Viking fortress ruins. And the title of the book – "Nonetheless, they were there" – peculiar title. What was there? The Viking fortress, probably. But not according to Lucienne. If the Viking fortresses were "the wrong tree", why was I here at all? I felt increasingly confused, but not at all discouraged. I was going to meet Preben Hansson, the Mr. Hansson, no doubt about that. The author of a book that the stern lady in the kiosk felt above carrying. Could it be an obscene book? There was always the possibility.

I walked up to the entrance.  
There were a lot of visitors.  
I bought a ticket.

The are was large and I immediately realized that few of the circles would be visible from the ground. The inner circle was in reality a large rampart and the stones – the odd little rowboat-like shapes – were not as prominent when ambling around them. I was standing on one of them. I squatted, stroked it – "Who put you here?" I thought. What did they look like? I sat down on the grass, wafted a few flies away. Summer in Denmark and summer in Norway. My very first trip abroad drew towards its close. It had not at all turned out the way I had expected. The Gotvin Soleng returning to Vanndal was not quite the Gotvin Soleng who had left. What had changed? Besides meeting her and becoming a man? Wasn't I feeling more free? But of what did this freedom consist? This I did not fathom. My God was the same, my faith remained unscathed - didn't it?

A cold puff of air blew along my spine.

I turned around.  
No one there.  
I had committed a sin.  
I had been in jail.  
I had struck a stranger's head.  
I had committed adultery.

"I had committed adultery" – this sentence struck me with all its force. Suddenly the sentence had a terrible chasm, I could see it now whereas I hadn't before. I had been blinded, blinded by her. I had done something a good Christian, least of all a minister, should never do. Gotvin the pure had set out from Vanndal; Gotvin the filthy and sinful would return. That's how it was and, on top of that, I had the nerve to walk around feeling free?! I had become a frivolous, irresponsible sophist who was trying to twist and corrupt the words of the Bible, of my Heavenly Father, and I was in the process of falling. Falling down into a heathen gnosis or perhaps into Judaistic hedonism. I had committed adultery, there in Spain, on a patch of grass by the municipal baths in Santiago de Compostela; I had succumbed to the sins of the flesh. So hardened had my heart become that it had taken me until now to realize this, but unlike St. Augustine, there was no Simplicianus there for me. Who was there to provide for my pitiable soul? Who was my spiritual advisor? Magnus Storakbråten? Hardly. The bishop? Could she understand what had compelled me to go? My fall from grace? I was having doubts again –all this uncertainty! I pounded my fist in the grassy ground. It smarted and I was bleeding. I must have hit something sharp. A shard of glass? I dug down into the grass while sucking the blood from my hand. A hard, pointed object. I held it up, blinked and stared at it. It was green with tarnish, but I immediately saw what it was: a bronze arrowhead. Bronze? But the Vikings' era wasn't the Bronze Age. They had used weapons made of iron, but there could be no doubt that what I was holding in my hand was an ancient bronze arrowhead. What should I do with it? Hand it over to one of the guards, of course. I put it in my pocket. This unexpected interruption into my thoughts about my iniquity, my fall from grace, my sincere feelings of guilt and remorse made the worst melancholy subside. Granted, I had committed adultery, but it had been a mild form of adultery. Yes, my Dear Heavenly father, might I not say that in the particular case, this incident of very mild adultery was even necessary? Could You agree to that? Perhaps this arrowhead was a message from You, a piece of noble metal given to me as a sign of forgiveness or sanction. The exceptionally mild form of adultery I had engaged in that night under that jasmine bushes had done me a world of good, Dear Father. Reconciled with these thoughts I again made peace with myself sitting on the grass in the middle of a Viking fortress. Still, a voice deep within me was still murmuring something about copulating for hours on end with a woman who was, essentially, a total stranger and it could hardly be labeled as mild adultery, but this was not the voice of my God.

I had forgotten about the miracles.  
My failure in the library.

The investigations that were turning me into an infidel.  
An infidel according to the Catholics.  
This touchstone of faith had still not been gauged.  
Not weighed in the balances.  
Not been designated a place among the Lutheran tenets.

Of course, thinking back I realize that the first few days following my departure from Santiago de Compostela were filled with thoughts of her and that all other impressions became insignificant scirms. That's how it had to be. Therefore these things w3er for the time being pushed to the back of my consciousness but they were destined to resurface in full force. But there in the heart of Trelleborg I was busy solving a riddle and the certainty that once the riddle was solved, the certainty that this was the key to hearing her voice again, smell her, and meet her spurred me on in a euphoric high which only for brief moments like the one I had experienced just before I found the arrowhead. I got up from the grass and walked one full circle on the rampart. It was getting late in the afternoon. I had a thousand kroner in my wallet – one thousand crisp kroner which, to be sure, belonged to Margit Nederstuen and which very soon would have to be repaid, but portions of which I nevertheless had every intention of squandering on a luscious Danish dinner. I had glanced at the menu at the inn: herring in cream sauce, shoulder of pork and hamburger, crayfish casserole, hand or pork and eel – I could take my pick. This was my vacation, after all, my only vacation this summer. My swimming trunks, orange with vertical stripes had cost half of what Margit had lent me. I still had not used them – would I ever get a chance to use them? But weren't they too big for me? I might give them away to someone who'd make better use of them, that's what I'd do. I walked back to the inn and took a seat in the dining room which was a cozy room with 4-5 tables with white tablecloths and candles. I ordered the herring in cream sauce from the plump waitress. She flashed me a friendly smile and thanked me. I said a simple prayer, ate my meal with great relish, and grew blissfully tired. At nine, after two cups of coffee with cream, my eyelids started to droop and I went to bed. I closed my eyes and fell asleep in the garden under the jasmine bushes.

Finding a local bus to Korsør was easy and the airstrip was only a couple of kilometers outside of town, a nice walk. All I had done this Sunday was walk around the fortress. There was something there about the ruins I couldn't quite grasp. It had to do with the geometrical outline. I was whistling and walking out toward the airstrip, looking forward with some apprehension to meeting Mr. Hansson, the author of a possibly obscene book. Its storyline probably centered around four Viking fortresses. I was going on a plane? Why had Mr. Hansson invited me to fly? Was he a pilot as well as a glazier? It was close to fiveo'clock and I could see the airstrip with a windsock swinging in the wind. A car pulled up beside me and stopped. The window was lowered and a man, around sixty, with a rotund, smiling face addressed me.

"Would you be the Norwegian?"

I nodded.  
"Hop in!"

It was Preben Hansson and we shook hands. He laughed, I did not understand at what, but I laughed too and gave him a pretty incoherent story about a riddle I had been given by a Spanish woman; a riddle involving his name on a sheet of paper along with the names of these fortresses. I would be delighted if he could throw some light on this. I showed him the crumpled drawing Lucienne had made and Mr. Hansson laughed even more.

"Well, let's visit the sky and see if we can find some answers," he said cheerfully and parked his car by a hangar.

This sentence made me a trifle uneasy as it was very close to what Lucienne had stated and it also indicated a certain imprudent attitude to the word "Heaven". However, I would soon have other things to think about as we were going flying. I had never before been in a small private plane, but flying turned out to be Mr. Hansson's great passion. He spent several hours a week on his hobby and often together with his wife Bodil. But today she couldn't get away, so he thought he might as well invite me to come along since I had traveled all this way just to find the answer to a riddle. We entered his small one-engine plane, a Mourane Solnier 880, he told me. It was French and very reliable, ensured Mr. Hansson as we fastened our seatbelts and put on helmets. I couldn't conceal the fact that I felt pretty wound-up, so to speak. There was no parachute. What was it he wanted to show me? This man had written a book as well? This wasn't the time to ask about the book as we taxied over to the runway and I closed my eyes and felt a churning in my stomach as we ascended. But then I relaxed and looked out and down. The view was breathtaking – fields of grain, roads, and houses. A few minutes later, Mr. Hansson pointed and we could see the Trelleborg below us. The geometry was even more distinct now, from the air. A fine piece of filigreed jewelry, a satellite dish, perfect circles and crosses, and then the strange boat-like stones. We flew across the area several times until Mr. Hansson told me we would set a course determined by the axes of the central cross and the rowboats, precisely 325 degrees toward the northwest. He pointed at the compass. I noticed 325 degrees and then he engaged the autopilot and leaned back.

The plane was humming.  
I was sitting with my hands folded.  
The course was set.  
There wasn't a cloud in the sky.