Internal Landscapes

21.06. – Solstice

The rustle downstairs meant it was time to get ready. Karl closed the book and slowly got to the bathroom. A smudged tracksuit had been waiting since jogging last weekend. But Karl didn’t care about his appearance at all, especially when he was about to go to the forest.  
 Sitting in a car he was watching the city – a huge mass of buildings, rushing people and single trees. Cats wondering and grey clouds passing. All he wanted was just a moment of silence, a moment lost. When dad turned left, Karl took the cap and set the watch. They got out into the forest but close to a main road.   
- So, what time would you like to meet? – asked mom, getting her tissues out of the rucksack.  
- Something like 8 p.m.? – proposed Karl – it’s up to you.  
 As usual, the parents followed their favorite lane which takes about one hour on foot so it was suitable for them to get back on time. Karl always wanted to explore new parts of the forest and create alternative paths, even if he ran there every weekend.   
 Jog came to him like a relief. A bath in green moss and young cones. Fresh air filled his lungs and strengthened muscles. Going up and down the slopes cooperated with breathing. As there was nobody around, Karl felt finally relaxed.   
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 After twenty minutes of jogging, Karl decided to do a warm-up. He stopped near a small hill covered with high grass and started doing the exercises. The view around was like elsewhere in the forest – only pines and small birches, sometimes a lonesome spruce. On the left the trees grew in rows, some of them were marked with white paint.   
 Karl continued the warm-up. Suddenly, while he was rising his head, he caught the sight of a mist covering a small copse. ‘How can there be a mist when it’s so warm?’ – thought Karl. That part of the woods was also much darker than the rest. When he came closer, he saw a group of high spruces and other trees he couldn’t name. They were so dense that it was impossible to look through them. Karl had to go back to the car but finally decided to explore this strangely-looking place. From the first step he felt it must be a preserved area – he could distinguish many plants and mushrooms he had never seen before.   
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 It took about ten minutes to finish the walk. Finally, Karl got to an unexpected place. He saw a small pond in the middle of a clearing reflecting the sun and surrounded by various berries and high grass. Here the trees were taller, the grass was greener and the water purer. Every single plant seemed to grow on its own, independently. The birds were flying, squirrels were jumping and ants were working.   
 Suddenly, Karl saw a girl sitting on a rock next to the pond. She was calmly looking at the water surface and probably didn’t realize that somebody was watching. She had long white hair, fair skin and rosy lips. A flowery loose dress was partly lying on the grass and flowing in the water. When Karl decided to approach, she rose her head and asked surprised.  
- Who are you!? What do you want!? – she nearly screamed.  
- I… just… I was jogging nearby and entered the copse. Don’t worry… I won’t hurt you… - said Karl. He was bewildered but tried to come closer.   
- Why are you so scared? Has anybody hurt you before? – asked Karl. The girl was very suspicious about him and was not willing to answer, but finally responded.  
- Nobody had come here before. Only animals and I.   
- How is that possible… – Karl was totally astonished – I thought it is a preserved area.  
- Preserved? – she smiled – the whole forest should look like this little copse.   
- What do you mean? – Karl didn’t understand. At that moment he looked up and saw the sun which was still visible and hot. It brought him round and Karl realized he should go back – parents would wait for him. Even more confused, he continued.  
- Sorry, I have to go now. My parents will wait for me – then rapidly turned and went back. When Karl was leaving the clearing, he wanted to glance at the girl for the last time - but she had disappeared. Only the sun was still shining and didn’t want to set during the night. The trees were waving and the grass whispering.

28.06 – The Irresponsibility

Since last visit in the forest Karl couldn’t stop thinking about that mysterious girl. She said something about that the woods should look like the foggy copse, but why? He had no idea. Fortunately, it was a weekend again so Karl went to the forest with his parents. This time the boy totally concentrated on getting to the copse to meet the girl one more time.   
 Finally, he saw the pond, high grass and the rock on which a small lark was standing and singing. The girl was collecting herbs by the shore paying no attention to Karl. He walked the water round and approached silently.   
- I feel you are a good man – she suddenly said. It was so unexpected that Karl didn’t know how to reply.  
- Ok…but…what do you mean? – he was completely confused. She stood up, glanced friendly at him and whispered.  
- I just feel you are not like the rest of the people who come to the forest. You are still unaware. Sit down here, please. – she said and showed him grass. They both sat on the ground and looked at each other. Karl still felt a bit uncomfortable but didn’t want to interrupt. The girl told him a story.  
 >> For ages all the local area used to be covered by dense forest. It resembled the copse which is now just a small dot. All men lived in harmony with nature, collecting berries and mushrooms. The animals had enough space to exist and so did the plants. Everything flourished. The situation changed radically when people started to develop their forest industry. Woodcutters came here to fell most of the trees. Then they planted new ones but it ruined perennial biodiversity. One of the woodcutters wanted to fell this oak, the oldest here, but he disappeared in the place where now there is a small rock, this one next to the pond. Virgin forest was destroyed to gain an access to the fertile ground. Virgin forest turned into a magazine of wood.<<  
 The girl finished the story staring at the rock and lark which couldn’t stop singing. Karl felt as if he had uncovered an incredible history. He understood all of it but still had doubts. Who was she actually? And why was she telling it to him?   
- I see but are you angry about what the people did?   
- Look, people think the whole world has been created only for them. In fact, nature would thrive without human beings. So if they have been given such a boon they should be grateful, not irresponsible.

05.07. – The Beauty

Today the forest was filled with a noise of chainsaws working close to the road. When Karl got out of the car he just waved to the parents and ran towards the copse. Following the same lane, he was thinking about the mysterious girl all the time. Does she live near the forest? How old is she?   
 He didn’t find her by the pond but decided to stay there longer and do a warm-up. After few minutes he saw her walking in the high grass. She always had the same dress and some flowers in her hair. Then he recalled the book he had finished two weeks ago. It was an old folk legend which tells the story of a nymph living by a pond with her companions and all animals. At that moment the girl came closer but Karl felt a strong twinge in his breast and was dazed. He realized what was going on and wanted to escape. The girl caught him and persuaded to sit on a ground. Karl didn’t know what to do, he was frightened. The noise of chainsaws died away.  
- Don’t worry, I won’t hurt you – she said the same as Karl when they had met for the first time. – Just close your eyes and listen.   
 Karl trembled but her voice sounded so softly that he became calm and closed his eyes. Then something wonderful happened - he felt as if he had entered an enormous opera. Each bird’s songs, branches falling, moss growing, leaves rustling and foxes fleeing were clearly audible. Karl sensed an inner never-ending space, natural music flowing somewhere regardless of the time. Every sound was like an independent instrument creating together an invisible orchestra. He took a deep breath and continued listening. When Karl opened his eyes the world around seemed to be more complete. He could easily discern the dew on the growing berries, impatient flies playing above the pond and the sun heating a mossy pillow. The Nymph was smiling and looking friendly at him. She knew exactly what he had heard and seen.   
- Are you still afraid of me? – she asked.  
- No…now I understand but it’s so unbelievable that I don’t know what to say.  
- You don’t need any words – just listen and watch. Try to perceive everything around you more carefully and then you will find your internal landscapes. The beauty is usually hidden in simple things, you just have to be sensitive and open. Never be self-centred.   
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 The sun touched my cheek and I fell asleep. The wind was blowing and the grass was humming…