

Andrea Winkler, *From the Grass*

Once I've set my foot on the meadow, my hand will pass over the tall grass, touching only the tips, and I will raise my head and say *yes really, my hand*, my distinctly real hand. Perhaps I will push my hair behind my ear, so that I could imagine the answer even more easily, a dark voice from the high grass in the direction of the sun, and at some words it almost dies away. All the way towards the tree the hand will do nothing else, and I won't either. For half a mile or a whole mile, while the tree moves neither further nor closer away, I would say *my hand, my distinctly real hand*, and at every moment, push my hair behind my ear, in expectation of the reply. If I, which can no longer be put off, set my foot on the meadow, in surroundings which are green, nothing but green, the green will remind me of the fences and bushes of the garden, which I swung to and from on my swing, exclaiming: Do you see the sea? And do you hear the whistle of the ship that is about to drop anchor in the harbour? As if I had not known, that it was a train arriving at the station, that the station was one of the smallest in the world, and the sound which the train sent into the garden, must almost be caught in the bushes that bounded it. The ship, listen, can you hear the ship coming in? That's what I said as I exchanged green for blue, and swung towards one who stood nearby, even if made of stone, with a cap slipping over his eyes. He had always stayed there, had never left, the water ran down his cheeks and never trickled into his skin, never reddened it, never salted it. For a while I hopped around him like a bird, from the window bench to the table, from the table to the chest of drawers, in order to top up wine, and later out of the room, up the stairs under the roof. I like to stay here, where the ghost comes from, I like to sleep up there, where you make me feel

afraid. And not lose my leg again! The sea roars in here, roars in the regular knocking of an iron bar on the locked door. I always get there one more time, there's nothing else I can do, even here, where I let my hand pass over the tall grass, raise my head and call, my hand, my distinctly real hand. My hand will come closer to the tree with me, climb up the trunk and the bark, but perhaps it wants to do something else, wants, as once before, to wrap itself round a piece of rope, knowing what has to be done, that is, nothing, almost nothing. Now I set my foot on the path, walk and walk and push my hair behind my ear, in order to hear the dark voice from the grass in the direction of the sky even more easily, perhaps. I once asked it question upon question: Do you still know, that - ? Do you still remember them coming to fetch me - ? A voice to ask something like that, an echo, nothing more! To turn towards an echo, as if it would then regain a shape, a body with clear contours, over which the hand can really pass as it does over the grass here! Then in time it grows almost to my mouth and into my nose, almost over my ears. Then the roaring is louder than ever and admonishes me, with the knocking all around, which grows louder with the roaring, to press my heel even more firmly into the ground because then at some point the voice will turn into a cave, in which I lie down. A cave way out there, with a narrow cleft through which the light falls? Into which I dip my hand, so that the wall then gives back the glow, a trace of shadow? Then I would hear the voice even more clearly, then it would certainly give me an answer: Would you once again like to speak from a body? Would you like to feel skin around you, hair, a hand, a distinctly real hand? There's laughter as once in my sleep, loud, bawling, far from any whimpering, which perhaps never followed at all. It remains like everything else, like the ship that was a train, the creaking of the wood as the swing goes back and forward, and the water that ran down the cheeks and dripped down, as if they were made of

stone. *Each drop the sea, please believe me! Each sound from the almost smallest station in the world a call to the fence! Peep through and you see nothing but the wind, which brings about all the movement, the hair blown one way and another, the legs, the long scarf around one's neck, all the fluttering around nothing!* The one who played the lion, remained lying in the sand and whimpers for me, whimpers because of all the misunderstanding, because he roared too often and too loud. Because I came back too often, despite the roaring, that was supposed to warn me? Such return increases fear and paralyses him who is used to fibbing in the ears of all, in order immediately afterwards as someone quite different to let his head drop on the plate. Does he want to disappear to somewhere different from me? And entirely from my field of vision? So that I call you neither by first name nor surname, simply say nothing at all any more? And no longer hear a voice, any voice, from the grass in the direction of the sky, no echo, which I answer, to which I add my humming. Hard, without this voice, without its echo, to continue on my way, my way through the tall grass to the tree, to climb up it, to let my gaze wander far far afield and to discern somewhere in the greenery a spot of colour, a breathing body, stretching out towards the sun, altogether alive. Then I would shape my hand into a funnel in order to amplify the sound of the whisper and slowly, really only very slowly let it rise: The ship! The sound which announced the ship, whistled from a locomotive out of the dim and distant past to me in my garden, and opened door after door for you, when you were still as far away as could be, neither cloud nor shadow. Nothing but a sound, a tone, an eddy between train and ship, to me, when I suddenly jump from the swing and run to the fence on solid ground, look through it in order to draw a horizon with my eyes, on which a raft is drifting towards me. That's how it must be! That saves me, that helps me to stay outside and later helps me

to hear the ghost in the attic. Does it too come out of the roaring? From the ebbing of the waves on the sand? Now, literally at this moment, your house floated in the air, was drawn in the air, and lured me long before I met you, long before we played lion and bird, lion and fly and then didn't play at all any more. Would I be able to ask once more, *are you still whimpering?* Would I be able to trust my sentences once more, when they call you by your first name or surname, trust my questions because there's hardly any answer. That only the voice never quite dies, when it becomes so quiet. That its echo still remains around me, murmuring from the grass in the direction of the sky, a knocking coming out of the roaring, which will at some point hardly press on my chest any more and take my breath away for only the twinkling of an eye. I am surely not walking here for the first time, I surely hear it all again and again. I pass my hand over the grass and say *my hand*, my distinctly real hand. Nothing apart from this touch now, nothing apart from this hoping now. Nothing apart from the walking, step by step towards the tree, with one, who is missed and will be missed for a long time yet, always perhaps, always always perhaps. Even if I crouched in the crown of the tree and acted as if I could play the part of him whom I lack, roaring with all my might like a lion, he would fail to appear. And that for sure. Who would wish to hear himself in the other and finally be utterly lost as he did so? Then I would rather pay attention step by step to the path, to the cloud, going along with me above, to the shadow, stealing along behind me, as if it was afraid for me, as if it had to protect me, even here. And push my hair behind my ear with my altogether real hand and ask the ground beneath me to remind me of the breeze, the wind that came from being on the swing, from my legs swinging back and forth to the fence and away again. Really you were the fence for me and even more the gap in it, and were the one who stood beside it and thought the water dripping from your own eye to be

unreal. Not at all in a face of stone! That made me begin again and again. Begin to call you by your first name, begin to call you by your surname and again and again for a moment to consider the story, which came with you to me, to be compelling and true. The fate of one who has no choice? Who can do nothing else but open the door and call into my movement, how distinctly green everything here is and not a trace of blue. And no roaring, possibly only a rustling of leaves in the breeze! Only I can no longer jump down, I can no longer jump down from the swing, no longer follow the calls and yet believe in the silence on the journey, that it leads directly to your house by the sea, where conversation with the fishes is possible. The fishes are gone and the salt on lips is gone, and where I walk and walk, now, my voice may hardly mingle with yours and be lost in it. Do you still know, that - ? Do you remember, the journey, the endless journey from place to place, and the man who pressed nothing but a stone into my hand? And said, *quick, run away, run away, while you still can. Do you really want to hear the repeated blows on the attic door, a ghost whom no-one presents?* And hold your breath and test, whether the roaring maintains itself there, where your fear lives. The fear you abandoned, the body you abandoned, your story which crawled into my hair, lay down on my chest, which, as it whirls dustily around me, hardly anyone will ever believe me. That a tone anticipated me, a train, a ship, through the gap in the fence! That it called me to you, that it drew your house in the air for me, just as if it could be entered with one small step! There I could be a bird, a fly, and stand at the window and laugh, if the assembled company of those with authority comes to an agreement on everything in a flash. And now and then jump from there to over there and top up wine and laugh a little more quietly, because everyone finds me so dreamy, not of this world at all. Your health! What grips them, that I'm still walking and walking, towards the tree, that my hand passes over

the grass and I call to them, *my distinctly real hand*. I doubt nothing, dear guests from earlier days, nothing! I will have wanted things to be different and, even if I walk like this for a hundred years and never move an inch, trace the drawing of my foot with my fingers and later hold it in my hands as a leaf. Bit by bit press my heel firmly into the ground, so that it digs a hole for my voice, for the echo of the echo and nothing more. As if that were nothing! As if all this trickery about nothing did not miss the whimpering of the lion. It will be fed up with the steppes and lie down close to the water, much later and once again later. It wasn't used to the same woman appearing again, but differently. Such a never-ending walk! Over to the tree, over to the tree, where the branches sink down to where I am and will raise me up, entirely. Where my eye meets with a spot of colour in the grass, which will have been expecting me for a long time. *Today do you recognise me? I heard the ship whistle for you and the train arrive at the smallest station in the world. I ran to the fence and closed my eyes.* So a new leaf will be turned over, for sure. Nothing apart from this touch, now, nothing apart from this hoping now. Nothing apart from my hand, my distinctly real hand, which on the way to the tree passes over the grass, and knows that it doesn't want much more. To feel a length of rope as it once did, a strong breeze, the salt from the water, which rolled down the skin as down a very smooth stone. Did I really talk to a stone? Did I repeat everything, as if question upon question could free the rigid expression, the frozen chin a little? Did that further increase the fear, the fear of what almost shattered fear during sleep, the fear of the banging of the rods on the attic door, the fear of the roaring? – *Only a dream, nothing more, only a dream!* – And my leg, my leg, that I can no longer feel, my leg that I have to drag behind me? Not now, not now, now I push my hair behind my ear, so that my voice doesn't die and something still rises from the grass in the direction of the sky. That it draws me back

as I walk forward and sends me up onto the tree, later. There I cover my eyes with my hand, my hand even softer from the blades of grass, look nowhere at all for a long time and find nothing, not the least trace of you, a path which I can take once more. Tree, door, fence, gap – it makes hardly any difference, it all wants the same thing from me, a now for another now, a whirl of dust, so much life. Then the walking here almost becomes again an endless journey for me from place to place, a journey, on which I believe the silence, that it's taking me directly into your house, your house by the sea. I only hear that, when I push my hair behind my ear, from there echoes even the murmuring of those in authority and of earlier guests, of those solemnly assembled round the table, who made a dream of me, a dark voice, which bends low as it hops. Is it still speaking? Is it still climbing through the grass as on bird legs, will it still risk a small leap? Like me from the swing once, once and many times, whenever the ship on the water called me and the train entered the almost smallest station in the world! And this tone drew a house in the air for me, one that I later took to be yours, one, in which someone's head sometimes almost falls on the plate. To be so tired! To become so tired from one moment to the next. To want to disappear? To no longer want to be addressed in one's own house? Wanting one's voice to die, the echo of the echo, which thunders so loudly in the ear? Then quiet, rather, stop quietly, rather, hold up one's hand, my real hand, which passes over the grass, forgets itself and forgets the answer, for the sake of which I push the hair behind my ear. A long walk, clouds above which go along with me, a shadow which creeps behind me, as if it were worried about me. Shall I turn round to it and ask it not to be afraid for me any more? And lower my shoulders, because then it has to keep still. I have to go on, on to the tree, and, before I climb up the trunk, lean with my back against it for a moment, to rest and no longer to think about what I

intended. If the breathing body in the grass deceives me once more? If the face that turns to the sun, dazzles me again and again? If it again takes my cry, the arrival of the ship, the arrival of the train as nothing but a lost tone from the dim and distant past, not even strong enough to whirl up dust? The dust of a story of one who could do nothing but draw a house in the air for me, against the blue, which he maintained was green and nothing but green, green as the fences and bushes around me. To bring such a picture to life, to awake in such a picture, as if there were no other, as if inhabiting this house were inescapable. I immediately let myself fall back into the shadow, which doesn't let me go, which remains with me, even if invisible. I'll come back to it, once I've reached the tree and its top seems infinitely remote to me. I could then also swing onto my hands, press my legs firmly against the trunk, let my face go red and pull in my stomach. Gather all my strength and pour it out when I see you breathing there in the grass, put my hands over my mouth and no longer call out at all, do you hear the ship today and the train from the grass in the direction of the sky? A tone which almost dies away and, quiet as it already is, blends with the knocking of the iron rods on the attic door. That you open it in my stead! There are still spooks and tricks up there, there the roaring is waiting for you, your fear. A while yet, a long while yet, longer than I need, in order to pass my hand over the grass and to say *my hand, my distinctly real hand*. My hand which still feels the rope of the swing around it, from which I have been unable to jump down for a long time. I can't be a bird any more, a fly, and bow down and hop, as if nothing else counted. If it didn't last much longer and I was unable imagine the whimpering one more time, finally? If absolutely everything disappeared from my field of vision, I, you, the head falling on the plate, out of complete tiredness, complete bewilderment, that all of that really happened and no trace at all of shadow will have been on the wall. It

comes when I press my heel deeper into the ground and it digs me a cave for the voice, the echo, which I don't want to lose. It binds me to the very first beautiful deception, to the train which was not a ship, at the smallest station in the world and the fence in which the sea roared and roared.

That's where I ran to and looked through to a horizon, on which a raft drifted towards me. That's how it had to be! It saves me when I can't see anything at all any more and have to drag my leg behind me, next to the one who doesn't manage to breathe and always lacks himself. Now perhaps not, now when I've no longer known for a long time where he's staying. But not in the grass? And no chest rises and falls? No drop of water reddens and salts the skin? And the tree, too, will be a bush and not stretch out its branches to me? What does it matter, I push the hair behind my ear, in order to imagine the answer more easily, the atomised story of one whose house for a moment was up in the air and in which later I didn't come round again. Going missing, and nevertheless saying *my hand, my distinctly real hand*. My hand, which at some point, when what rises from the grass towards the sky becomes weaker, will wrap itself round the rope of the swing and link me to the meadow, in which I now step by step walk towards the tree. Such a never-ending walk! I will have wished it to be different, but not doubt to have come again, to pass my hand over the grass and push my hair behind my ear. So I perhaps hear the answer, when the voice is already breaking off and falls silent. And hold my breath, a now for another now, the first deception, which anticipated yours: Do you hear the tone, which opens door after door for you, which lures me to jump from the swing, to look through the fence and to draw a house on the horizon, a raft, a dwelling for later.

(Translated by Martin Chalmers)