

I get an invitation to a memorial gathering, 29 June at Blossom

to-day or today?

sorry, I know you're writing

I'll stop pestering

you coming over tomorrow?

Bertram misses you

was it tonight you had a date?

Your boyfriend's a cad for being so late

two old men playing pool  
the one comes over and stands before me

well I say

he isn't my boyfriend

I'm sitting on a high bench against the wall  
I've bought two beers and almost finished mine

then he's a cad *and* a fool. Cheers

cheers I say

he keeps standing there

you look goddam gorgeous

he smiles

a small tuft of hair poking up oddly from the centre of his  
scalp

one doesn't leave such a lovely lady waiting

I smile back

it annoys me not to be able to touch the floor

Jørn, the other man shouts

it's your turn!

they try to impress me with their play  
measuring angles, aggressively chalking their cues

Wrecking Ball on the stereo

and a table of young teens in the corner  
boarding school kids maybe, playing dice and  
singing along. Tinsel's draped above the bar

it's the end of April  
I've just turned thirty-three

the third stage of youth

I read that somewhere

I finish the bottle and weigh  
drinking the other beer too

then he arrives

in a way-too-warm jacket, his hand feels dry

we met on Tinder  
he's a documentary filmmaker

prefer shadows to sun, Burroughs  
to Bake Off and I've read more books  
than most, he wrote in his profile

awful

but then there was a photo  
where he squinted a bit with one eye

young man

Jørn's there right away pointing his beer at him

and I'm chuckling

because the documentary filmmaker's  
forty-three and divorced with two kids

you're simply ill-bred

the documentary filmmaker looks confused

you don't let a dish like this sit and grow cold

my laughter rings out loud and strange  
and I feel suddenly irresistible

toothsome and savoury

and I hop down from the bench  
have an urge to turn everything up  
the music, my feelings, to kiss him  
and buy a long line of shots, make something light up

but then

hours of plodding dialogue

I ask and ask

and when I say something his gaze drifts  
and focuses on something somewhere behind me  
so I'm tempted to turn and check out  
what it might be

he crosses one leg over the other and looks at me

so what about you and kids?

I take a pull on the beer he's bought

it's wheat beer

I don't like wheat beer  
it tastes foul and yeasty

what do you mean?

well is it something you've thought about?

I take another pull

you want to have kids?

yeah



the boarding school kids shriek with laughter, one of them  
has said something funny, the pool players have gone home  
the bartender flashes the lights off and on

or no

last call!

I push back my chair

maybe

fine he says and grabs a handful of peanuts  
because I just need to be straight with you

I've had all the kids I'm going to

he throws them into his mouth

so it's just not in the cards

he chews and chews

for me

to have a kid with you

I'm a writer

I'm working on my second book

a novel about the Polish portraitist Lysander Milo

I'm sitting at the computer with earplugs in  
the flat next door is being totally renovated

Milo worked in a cement factory

in Bydgoszcz in the sixties

one day he vanished, age twenty-three  
and in a big basement room they found more than  
a hundred busts in cement, sculpted in secret  
depicting a cross-section of the factory workers

a few years later Milo turned up in Warsaw

he had a huge breakthrough  
before he disappeared again for good

Bydgoszcz

how do you even say that?

I massage my temples

the workmen have been at it for three weeks  
tramping up and down the stairs  
starting early in the morning with their steel-toed boots

Sweet Dreams Are Made of This

and the radio blasting, today they're drilling into something

I page through photos of the busts

they're eerily beautiful

I saw them by chance last winter in Berlin and  
was captivated. The faces rough and simplified

yet at the same time inscrutable

soulful

I could stare at them forever

live people in cement

they study me as much as I study them

I take a deep breath

the drilling grows louder

the coffee in my mug moves almost imperceptibly