

De Nærmeste - Our Nearest and Dearest

Extract, translated by Jennifer Alexander

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When we get down to the ferry, I look for Uffe but he is not there. He has stayed at the other side and I can see him standing by his car, waving. The girls will make the crossing by themselves. But before they go on board, they give me a kiss and ask if I'm sure I don't want to go with them. I could stay to eat and then head home, but I shake my head.

It only takes ten minutes to cross and you could easily swim it, if you wanted to. I stand watching them until I can't see the car anymore, and I wave to the guy I kissed behind the shed. It is him who is piloting the ferry, and he blows me a kiss before putting out from the quay.

Then I go for a walk, and when I come back I sit down on the terrace of the little bar, which is under new ownership. They are still refurbishing, but they are open and the waiter says I can easily have something to eat.

When I'm finished, I stay sitting, watching the ferry as it goes back and forth, just as it did when I sat in the car with my dad, and he spilt ice cream on his jersey. I promised myself then that I would take it home and wash it. But I forgot, and it was still dirty when I found it there in his things. I hoped that he hadn't worn it again, and I put it in a bucket to soak when I got home, but the stains, having had a good while to settle in, didn't come out.

The waiter comes and tells me they are closing but I am welcome to stay. The light nights are nearly over and it's all about making the most of them, he adds, but when I notice the wind set in, as it often does in the late evenings along the western coast, I get up and go over to the car.

I can see the swallows flying low over the marram grass. They are chasing insects, which go to ground when the weather turns, and I can hear their thin cries, which will always take me to that summer, when I thought I knew it all, but everything was new.

It is warm, even though it is getting dark, and I roll down the window. It is the time of day I like the best - whether it comes late and long and blue like it is now, or early and white and grey as it is in the winter - the time day slips into night and you hardly notice.

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I drive quickly and have a feeling that I am floating on that water that I can see when I look out at the sky and the firth, as they grow darker and darker. It all slides by me and drifts in through the shadows, which grow blue and finally almost black, and I wish I could rock away on the water, like we did when we were small and went down to swim at dusk in the summer.

We'd say to my mother and father that we wanted to go to bed early, we had school in the morning, but we were lying, and when it was beginning to get dark and they thought we were sleeping, we ran down to the beach. We never got caught, or it may be they just didn't say anything.

I can still feel the water that enveloped me in the dark, and the crabs that prickled over our feet if we didn't move them fast enough, and hear Eva screech as Christian sprayed her with water.

Missing them hits me like the cool dark blue light, but it's fine. I am not like my mother, who started complaining just as soon as summer solstice was done, that things were all wrong and she missed the light. Me, the dark suits me, and I have learned to cherish it.

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