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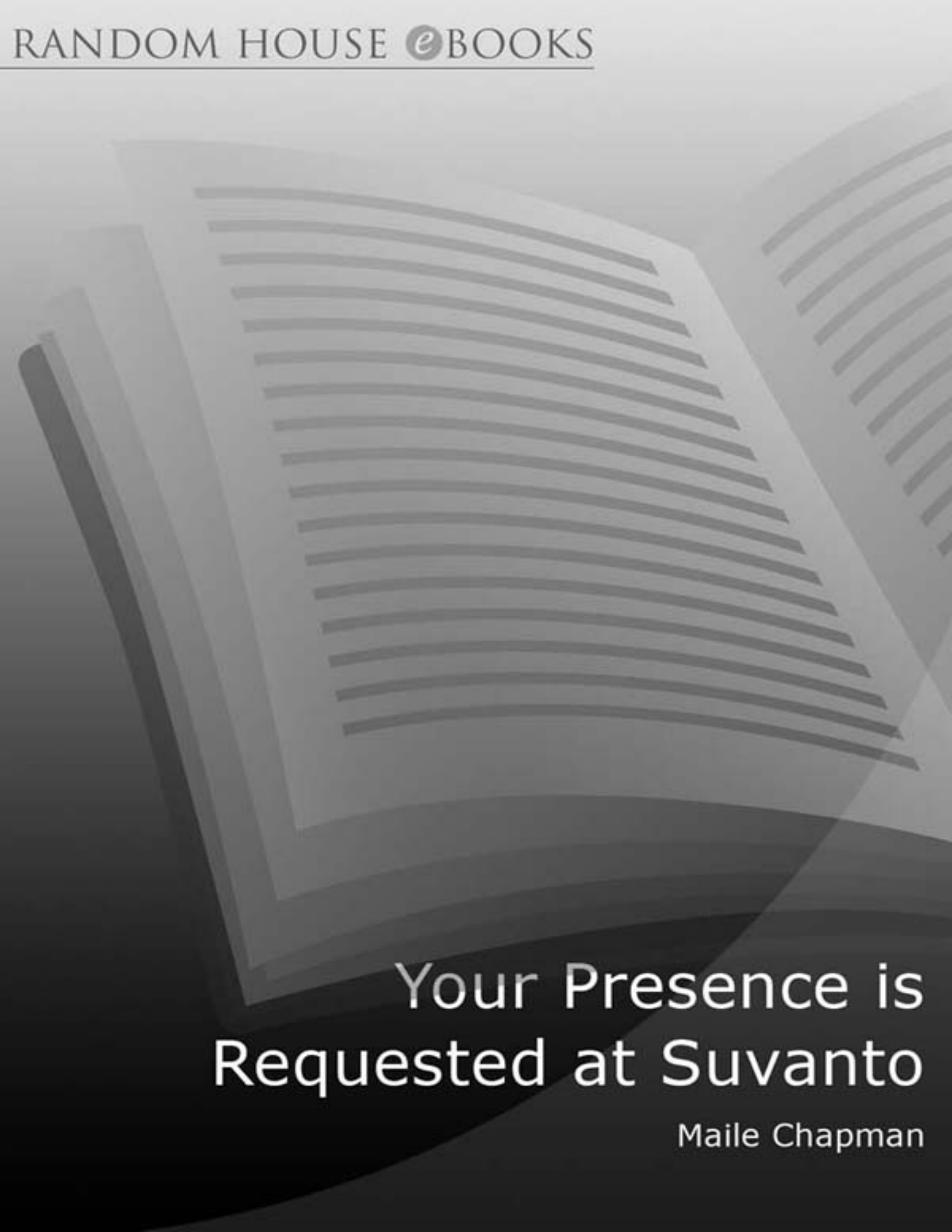

Your Presence is Requested at Suvanto

Maile Chapman

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LONDON

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YOUR PRESENCE IS REQUESTED AT SUVANTO

Maile Chapman was born in Honolulu and grew up in the Pacific Northwest. She received a BA degree from The Evergreen State College and an MFA degree from Syracuse University, after which she spent a Fulbright year in Finland, visiting early-twentieth-century institutional buildings, particularly hospitals. Her writing has appeared in *A Public Space*, the *Literary Review*, the *Boston Review*, *Best New American Voices*, and *Best American Fantasy Writing* as well as many other journals. She is currently a Schaeffer Fellow in Fiction and PhD candidate at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

And with these orders suddenly there stood
a gleam of awesome fire in heaven and earth.
The sky was still; the wooded glens were still
in every leaf, and you could hear no cry
of animals. The women had not heard
that roaring clearly, but they stood straight up,
with staring eyes.

—**Euripides, *The Bacchae***

At the most we gaze at it in wonder, a kind of wonder which in
itself is a form of dawning horror, for somehow we know by instinct
that outsize buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction
before them, and are designed from the first with an eye to their
later existence as ruins.

—**W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz***

And always keep a-hold of Nurse
For fear of finding something worse.

—**Hilaire Belloc, *Jim***

Prologue

We cared only for ourselves. We had large windows, and we watched the sky thicken with snow. We pulled open the metal door to the roof and positioned ourselves along the curving promenade, scraping our lounge chairs over the concrete, turning to absorb the winter sunlight through fur-lined hats and soft, generous coats. From the promenade you can see the cornerstone; we discovered this by carefully leaning out over the railing, into the air, looking down to where the building meets the ground. Pictures were taken, and we'd like to see them now, because we were beautiful then. We'd like to be beautiful again, and in memory we will be, and then we'll tell you all about that winter, including the early deaths, some say preventable, some say one, some say three, that happened at Suvanto. We're nearly ready, we're always almost ready and it takes only a little time for the vessels to flush and fill with memory, and then we can open our eyes, lift our heads, sit up in our beds, and turn to meet your gaze. We'll tell you what we remember; we love the body as you love a warm wet leather glove, pulled on snugly in cold darkness.

Propped and reading in the bed, pages moving behind the windows of the high private rooms, sometimes we're the ones doing that, but mostly we're happy downstairs, turning, moody in the black dress, hairpins in firelight, a winter tango, staring over one another's shoulders for a slow display of emotion in the cold, quiet country. Just for fun, just among these friends. And in retrospect we love the other creatures too, the dark birds and the small *siili,* our

little hedgehog, and that bowl of fish near the heating panel in the Solarium. The hedgehog we think we caught in photos. The fish are floating, pulsing like blood cells in the eye, pulsing like piano and especially violin, like a record turning unattended, fires lit and flaring against the windows, bright against the shadows of the blackening birch, the cedars, and the ever-present pines, the backdrop, the audience, it is so hard to catch attention from the pines. And they are thicker now. But we love the pines outside the windows of that room where we pushed back the couches and practiced, harmlessly. We love everything that we did. Including even the burden of hot water in the bowels, the squeeze in the viscera and trace of metal in the mouth, damp heat at the hairline, and the hidden unpleasantness that returns along with blood. We love these memories because pain is a haunting beyond the muscles and repetition serves a purpose. We are happy that we're happy now, and happy that we're safe now, and so we'll repeat this for you: we are safe and happy now, and this is what we wanted.

One

Julia arrives in August, on an afternoon that is warm and damp and thick with the smell of berries and pine hung low in a buzzing blue sky. Mosquitoes are fat and hysterical, moving in from the sunlit empty meadows to float in the shade, rising and hanging at the screened windows. They are hungry like a personal affront; it is some consolation to know they won't survive the coming drop in temperature.

The car hired to bring Julia here is parked and clicking in the circular front driveway. The windshield is roughened with the yellow and black viscera of insects. The driver is quiet and polite. He had no trouble finding the hospital called Suvanto Sairaala, and he has parked at an angle, expecting to pull away again shortly. He is standing beside the car, waiting. But Julia sits in the backseat, anonymous in her dark fur coat, motionless even after the driver opens the doors and the trunk and begins stacking a set of brown leather suitcases and three silver paper hatboxes on the hospital steps.

Sister Tutor is waiting as well, bent and looking in as an encouragement. But Julia doesn't move. Her legs are bare, she wears a summer dress, she looks ready but she is reluctant, with the cool, slow circulation of the elderly. She holds a pair of peeling snakeskin gloves against her lap. She'd been dozing, and now she is disoriented, and doesn't like that this is her destination. The tall curve of the hospital wall oppresses, and so does the wide shadow cast by the canopy over the front steps, with a verse from the *Kalevala,* just visible, inscribed around the frames of the

tall glass doors, which in English would be *Though disease has not subdued you / Nor has death thus overcome you / Nor some other fate o'erwhelmed you . . .*

Apparently, she doesn't have any money in her purse to pay the driver.

"Who put her into the car?"

"A man did, ma'am," according to the driver, and this man told the driver to watch the lady, because she might try to get out of the car, and he should prevent her, but that if by some quick opportunity she did get out he was to put her back and bring her all the way to Suvanto as planned. The man hadn't paid the fare ahead of time, saying it would be settled at the other end. But the lady hadn't any money of her own. The driver stands waiting. He would rather not have mentioned the fare. But it was, in fact, a long drive.

Someone (Julia's husband? or who?) has behaved poorly. Sister Tutor thanks the driver, and what she means is, *Let's not embarrass her,* and she tips the driver herself with the little bit of money she keeps in the tiny key pocket of her apron. He declines; he was not asking for a tip.

"For your kindness," she says, insisting, and sends him in to see the secretary for the rest of the fare. And then she climbs into the backseat beside Julia and introduces herself. They are, roughly, of a common age, and a similar size, one fair, one dark, and they sit together quietly, looking through the pines, up the slope in the direction of the doctor villas and the pavilion where the nurses live.

Sister Tutor can hear the whine of one mosquito bouncing in the car with them, excited by their breathing and by the odor of their skin. She can hear the movement of the pine branches shifting overhead, and outside, falling heavily through the air, Sister Tutor believes she can hear the heat of the sun streaming down through everything.

She listens, and then she says, “Well, Julia, let’s get out now.”

She speaks in Finnish, saying the name in the soft way, *Yulia.* She slides along the seat and holds out a hand. Julia’s eyes are flat and dark, partially obscured by kohl that gleams and gathers in her deep orbital shadows. She puts her cold hand in Sister Tutor’s, and it seems she’ll agree to step out now, and follow. Instead she pulls, slightly, as though trying to draw Sister Tutor back into the car with her. Sister Tutor, perhaps misunderstanding, puts out her other hand, offering a double grip, coaxing until Julia finally slides along the seat and puts her feet down on the gravel.

“Come upstairs,” says Sister Tutor, and what she means is, *Let’s take off that unsuitable coat, black in the heat, brown in the sun, and visibly full of dust.*

Julia won’t look at Sister Tutor, only down at her own feet, blinking slowly under heavy mascara. Still, she nearly misses one of the steps, and abruptly puts her hand back in Sister Tutor’s hard friendly fingers.

“Finnish or Swedish?” asks Sister Tutor.

Julia shrugs to say, *It doesn’t matter.*

They pass the reception desk, where Sister Tutor waves and the receptionist calls for an orderly to carry up the new luggage. Julia is so small that the hem of her coat touches her heels, the peach satin lining falling down on one side and gliding along toward the elevator as if this is already her nightgown showing underneath. Her hand in Sister Tutor’s is only the size of a twelve-year-old girl’s, but with ten ruby rings stacked between the swollen knuckles, and Sister Tutor squeezes gently, careful of the rings, the old bones, and tries to make her smile, a little, but Julia won’t answer, not even with faint movements of her fingers in return. And though she studies the walls, she does not

seem curious about the new surroundings, not curious at all.

Sister Tutor takes her up in the elevator, caged at the front and glassed at the rear, and they can look out over the grounds (and perhaps just see the car departing, following the road away). They walk together down the residential hall, built in a curve to open a wider surface on the southern side, to gather sunlight into the rooms. They follow the curve to Room 527. The bed has been fanned, the room recently aired, and the curtains are open. Despite the sunlight it is all as cool as camping. The windows are just above the level of the surrounding pine forest and the horizon is a rough, green, mesmerizing line duplicated by the bed: a folded green blanket, a thin blue duvet, and a small white pillow staring from the head of the bed like a square, featureless face.

Julia does not ask how to find the toilet or how to get a cup of coffee or anything else. With the makeup it may be hard to see, but she's gone waxy, lips too dark and harsh in the lipstick as she slips away from Sister Tutor's hand, sinking toward the bed (Sister Tutor guiding), her coat exhaling perfume, exhaling perspiration and the sweetish odor of tired rayon, and she shifts herself into position with the toes of her small black shoes pointed toward the ceiling. When Sister Tutor undoes the little silver buckles (*how on earth did she get them on by herself?*), there is a moment of navigating them over the swollen bones, the bunions of well-used feet, but then, of course, there's relief once the shoes are off.

Sister Tutor looks up to ask if there is anything more she can do but Julia has unfolded a white handkerchief and drawn it over her face, where it moves, trembling as it hides her. She's not crying, is she, embarrassed by the lack of money in her purse? Probably not. Probably she's tired now. Possibly this is even a dismissal. But that dark lipstick

will bleed into the cotton in a minute, showing through like a bruise, calling suddenly into mind the lady Sister Tutor had once seen hit by a cab, dragged in her dress and killed in the street. She'd been crossing to the Helsinki Ooppera, and she died in a crumple of torn taffeta on the black ice of the street while someone ran for help and Sister Tutor, much younger then, fell to her knees in the snow to hold the stranger's crushed hand, skinned and ominously slow to bleed, and waited.

But of course Julia is just going down for a nap, still holding her coat around her. And so, thinks Sister Tutor, pulling the blanket over her bare feet, *That's all right. But I'll leave the door open just a crack.*

It is unspoken in the air: What you need, Julia, is nourishment, clean cotton that breathes, and some sunlight every day while it lasts. Some diversion and some exercise and of course a firm routine. And we will give you that. And we will take away those constricting shoes. And get some others from town, we'll recommend which kind: wider, kinder, more comfortable and more suitable for what your life will be here now.

Julia sleeps. But later someone arrives to pull her sleeves, someone with clammy, uncareful fingertips. She moves aside the handkerchief as the coat is tugged away and looks up at a tucked lip, soft as a rabbit's, and a glimpse of healthy white teeth. The woman gathers the coat and then sinks awkwardly down onto one knee beside the bed, her joints cracking, her strong fingers gripping the edge of the mattress for balance. Her fat bun of dark hair, controlled behind a white cap, touches Julia's arm when she leans down to push Julia's shoes under the bed, out of reach.

"I'm Nurse Todd," she says, her hand braced on the edge of the bed as she slowly gets to her feet, moving as one who favors an old ache in the back. She is flushed as

she folds the coat over her arm. Julia holds the handkerchief against her face, watching with one eye.

“I’m the charge nurse for your floor. You’ll get the orientation when you wake up. You’re welcome to come to me with any questions, anytime.”

Julia stares up at Nurse Todd’s neck, her mouth, her ear, and then up to the gleaming weight of her hair, every part of her head, but won’t meet her eyes.

“Nurse Taylor says she’s sorry she isn’t here, but she’ll stop by later to introduce herself.”

Julia looks to the apron, the key pocket, and the fit of Nurse Todd’s uniform.

“Say something,” says Nurse Todd. “Speak when you’re spoken to.”

Julia says, “I’ll wait for the other nurse.”

Nurse Todd presses Julia’s coat to her hip with an elbow and leans in, reaching to quickly snatch away the handkerchief, heedless of ripping it.

“Don’t worry,” says Nurse Todd, folding the handkerchief and putting it away on the far nightstand where Julia can almost reach it. “I can look after you.”

But there are the teeth again, above, and a faintly cosmetic odor from Nurse Todd’s breath when she reaches across. Julia turns her head to avoid it. She’s chilled without her coat, and she wants a cardigan, but her bags haven’t been unpacked.

“You’re cold,” says Nurse Todd, who is not unobservant. “There isn’t nearly enough fat on you.” She touches Julia’s upper arm, and she squeezes, gently, to prove this. Julia moves to sit up, but Nurse Todd’s grip tightens heavily in response, contracting until her fingers and thumb meet in the damp fabric at the axilla under Julia’s arm.

“See what I mean?” she says. “Not enough flesh.”

Julia doesn’t react, doesn’t acknowledge the choking, thudding pulse in the vein and a growing faintness in her fingers. Nurse Todd gives Julia’s arm a tiny shake before releasing it. Then she flips the blanket up to Julia’s neck, tucking it quickly, in a practiced way, tightly, too tightly, so that Julia can’t easily move.

“I’m sending your coat to the coatroom,” says Nurse Todd. “I’ll be back.”

She turns in the doorway. Julia, temporarily immobilized, stares back at her with a look of helpless hatred, and thus Nurse Todd is satisfied.

The Head of Nursing, who in a more traditional, more hierarchical, more Victorian institution would have been called *Matron* in the old-fashioned way, had been fairly direct with Sunny Taylor in the beginning, extremely direct, by the Finnish standards of the day: “What we want from you is competent nursing, and also patience. You might get annoyed because of them. It should be said.”

“Right,” Sunny had said then, cool in white and blue. She had a pleasing forehead and a perfect hairline, green veins mild at her temples, nice eyebrows and such clear skin, so reassuring, all very much on purpose. With her school pin and enamel nursing emblem worn neatly, tightly at the closure of her collar.

“And common sense, because you’ll feel the isolation here. I notice you worked as a private-duty nurse.”

“That’s right,” said Sunny, legs crossed calmly at the ankles, not drawing attention to those years of twenty-four-hour shifts in homes, in bedrooms, those years that others hadn’t wanted, bad capricious pay and light sleep taken in armchairs, at bedsides, cash transactions leading into the lives of people who are always unhappy that a nurse is needed. Unhappy with her, because she was proof that someone there was ailing.

But the Head of Nursing is shrewd enough to know that some have their reasons to choose that life. She doesn't make Sunny elaborate on the years of making do with cupboards full of old towels cut into bandages and the sickening smell of a beef and cabbage dinner being prepared down the hall. She can well imagine Sunny, arriving in the clean uniform dress and bleached apron, neat cap tightly tied, entering the private homes to move the blankets, to change the saturated dressings. To reposition sweating limbs, to replace compresses, to readjust supporting pillows, and then to nap in the chair, then to wake stiffly, changing wet dressings again before going home to probably perform the same duties for the family invalid as well, doing something, for someone, every hour, on the hour, all day and every night. It's not uncommon to find oneself at the center of a ring of continuous, totalizing need.

"Your responsibility will be the top floor. The patients there are mostly the wives and daughters of the foreigners who work for Finn-American Timber. And so, only a few are local women. Only a few are Finnish women, you'll notice."

"Right," said Sunny.

"The timber wives are always up-patients. They really don't need much care."

That would be fine, she thought. That would be quite tolerable, because even though in her mind's ear Sunny heard the spoiled advance voices of the timber wives making their frivolous, unnecessary requests—*bring me my applesauce, rub my feet, where's my hairbrush, now hold the mirror steady while I fix myself*—she knew there would never be a repeat of the crushing responsibilities she'd faced in her off hours during the last several years, at home, with her mother. But of course it couldn't possibly be the same as anything at home, that was the point. She had written letters in response to advertisements from hospitals

far away, hospitals as far from home as possible. The letters were a slim bridge to a new place, and then very heavy wheels had been set in motion. A long voyage, some parts over land and others by ship, her ticket paid for and picked up at the terminal, a long time in transit to think, after which she was to find the train station in the center of Helsinki. Board the train to Turku. It will be marked. She would be met after the train. She had followed exactly the instructions sent in a letter by the Head. On the reverse of the letter were the same instructions written in Finnish, in case she went astray. If she went astray, she should show this to someone and they would put her right. She carried one small suitcase past the bright golden buildings around the harbor of Helsinki, finding the bus that would take her to the trains. She had pointed to the letter, not daring to try to say it: *Rautatieasema?*

"*Joo, kylla,*" said the driver. Sunny had money she'd exchanged on the boat and she held it out now in the palm of her hand, but the driver held up his own palm and did not take any; she didn't know if this was a good sign or a bad sign.

But that again was the reason she had left home, to know nothing and to be responsible for nothing except the work placed immediately before her. She had not been drawn all this way merely by the temptation of regular hours, the assurance of being paid, of being treated well. Who would choose such a rupture, such a risk, for merely that? No, she'd come looking for the promise of dislocation, and a quiet place in which to be left alone, protected by the order of an institution in which a natural division would be acknowledged, would be expected, a separation between herself and her previous life inserted as neatly as the emblem pinned to the uniform: *My working self will now be only a version of me, one version, and this dress, this face, this detached smile are all that you can claim of me while I*

look after you. She had brought no more than she could carry by herself. Everything else boxed and left behind her. Unsentimental. Eyes forward, the only way. Of course she is sorry. Of course she still doesn't know what the point could have been, why anyone should be made to suffer like that, and then to die like that? Her mother was dead now, finally, thank god. But she had died terribly, and Sunny could not scratch the memory out of her mind, her mother's face, more bony and more hard over time and coming to look eventually like a part of the carved wooden headboard behind her where she sat propped against a small hill of rubber-coated pillows. She had spent years and years propped in that bed. And afterward Sunny sent the mattress to the dump and paid a man to burn it there, because after everything she did not want anyone to carry it away and sleep on it.

"The language barrier . . ." Sunny said.

"You shouldn't worry about the language."

"I don't speak Finnish, I mean, I hope that was clear."

"No, how could you. It's a bilingual region." The Head of Nursing glanced to the window, as if to indicate the whole region, everything, the lakes, the water, even out so far as the archipelago of rocky forested islands in the distance, islands leading all the way to Sweden. Her eyeglasses caught the daylight, opaque, slightly opalescent, until she turned back, her eyes again professional, impersonal, small, blue, and level.

"Really, you can't know this, of course, but Swedish has been the dominating language on the coast for generations. Nearly everyone speaks Swedish, or can understand it. But we speak mostly Finnish here. We're switching our record keeping over, for the first time. It was always in Swedish before, everywhere, but times are different, and it should be in Finnish now."

“I’m afraid I don’t speak Swedish either.”

“It will be the case that everyone on your floor will understand English. They need English-speaking staff. Can you speak German?”

“A little, from school.”

“Then it should be true that Swedish will be easier for you. Swedish is easy to learn. Finnish is quite a lot harder. You can study with Sister Tutor if you want to try to learn. But the timber wives and daughters only come to Finland for a few years. They won’t speak Finnish.”

“I’d like to try to learn.” And then—“How do you say the word for nurse? In Finnish?”

“*Sairaanhoitaja:* that’s the word for nurse.”

Sunny had not tried to repeat it. “And Head Nurse?” she asked.

“*Ylihotaja.*” And Sunny could not repeat that, either, because spoken Finnish seems to take shape high in the mouth, but low in the throat, counterintuitively for native speakers of English.

“It takes some time,” said the Head of Nursing. “It’s hard to learn the language and it’s hard to penetrate this culture. It takes time to make friends in Finland.” The Head’s voice was deep, not especially sympathetic but not unsympathetic either. “And for those on your floor, it is clearly easier to come here, to the hospital, than to try to adjust. That is something you’ll notice, that they are perhaps lonely, not sick, just lonely. They often come from the outlying timber towns, and they don’t always wish to go back.”

Ah, thought Sunny, *I’m a fool*; she’d thought the Head was speaking to her personally about her new life here, her new role, about settling in, about the possibility of making friends, and not just about the difficulties that those timber

wives had encountered and that had sent and kept them here.

No matter; Sunny didn't care whether she fit in with others, because there would be the small private apartment of her own in which to spend the evenings, a bedroom, a sitting room, a washroom, and her days and nights would finally be as different from one another as the bright and dark faces of the moon, for virtually the first time. Cross the stairs, step over the threshold, shut the door. Time would be divided, and privacy respected.

These years later Sunny's list of things to accomplish in the afternoon includes seeing to the new arrival, Mrs. Dey—Julia, that is—who will live now for a time in Room 527, on Sunny's own top floor, between the reassuringly glossed walls where everything is green and blue, the curtains drawing the eyes outward to the pine trees and up to the beginning of the rough stone outcrops beyond the far side of the water. She finds Julia sitting in one of the two chairs by the window, having slept again and woken to find herself alone, arms bloodless and tingling. The unsheeted bed shows signs of her struggle to get up.

Sunny taps the door: "Mrs. Dey?"

Julia turns to Sunny, expressionlessly, so it seems, but Sunny is of course aware of the assessment taking place; on a first meeting the new upper-floor patients customarily look to her face, as dictated by good manners, but they cannot seem to concentrate on anything she says until they have allowed their attention to glide over her appearance—dress, shoes, natural endowments, including prettiness, or lack thereof—believing, somehow, that Sunny does not notice. If they are polite they try to do this without allowing their eyes to move in the sockets, or they wait until she turns aside momentarily. They want to know what age she is: Younger than themselves? Older than themselves? Does

she look smart? Clean? Worth listening to? Now, from Julia, Sunny feels undisguised attention, moving from her shoes up, without the pretense of absentness they normally adopt to mask the looking. Sunny will do the same to her, of course. But later, in ways that Julia won't necessarily feel.

"Am I allowed to leave this room?" Julia says.

"Of course you can leave your room. Do you need the toilet?"

"Is that any of your business? I need my cardigan and I want my coat."

Sunny pulls out the second chair and sits down, a gesture intended to be soothing. "You should come and go as you like. And we'll unpack for you. Didn't Nurse Todd send someone in to do that?"

Sunny smiles. Her eyes are blue with a ring of gold pigment, and her hair, blond and early silver, is bobbed and wavy behind a white cap worn low and back to one side, tied with a wide white ribbon. Lovely, traditional, clean, tight. Her posture and that neat bow in the ribbon conspire to say, *I am busy, but I care about you; believe in me, do what I tell you to do, and you will be well, almost certainly.*

"I was asleep," says Julia, "but the big bitch came in and took my coat." Her eyes have swollen during her nap and the bags below them are taut, like sausage links in shiny casings. *Too much sodium, and a rude mouth,* thinks Sunny, making mental notes, and adding appraisingly. *we'll wash your hair as soon as possible.*

They look at the forms together. Sunny can fill them in by rote, not necessarily because she understands all of the Finnish, but she knows enough, has been learning and practicing when she can. Julia looks down at the stack of papers in silence.

"*Sinun etunimi?*" Sunny says, pointing, but Julia says nothing.

“*Mitä sinun etunimi on?*” she says again.

“Dey,” says Julia.

“*Ja sukunimi?*” Sunny waits for the rest. “Your full first name?” she says.

“Julia.”

“Don’t you understand Finnish?”

“English is better,” says Julia, and then Sunny is embarrassed, because Julia apparently doesn’t have the patience for her grammatical mistakes. Sunny completes the forms without looking up again, and when Julia has signed her name she sweeps the papers together into a file. She opens the wardrobe and takes out a stack of folded mesh laundry bags. With a laundry pen from her apron pocket she prints DEY across the top of each.

“White bag for white laundry,” she says in English, “blue for the mixed, and pink for the foul. Your garments will come back with tags sewn in, but I recommend you put your initials on the inside seam of anything you treasure. Some of the ladies on your floor aren’t particular about whose underpants they put on.” She offers the pen, a loan.

Would Julia like to see the rest of the building?

“I suppose,” she says, reaching for a supporting arm, for Sunny, whom she understands is of value as a first ally, a clear and slim authority in blue. More susceptible than Nurse Todd. And less peripheral than Sister Tutor. She holds Sunny’s arm tightly, antagonistically. *I don’t want to be here, but since I am, I will be your problem.*

At the nursing station Sunny stops for a word with Nurse Todd, and before she speaks the other says, “I’ll have a girl in now to unpack for Mrs. Dey.”

“Send up something cheerful,” says Sunny, and what she means is, *This patient is cranky and unpleasant.* Julia is looking down the hallway, back toward her door, which she

may or may not be able to distinguish among the others along that curving yellowish expanse that now seems to hum, a little vertiginously, in her vision.

Julia steps carefully, pushing her feet gently forward in the slippers they've given her, and Sunny thinks, toenails? Calluses? Someone will have to check.

Nurse Todd sends a message down for a welcome bouquet: ferns and wildflowers from the yard, and one small lily from the greenhouse, from a small bunch cut to supplement the usual sprays of happy greenery left in the wards and dining room. The lilies are a project of the Mrs. Doctors. Eventually, they may even try orchids.

One of the girls will make a small but nice arrangement and bring it up to Nurse Todd, and it will sit for a moment on the desk while she writes a small stiff card: *Tervetuloa,* from the Staff of the Orvokki Ward. By the time Julia sees the lily it will have relaxed a little, softening in the air. They've been kept since cutting in the seldom-used walk-in cooler in the clinical wing—in other words, the mortuary. But does anyone need to know this? No, dear, they really don't.

"I hope you'll let me know if you need anything," says Sunny, as they stand, side by side, waiting for the elevator.

The perfunctory phrase, so often repeated, will eventually lose meaning, because, of course, isn't that why we're here? So that Sunny can look after all the details of our daily lives? At the moment Julia wants her coat back. Nurse Todd has had it shaken and hung in the coat area near the front entrance, where they find it looking a little shocked upon the hanger. She wants to wear it indoors and so she shall, though Sunny can hardly find her arm to support in the wide sleeve. Is support really necessary? She lets go, and Julia pinches her hand back into place. Julia does not listen well during the tour. She turns her head

only occasionally. Her dark hair is caught up with glinting hairpins hardly disarranged by her enforced, motionless nap on her new narrow bed.

In the entry hall Julia meets the unsmiling receptionist, who shows her the book near the front door that she should always sign when going out and when returning, to keep the staff informed. For her own good. The receptionist tells her this in Finnish and Julia's eyes drift away. The receptionist repeats the instructions in Swedish.

"*Okej,*" says Julia. To Sunny, she says, with great exaggeration, "I understand."

And then she is shown the long hallway of offices in bright pine, the glass doors of the administrators' rooms that she will probably never need to enter.

"Why show me, then," Julia says.

"There are other rooms you might need," says Sunny. "Come this way." Sunny shows her the dining room, long and narrow, the two rows of tables, the windows extending up to the ceiling, where on this day in August the top panels have been cranked open with a long metal mechanism to keep the fresh air moving. The windows look out over a clearing behind the hospital and the room is filled with natural light. Julia stares up at the ceiling, painted a bright, slick red as a spur to appetite.

"You can sit wherever you like at mealtimes," says Sunny. "We don't have any fixed arrangement. We have a flexible social plan. We think it's better if the patients who are well enough to come down can all mix together. And if you don't feel well some day you can let one of us know by turning the small red tag outside your door, and you'll get your meals in your room."

Julia lingers at the edge, reluctant to step out among the chairs, empty evidence of so many other people all around, unseen now in other parts of the building.

“A cafeteria,” she says finally. “How depressing.”

“It’s not a cafeteria. And everyone here is very friendly.”

“I’m sure,” says Julia. “Can’t you afford tablecloths?”

“There are tablecloths for dinner. It’s pleasant.”

“I don’t believe you,” says Julia.

“You’ll see, tonight,” says Sunny, “at dinner.”

Sunny resists the urge to say anything sharper, an urge flicking in her head like a nerve; the tablecloths are in no way her responsibility. But of course Sunny will practice patience instead. Of course she will, because Julia is infirm, after all, and correspondingly grumpy. Sunny is under no personal obligation to like her, and whether she does or not shouldn’t matter, because personal feelings are routinely set aside, for the greater good. Isn’t that obvious?

Across the hall Sunny quietly opens a wooden door and looks inside to see if the chapel is occupied, hesitating in the doorway. Julia looks over her arm, sees the cross hanging empty on the far wall, lit by the greenish daylight from the uncurtained windows on the shady side of the building.

“No thanks,” she says, loudly, then hides her face behind the collar of her fur like an imaginary countess. And she does not look at Sunny, but shuffles ahead, awkward in the slippers, away and down the hall.

They see the Green Room, filled with pots of fleshy foreign leaves as moist and supple as the inner fold of an elbow, and they visit the Solarium, which Julia admires for the windows, but the Radiant Room doesn’t look as cozy when the hearth of Finnish granite is cold and empty, and she is unimpressed.

“Never mind,” says Sunny. “Just wait until it snows. You’ll be glad to sit there.”

Sunny knows that Julia will need to be prodded into the schedule, and this is normal. Sunny finds her for dinner that first evening seated in the chair in her room, looking out the window. She's reapplied her makeup, and she's wearing a black skirt and blouse with a fawn-colored ribbon at the neckline. Some might say it is a little too formal, perhaps a lot too formal; these are not prosperous times for most. Sunny takes her downstairs and helps her choose a place to sit, under the red ceiling with neighbors in plainer knit dresses. She introduces Julia around. She finds out about the meal. Julia will accept the roast, the rutabaga, the buttermilk, the heavy plain cake. She looks up, as if hoping to be contradicted, but now she has had her allotment of attention for the day. Sunny will leave her with the others and retire for the evening.

Sunny says, "Enjoy your dinner, ladies."

Oh yes! We love dinner.

And then Julia exhales, and sits back in her chair, looking down at the tablecloth and waiting for the inevitable tiresome conversation to begin. And it does.

There is a small problem, though. When Julia turns to stare at those seated at the other tables a blossom of blood appears above the ribbon of her neckline. And not until it grows, and another appears on her throat—a spot of blood sliding greasily in the wrinkle of her skin—does Mrs. Numminen, on her left, feel compelled to look away discreetly; they've spoken a little, mostly about the mosquitoes. Julia touches her throat and finds blood on her fingertips. She takes out her handkerchief, with its blot of dark lipstick, and Mrs. Numminen looks away again, assuming that Julia is bringing up blood, somehow.

"What is this, now," says Sunny, when Julia appears alone upstairs, wandering past the nurses' station just as Sunny herself was to step away through the door at the end

of the corridor toward her own private rooms. She pulls Julia closer to the light.

“It’s broken glass,” she says. “Little shards. How did it happen?”

The answer is that Julia had been pressed to hurry that morning, pressed to leave her apartment without any help. She’d packed her bags by dropping cosmetics and medicines in among her clothes, including the ones she wore to dinner . . .

“I brought everything,” she says.

It is nearly time for Sunny’s own dinner but instead she strips Julia, privately of course and with the door closed, and removes the glass splinters with the aid of a strong lamp, her magnifiers, a pair of tweezers, and a cotton ball dipped in disinfectant.

“Raise your arms,” she says, and she can be terribly kind, now that there is work to do.

There is a line of soft gray hair under Julia’s arms and another faint trace down the center of her back. And there are scars along her arms, a history of dark injections at intervals on her loose, cool skin.

Sunny steps out, has a word, and a ward maid turns on the taps and fills one of the four deep freestanding tubs in the shared bathroom down the corridor. Sunny brings a dressing gown, and Julia slips it on over her half-slip and sturdy black brassiere. She is wearing her own terrible shoes, worn to dinner, fished out from under the bed with a brass-handled cane unpacked from her suitcase. She follows Sunny slowly down the hall, easily enough, until Sunny opens the door to steam and tile, the communal bathroom, warm and damp with a high, tiny window.

“No,” says Julia.

“I’m afraid you need a bath,” says Sunny.