THE RING

Also by Lynne Hjelmgaard

Distance Through the Water (I Want Press, France, 2002) Manhattan Sonnets (Redbeck Press, 2003)

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A few lines I have taken from a poem by the Swedish poet Gunnar Ekelöf (1907–1968). These lines I have placed in italics.

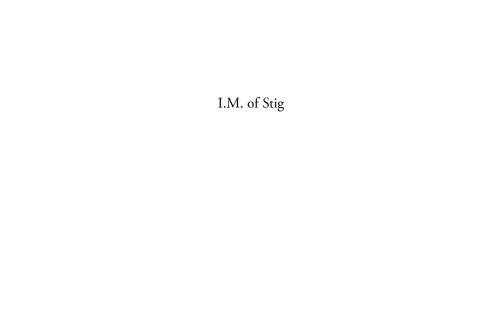
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For Stig

How I admire you who moved steadfast between countries, even when there were deserts to be crossed by foot, oceans to navigate by stars, strangers to trust, bargains to be made with the gods.

(I become easily unravelled.)

You could get on a train going in the wrong direction and not panic.

And robbed of everything (as I am now) and still you found your way.

Copenhagen

You have been gone from the harbour almost a year

The howl in the rigging is louder. Our best friend says you will come for me one day rejuvenated from weathering your last Atlantic storm. He still paints the sky and sea.

I stare at a flame and in an instant your body reappears as whole. Denmark is good that way.

It wins competitions for the world's happiest population.

I can tell by the mentality on the bike paths:
all are equal until one disturbs a real speeder
or suddenly stops without making a hand signal
or rides on the sidewalk or crosses on a red light,
doesn't respect pedestrians or people boarding a bus.

It is important to follow the rules, keep up with traffic or step aside.

(Remember to keep the green buoys to port as you return.)

Sometimes it is harder now than at the beginning, but our painter friend says you are busy sailing the waves.

Perhaps you can smell land by now. (Though you love it best far from shore.)

I hope there is enough wind. The seas wild and churning I wait for you. I see the sails filled and flying.

When we first met

You brought woven saddle bags from Afghanistan containing: one pair of pants, a toothbrush, two hard bound diaries with pages coming out and one pair of underwear.

There was an Afghan coat you sold in the desert and the dirty pots you threw out of your kitchen window. (They were too hard to clean.)

There was the return trip from Israel with stuff taped to your body underneath your clothes; and Jørgen who dropped a chunk in the airport bathroom and you had to eat it and there was enough money for a taxi from Copenhagen to Helsingør to see the sunrise when you got back.

You told me.
You dazzled me.
You gave me your ring.
Your foreign accent, then very foreign.

Now you call me love and I love to hear you say that. And it feels like it comes from that space right below the throat and close to the chest.

I don't want it to end though sometimes it seems like we're on the way to already finished.

Our belonging, was it stronger at the beginning?

Will it be that at the ending? Is there a middle of the way in between like the morning yesterday?

It seemed like you wanted me to walk with you to say goodbye. I didn't know it until after and then I wanted to.

I would be silly to just run after you so I picked up your clothes instead.

At times I don't know where you're heading but I wish you (me) were going back. I'm afraid to look at you (me) going ahead. Then you say you are a loner, I am your only friend and you need to get a haircut tomorrow.

Where a rose has left you wounded

spring brings me deep into the blossoming forest where your tulips grow

a hawk chases a gull or swallow shrieks, cries of other birds behind the shadow of a yew hedge

a tiny belly pants with breath its twisted beak and flat wings crushed on the dusty ground

the night isn't finished I guide you back to bed

*

the easiest path to the sea is through the wild roses the peeling lounge chairs on the terrace, lavender where the deer sleeps in the morning

headless tulips a smell of soap on the body

afterwards, no longer you alive there——

Your dinner spread among the universe

Your dinner spread among the universe. Can no longer taste. Afraid of faltering, absorbed in sterile rooms. Drive me the miles back to your bed.

It roars. Go back, go back the roar, we can't find cures written on our thinning walls. Tired hands keep calling you down. We aren't finished. *Wake me to sleep in you.*

Those who have received and been given, we can see it on their mouth and eyes. I want you to see it on my mouth and eyes.

That was yesterday when dreams walked us around the house. We spent the day thinking about porcelain instead of disease, if it will release you.

The doe is lost in the forest. Large brown eyes alert, limbs ready to jump. "Come with me." The immeasurable distance to where you stand.