

Dag Solstad:

Armand V.

Footnotes to an unexcavated novel

Translated from the Norwegian by Erik Nordby

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This footnote, the very first one, is afflicted by its disrupted time perspective. It arises from a particular place that is linked to Armand's youth, even if it is not really about Armand's youth, but about his son's youth, as it is seen by Armand, a man in his sixties. Consequently, this footnote is a reflection on something that has taken place at a very different time, and in a very different place, and with individuals that are completely transformed from the main text it relates to, just like Armand, or those who are not even a part of this text at this time, just like Armand's son, who wasn't even born, indeed this is a time nearly 20 years prior to Armand's first encounter with the woman later to become the mother of his son, but even so the son is central in this footnote to a scene which sheds light on his father's youth.

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A morning, not that long ago, Armand awoke and got the idea that he had to visit his son, whom he hadn't seen in well over six months. He became wide awake when he reached this resolution, but just before that he had been in a shroud of mist, from where this clear notion emerged. Six months ago, when it was still winter in Oslo, his son had stayed with him for a while, owing to the fact that Armand was about to embark on an extended journey abroad, and it worked out well that his son, who lived in a small bedsit, a thirty minute walk away from Armand's apartment, moved in and took care of this spacious apartment while he, the father, was away. His son moved in with him three or four days prior to his departure, and was asleep in the guestroom when Armand left the apartment one dark winter morning to set out on his long

journey abroad by taking a cab out to Oslo International Airport, located at Gardermoen in the Norwegian inland, not far from Mjøsa. From there he took an early noontime flight to a central European city, where he immediately commenced on the assignment that had been the purpose of the journey abroad. He roamed around in Europe for weeks, by plane or by train, until he arrived in one of Europe's positively largest metropolises, the final stop on his long journey abroad, and where he had booked a hotel room for five nights. Nevertheless, he left this metropolis already on the second day, around noontime, due to the fact that one of the appointments he had scheduled for the day was not possible to cap off, and when he in addition had begun to suffer from a to him surprising, but acute, sense of boredom with being on this journey abroad, and in particular in this metropolis, that he had previously experienced such joy in visiting, and that he with great expectation had looked forward to seeing again, with his own eyes, and to wander the to him very appealing streets, he therefore decided to, as soon as the annulment of the appointment was a reality and he had hung up the phone, to pack his suitcases, take the lift down to the reception, settle his bill for the stay, and then take a cab out to the airport where he at the SAS-counter was able to trade in his ticket for the next available flight to Oslo with a vacant seat, since the undertaking that had sent him out on this journey abroad was of such an art that he had been given tickets of a sort that made such changes and switches possible. He came home the same day, arriving late in the afternoon at Gardermoen.

At around 6.30 p.m. he locked himself into his apartment. It was still winter, and the snow had been coming down heavy. Wet snow that had covered the shoulders of his coat in white, and that soon would melt now that he stood in the hall, and was about to hang his coat on a peg. He heard voices in the apartment, not just the son's, but also that of a woman. He put his suitcases down and took a few steps forward, towards the door that was half open towards the living room. But then he stopped abruptly. For inside the living room, through the half open door, he could see a terrible sight. A young man, dressed only in his underwear, kneeling in front of a young, fully dressed woman. A young degradation. His own son being degraded by a young woman, a girl. The girl tossed her head, and her hair swirled softly around her. She looked at him with scornfully, and the son shuddered in his own misery. Armand tiptoed petrified to his own room, at the other side of the hall, and closed the door carefully so as not to make a sound. He stood straight up in his room, in his winter

coat, which he had not had the chance to take off, and with the melting snow still on the shoulders. He was transfixed by the sight.

He remained like this not only until he had heard the young woman coming into the hall, with raging footsteps, stopped for a moment and calmly put on her outer garments, before the entrance door slammed shut behind her, but also until he heard that the son, as expected, had not left the apartment with her, but was still there. For he could, after a long moment hear the timid, almost self-eradicating footsteps out in the hall, pacing to and fro, until they ultimately vanished, but this time without the entrance door slamming locked again, on the contrary, the son must have moved in the opposite direction, with his self-eradicating footsteps, in the direction of the kitchen, and when Armand realized this, he continued standing as he was, paralyzed, straight up and down, in his winter coat inside his own bedroom, behind his closed door. He shuddered. The degradation. His half naked son on his knees in front of a woman, degraded. It was not something that could be wiped out. Never. The image was as truthful as a stain of blood. He did not know what to do with himself. Bloody. True. Blood guzzling, in the worst imaginary way, the worst he could think of, he waded in it, where he was standing. He had to get away. The son's self-eradicating footsteps returned, and now he entered the living room. As long as the son was in the living room he could not sneak out into the hall, pull his suitcases with him and exit. He sat down on the side of the bed, still with his winter coat on. He had to get out of this, but how? He stood up, walked over to the door and listened. He could not hear a sound. Where was the son? Was he still in the living room? If he was then he would be able to hear it if he stepped out into the hall and left the apartment. And the suitcases would be there still, perhaps the son had seen them already? But why did he not come to look for him here in the bedroom? The image of the degradation was dissolved in blood. He had to remain where he was until he could hear the son's footsteps again, and he was able to listen to where they shifted him over and over again, till he was certain that they had shifted him, the son, to the kitchen, and he, Armand, could make an undetected escape. At last this happened, and the father, who had long ago removed his heavy winter boots, took them in his hand and tiptoed quickly out into the hall, over to the entrance door, opened it, and then carefully shut it without a sound, by carefully turning the Yale lock.

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