

# Cappelen Damm Agency *Fall 2021*



*I can often see it in others. I don't exactly know how I can see it, because it's fleeting. It inhabits their face. It's in their skin, around their mouth, in their eyes. Some women carry the pain in their face. Men too. It's difficult to pin down, it easily slips away. It defies youth, it defies beauty. I've seen it in others since I was a child, before I knew what it was. I've seen it in children. I've seen it in elderly women. Some days I've seen it in myself. In my pores, in my skin tone, in the lines on my face. If I don't watch out, it seeps through.*

Liv is a nurse. She takes good care of herself and others. She is a normal person hiding a normal secret. One night, many years ago, she was raped. By a man she willingly followed home. The Power is a novel about power, but also a book about having the power. The Power to move on.

## The Power

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**The Power**  
Heidi Furre

Heidi Furre  
*b. 1986*

Heidi Furre (b. 1986) made her debut 2013 with the novel *The Paris Syndrome*, to critical acclaim. She has since written two more novels. In addition to her writing, Heidi spends the majority of her time working as a photographer.



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Sample translation by Wendy Gabrielsen

*Makta (The Power)*  
by Heidi Furre

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Every day I go past a red brick house. On the door there's a wreath that changes with the seasons. Now it's October. The wreath is made of white heather and ochre-yellow velvet ribbon. It'll soon be Halloween, and then pumpkins will appear on the steps. Small ones, with different patterns and colours. Not the vulgar orange kind, but perfect little plants. And lots of them, tumbling down the steps. I don't really know, but they'll probably cost a thousand kroner. The wreath was maybe five hundred. There's a Louis Poulsen lamp hanging in the window, which I know cost ten thousand.

A different family used to live there earlier. A husband, wife and two attractive children. They sold the house for several million kroner. Worth knowing, as you don't get much for your criminal injuries compensation in today's housing market. Something had happened one night. The woman who lived there ran out into the street, with no clothes on. She was screaming her head off. A neighbour had thrown her a down jacket, before the police came and wrapped her in a foil blanket. They carried the man out on a stretcher, in handcuffs. The people living there now know what happened. They sleep in the same bedroom. Their children have their own bedrooms, their safe children's lives. Soon they'll decorate their Christmas tree. There's nothing in that house I want. I'd rather not look through the kitchen window, at the design lamp and the fitted bookshelves. I hurry past, because the house takes me back to a room that I don't want to be in. I can't think this way, as then there would be no other rooms I could stay in. Because what I'm trying to avoid is everywhere. All rooms have their own pendulum; a room can swing from safe to unsafe in a moment. My job is to listen for that pendulum. I don't have perfect pitch but not it's not far off. A snake listens for danger with its whole body, feeling the ground vibrate beneath it. It listens with its scales and skeleton, before attacking its prey or darting into the bracken.

I find what happened in the house bizarrely comforting. Knowing I'm not the only one. Knowing it's not possible to be somewhere you shouldn't be. That woman was safer outside on the street, naked, at night. Safer than in her own bed. So then I'm free, because there are no rooms that are safe. I usually call my husband when I walk home at night. I say:

Now I'm going past the bus shelter.

Now I'm going past the apple tree.

Now I'm going past the brick house.

Now you must run out and find me if something happens.

We stay on the phone until I'm home. It's not that I'm scared but calling him on the way home has become a ritual stored in my body. It's my way of being in the world. The way I walk and see things changes with the light. Walking through the park in the dark is out of the question; there are invisible boundaries there at night. I go home under the streetlights. Let me keep deceiving myself that the safest

place is at home.

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The story of the woman in the street is considered extreme. It caused a scandal, but they got a lot of money for the house. The viewing was full of families that could pay whatever it took. All the neighbours were there too, mainly to look for answers inside the house. But it was just like everyone else's, with nice furniture and new surfaces. What had happened was terrible. It couldn't happen here. This was an exception. But I know it exists. It's in me and in others. It's in one in ten women, apparently. It. Everyone agrees that it shouldn't exist and yet it happens. What people say and what actually goes on is not the same thing.

I can often see it in others. I don't exactly know how I can see it, because it's fleeting. It inhabits their face. It's in their skin, around their mouth, in their eyes. Some women carry the pain in their face. Men too. It's difficult to pin down, it easily slips away. It defies youth, it defies beauty. I've seen it in others since I was a child, before I knew what it was. I've seen it in children. I've seen it in elderly women. Some days I've seen it in myself. In my pores, in my skin tone, in the lines on my face. If I don't watch out, it seeps through.

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For a long time my favourite film was *Pretty Woman*. It's about a sex worker who is saved by a client. The first time I saw it I was babysitting my neighbour's kid. They had a TV room in the basement and a satellite dish. They came home at ten, paid me in cash, it felt good walking home in the dark with that green paper money in my pocket. I loved Vivian in high heels, dressed as a hooker, but I also loved her in a suit. I rummaged around in my wardrobe for some tarty clothes, obsessed with her blonde wig. I put on a swimsuit and a skirt, stood in front of the mirror and longed for a life in Beverly Hills. Vivian wanted sex but wouldn't kiss men on the mouth. I didn't understand her, but realised I had to learn to think like that too. I thought that one day it would help me if I could disconnect my head from my body. At the beginning of the film there's a line about someone finding a murdered woman in a dumpster. It was a Friday night and I was eating sweets. I didn't understand the scene with the skip, but I was so relieved when Richard Gere picked Julia Roberts up from the street. The aesthetic of the film was so appealing, I wanted to live like that. Lovely outfits, shiny latex, shiny hair. I liked beautiful people and I still do. I look at Julia Roberts' face today, and it's exactly the same as it was in 1990. My skincare specialist has told me that everyone has a little work done in their late thirties. You have to start before it's too late, halt the ageing process before other people expect you to.

I think about all the things I can do to my face. Looking good is a kind of pretence, where part of the game is not to reveal yourself. When I go out without makeup, of course I don't go out without makeup. First I put on a day cream with a little colour in it, some concealer under the eyes, a hint of bronzing powder on the cheeks and forehead, and finally some eyebrow pencil. A bit of colour on the lips. On the way out of the door, I go back into the bathroom and spray my face with moisturising mist. I prefer not to say I spend much time on this. That's why I must first spend time on the procedure itself, then spend time covering it up. And finally spend time feeling ashamed by my endless obsession with my own appearance. All these units of time are not visible, they're hardly visible even to myself. Planning an outfit is a complicated jigsaw puzzle. It must seem last minute although it's actually quite the opposite. Like Patti Smith in new white sneakers. Suzanne Brøgger's eyeliner. Meghan Markle after giving birth.

Like the number of hours Christine Blasey Ford spent at the hairdresser's before addressing the Senate. Or Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, well dressed, young and pretty. Red lips, toned-down eye makeup. She knows that this means something, especially if you're going to stand up and say something important. The duties are only obvious when I stop doing them. Their absence shows on my face so quickly, in just a few hours. If I get the flu or a tummy bug, everything falls apart. I get up, use the little energy I have to make breakfast, packed lunches, and zip our little children into their big snowsuits. As soon as they're out of the door, I go back to bed to sleep off my fever. That's when it comes. It's an ugly, exhausted mess. The older I get, the more expensive it is. It's harder and harder to keep up. I drop the kids off at the nursery, and notice a mother hanging up her vintage Max Mara coat on her child's hook. It must have cost five thousand kroner. I go to a meeting for the parents and all the mothers are pretty. The person next to me is wearing cashmere loungewear. Two thousand. I can just sit there studying someone on the other side of the room. Every detail is just right: the varnished nails, perfect hair, clothes that look new. The only thing that's off are the blue plastic shoe covers, but I can see her high heels underneath. When the introductions start, I say my name is Liv, I'm Johannes and Rosa's mum. Of course I've done my homework. My hair is held up with a tortoiseshell clip, like middle-aged women often have. I've used concealer on the circles under my eyes and stress acne on my forehead. Nice clothes, but not nice enough to make the others feel underdressed. I have understood what is expected of me. That there is no goal, just an endless balancing act between seeming natural and controlled. Every time I go to the dentist, I need to take the rest of the day off. I tell them at work that I'm having my wisdom teeth out, but it's just a normal check-up. My dentist is kind. She has long dark hair. Her teeth are white and her fillers quite subtle. At first I lie in a dimly lit room. I gratefully borrow the duvet they offer me. The dentist leaves the room. I lie there looking up at the ceiling, listening to the hum of the ventilation system. There's a white curtain that stops people from seeing me lying here. Rooms like these are secret clubs, only for those of us in the know. A safe place for the initiated. The dentist comes back in and asks me to drink some medication. Asks me how my dental anxiety is. I say it's okay as long as I can take this. Knock back the medication, even though I know it's not strong enough. Half an hour later I get this tingling feeling all over my body. I'm not scared, just too drowsy to do anything about it. "You're so kind to me," I say to the dentist when she helps me into the treatment room. I know I'm not going to collapse from one single dose, but let her support me for the sake of appearances. Anyway, it feels good to be held like this. I lie back in the dentist's chair and stare again at the ceiling. The worst part isn't all the work done to my teeth. It's looking up at the ceiling, just waiting until it's over.

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I cut the children's little nails and vacuum the bits up off the floor. Occasionally, pieces of nail turn up where I least expect them to. I can find them caught in my wool jumper while I'm out. Suddenly I see one, a little crescent. I feel moved to think that it's followed me the whole day, a tiny bit of my child's body. But at this precise moment I don't think about these nails in a sentimental way. I put away the vacuum and go into the kitchen. Make four rounds of sandwiches, put them into lunch boxes, wash grapes and tomatoes, dry them with some paper towel and place them on top. Sometimes I think about what happens when the kids are given their lunch boxes later in the day. How they'll need help to open them. Then I always regret I didn't make better sandwiches, didn't do anything creative that particular day. I often do that, regret trivial moments from the past.

I get Rosa dressed, brushing her tangled hair while she runs around me. Terje comes out of the shower, Johannes dresses himself. I can see him putting his jumper on back to front, but don't interfere. Every



morning it's like waking up in the middle of a maze; it changes slightly each day. Unexpected developments and obstacles arise. An argument, a missing piece of clothing. Plastic bags full of rubbish in the hall. As soon as the front door opens it goes quiet. The moment we've all been working towards. The kids charge out into the world, everyone waves to everyone. Everyone loves everyone: Mummy loves Rosa, Rosa loves Mummy, Daddy loves Mummy, Mummy loves Daddy, Daddy loves Johannes, Johannes loves Daddy, Mummy loves Johannes, Johannes loves Mummy, Daddy loves Rosa, Rosa loves Daddy. I lock the front door and go into the bathroom. Blow-dry my hair, cleanse my face, apply serum and day cream. Don't need to check the time as I've got the late shift. The house is quiet. I take out makeup brushes and small containers in different colours. I paint a new skin over my skin. Paint new colours on top. Make myself better, as I ought to. I've learnt to enjoy this routine. I always used to spend these moments dreaming. In my teens I used makeup to become someone else. The goal was in the future, that was where I was heading. Painting on a new face in the morning was vital; it would lead me to this goal. I didn't know that I would stay in this house, that my life would be mapped out. I am middle-aged. Look at this, this is my life. That's how it turned out. I'm not damaged.

I go into the kitchen and clear away the breakfast things. Light a fire in the stove and do the laundry. From the kitchen window I can see that the neighbour's TV is on. Two people are talking in a studio. On the table between them there's a bible. My neighbour always watches this channel, the screen glows all year round. I set up my laptop on a little stool and roll out my yoga mat. Search for my favourite yoga instructor's name. She comes across as cheerful and confident, even though everyone that does yoga is disturbed. I do as she says for thirty minutes. It makes me feel tired and calm. Towards the end of the video, she asks me to sit in a comfortable position and let my thoughts drift away. I do as I'm told. Close my eyes and breathe. I can hear faint breaths coming from the yoga instructor. When the clip has finished, there's an advert for a podcast about a young woman's murder. I close the lid and get ready to go to work.

My job is to look after the young, not the old. You don't have to be old to live in a care home, you just have to need care. One of the residents I look after is sixty-five. His body is still quite youthful but his memory has almost gone. If I have time I usually sit with him while he eats, but today he throws his supper on the floor. The plate shatters. I remove the pieces of china and wipe up the food. Fetch a new portion and put it on the table. From a distance he looks young and healthy. Trainers and a hoodie. His wardrobe is the same as when he moved here. Clothes that belong to someone that's active and healthy. During my studies I thought that working with ill people would get easier, that I would just think of it as a job. But it hasn't got easier; it feels more like I'm circling something I can't escape from. I see more ill people than healthy ones, and expect to soon be one of them. It's thinking about the families that bothers me the most. The panic in their eyes. It can keep me awake at night. Everyone says the same thing, that it's so unfair. But maybe this is precisely what is fair, that illness spares no one. Not the good, or the young, or those who can pay or speak for themselves. It just happens.

After walking around for a while outside, I see the patient sitting on a bench. The sun is setting behind the buildings. The red light suits him. There's a small, enclosed garden for the residents to be in. An elderly woman is raking the leaves, others are watching TV inside. There are only two of us on duty, me and a student nurse. The student tidies the kitchen and fills the dishwasher. As soon as she's finished, I unlock the medicine storage room and fill the evening pill dispensers. It's not ideal that the student is alone with the residents, but it's usually fine. The early evenings are a bit like they are at home; as soon as supper's finished, there's a load of things to do. Medications are given, incontinence pads changed and nightshirts buttoned up. The first resident goes to bed at nine, the next at half-past. It must all go like clockwork so that everyone is asleep before the night shift starts. Some patients never sleep, they

just wait in their beds. One elderly woman always wants to sleep with the door locked. She has to hear the sharp click of the lock to be able to drift off. I completely understand her. A couple of years ago we changed our nurse's uniform to ordinary trousers with a white shirt. The residents liked it, liked how it removed a small part of being ill. There are enough things that confirm their condition. They wear slippers to walk across lino floors, the clearest sign of an institution. All the chairs and mattresses have waterproof covers. There's a flowery plastic cloth on the dining table, and in the lounge there are fake leather armchairs that are easy to clean.

The night staff arrive. We share information, and I fill out the form for my shift. The staff that work nights are often young; they think they can keep going without getting drained. The toughest ones spend the night on the treadmill in the gym. Working out at night makes me think back to what it was like as a teenager, forcing myself to do sit-ups in my room each evening. It was effective. My jeans had to be low and my tops so short. They say that exercise prolongs your life and the night shift shortens it, so maybe it's not such a bad idea to even it out. I see that one of the night staff is using her acrylic nails to open an energy drink. She's dressed for a workout and has eyelash extensions, but the lashes are slightly too thick. This produces the opposite of the desired effect; there's a dull, inaccessible look in her eyes. Still, I know that attributes like these can function like armour, driving away certain kinds of people and attracting others. The extreme lashes reveal that her lips are enlarged too. If her lashes weren't so altered, perhaps I wouldn't have noticed the slight stiffness around her mouth. I'm guessing 0.3 millilitres in the top lip and 0.2 in the bottom one. I can almost feel the tears forming with the first prick of the needle. The second prick, third prick, tenth prick. It's poison. The lashes are plastic. I ask her to check on room four every two hours. The resident sometimes wanders about in the dark.

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Nine and a half hours later I'm back at work. The girl from the night shift meets me in the break room. She opens another can of energy drink with her nails, flicks through the newspaper and tells me how the night went. The energy drink annoys me; she should prioritise getting some sleep. A new patient is arriving today, I read the name in a letter. It seems familiar. I skim what it says. Relatively young, rehabilitation after a motorcycle accident. One of the rooms has stood empty for two days, one less resident to put to bed, feed, clean, comb. Less responsibility, less running back and forth. I check the time, I'm five minutes behind schedule. There are several people still waiting in their beds. I go into the first one. Her face reminds me of Rosa's, how she lies completely still in her cot after she's woken up. I often stand in the doorway observing who Rosa is without me. This patient has the same peaceful look; I can see her eyes following a magpie outside. She turns towards me and raises her hand before going back to the magpie. Wait, is what it means. I leave the room and go to the next one. He can physically manage most things; I stand behind him in the mirror watching him brush his teeth. A lot of them manage to brush their teeth themselves for a long time, it may be one of the last things to disappear. The memory of it lies deep inside the muscles. Brushing your teeth is nearly the same as breathing. He is fully aware of himself in the mirror, he's at his most alert. I can see the child in him too. I think about how children love seeing themselves cry in the mirror. I sometimes envy how unafraid they are of their grotesque gaping mouth. I must have done it too, before I started associating mirrors with duties. I smile at the patient in the mirror, put my hand on his shoulder and ask him if he's ready for breakfast. There are just small details that separate us; I am caught up in my memories, and he is caught up in the absence of his. He asks me politely if I've lived here for long. I say that I live somewhere else, that I just

work here.

The new resident arrives after lunch. It's a woman in her forties, and she has people with her. Her ex-husband, a good friend and a brother. The brother. I recognise her brother. He's a famous actor. He's also known to be a rapist. A production assistant accused him of raping her on a film set. I followed the story closely in the news; it was her word against his, no conviction. They had had a relationship both before and after the assault. They described their relationship in exactly the same way, before it diverged in two different directions. Two totally different versions of the same night. No similarities at all. No chance of misinterpretations or grey areas. One was a liar and the other wasn't. I had read the papers carefully, picked sentences apart looking for something that would reveal who was making it up. But I found nothing. They were both equally convincing. One of them was an extremely good liar. The actor's charisma made the whole thing even more confusing. The production assistant had everything to lose by bringing false charges; she didn't have a contract and would never be able to return to the production company. After a couple of years, the actor slowly but surely got back to work. He was acquitted. And now he's here, in the new patient's room. His face is friendly. I shake his hand as I say my name. It happens so fast, like an ambush. I remember him being spat at outside court. A newspaper photo showed him wiping away tears and spit with the back of his hand. I felt sorry for him each time I saw this photo. Was that enough punishment? He would never be convicted, but he would never not be a rapist either. It was an unsolvable equation. A conviction might have made the equation seem a bit less convoluted, but it wouldn't have erased the lasting connection between the victim and the offender. Everyone would lose anyway. The craziest thing was the contempt I felt for the victim. I was sickened by all the quotes from the courtroom, because they could have been my own. The law couldn't override these screwed-up nuances of sympathy and contempt. I was angry, but my anger is a rare creature that changes shape as soon as I spot it.

I don't know where violence goes when it's over. Does it sink down into the mattress? (Something I think about every time I sleep in a hotel bed.) Is it like acid, eating its way through the mattress, parquet and forest floor? Or does it wander from body to body, residing in the flesh? Is the courtroom the crematorium? Violence that doesn't end up there goes into the blood. Goes into the brain and muscles. Turns ugly. Makes the face ugly, the skin rough and grey. Once I had a teacher with a completely grey face. Yellow hair that hung over the lectern. When she wrote on the board, the chalk seemed heavy in her hand. That little piece of chalk, almost impossible to lift.

I show them round the unit like a robot. I open the door into the kitchen and say that over twenty-five percent of the food we serve is organic. The robot smiles and speaks whole sentences. The robot carries in cardboard boxes full of the patient's things. Unpacks books and clothes. I offer them coffee before they leave, suggesting that they could have it in the garden at the back. They accept the offer. I stay inside with a patient who's watching TV. I follow the film star the whole time from the corner of my eye, as if I'll lose control if I don't know where he is. When he picks up his cup of coffee, his hands seem to shake slightly. He's wearing a thin down jacket, grey sweatpants and a cap. He's slimmer than I thought he was. I go into the break room, luckily there's no one there. The robot writes everything up in the patient's medical records. Don't make a big thing out of this, it says. The resident has nothing to do



with the rape case. And even if she had, it wouldn't affect her right to treatment. To be able to live here it makes no difference if you're a good person or not. What the patients have done or been is irrelevant in here. Everything's fine, says the robot. I have a glass of water, wash and disinfect my hands. Go into the garden and clear away the cups. They say thank you and goodbye to me and the residents. The film star gets up, walks down the corridor and out of the front door. I carry the cups into the kitchen. My hands are shaking a bit, but I manage it okay. I see the new patient sitting in a garden chair; I should join her. Say to a colleague that I'm going down to the storeroom in the basement. I run down all the stairs. Wander back and forth down there. It's that compulsion again. That nastiness. I was sure it would gradually fade away. Like moving away from a town and slowly forgetting the names of streets and restaurants. That's not how the nastiness works; it comes after me. It changes shape and size, finding new paths to take. I can feel the key to the medicine storage room burning in my pocket. I make a mental list of the different things I can take. Wander around a bit, then run into the break room. See what I have in my bag. A painkiller containing caffeine. A DayQuil I've bought on a holiday abroad. It says Powerful Relief. I take both.

The rest of the day at work I wonder if someone has sucked out my brain. Can't think. Can't think, it's like an echo resounding in my skull. The moon is out, I can see it shining through a window. Beneath the window there's a chest of drawers made of varnished pine. Someone has opened out a serviette and placed it on top. On the serviette there are two battery-operated fake candles; it was done with the best intentions. Women are natural hostesses. For other bodies and needs. For pain, men, dead embryos and babies. The body is a well for unwelcome guests and the thirsty. I go from room to room and help a patient put on his brown compression stockings. His legs are soft and heavy. I need to use force to get them on him. It's wrong for me to have this job. Seeing human legs in brown compression stockings is like thinking that the sun is burning gas. Life seems so insignificant and beyond all control. I wore stockings like those when I gave birth. Had no control. I walk down the corridor, past sofas and chairs that no one uses. All the furniture here is old fashioned. It's only been here for five years, but was already passé when it arrived.

That evening I go to the gym. It's a good idea. Undeniable proof that I'm a healthy and active human being. I sit right at the back of the spin class, watching twenty other bodies pedalling round and round. Mainly women. It's dark, and the music drowns out all the breathing. The instructor asks us to smile. I do as I'm told. I see my pulse on a screen, I can easily make it go up or down. It's a major attempt at gaining control. Keeping the nastiness away requires constant maintenance work. Invisible to others, until it's no longer done. The spin class offers easy maintenance for people like me. The ones that are doing fine, who serve and pay, have long (but not thin) hair, and dress up without seeming to. The ones that can't face getting involved, who kept quiet in the autumn of 2017. I look at others because I can't see myself, I'm all rubbed out. Adapted to the template I have of women that are doing fine. In the changing room I observe a woman putting on her makeup. Everything is black. Clean, shiny shoes and thin black tights. Black coat with no specks of dust or fluff. Blonde. Has she been raped? Yes, I think so. Everything is thought through. It takes a long time, I know.

Last summer I held my head under water in the swimming pool. We had rented a holiday house in Italy, and I often woke up at night, worried that the children had gone outside to swim by themselves. There were smooth marble flagstones around the whole house; I thought they'd be the end of me. Jump up from the ground and crush us. I decided that Johannes should feel safe in the water. I would teach him to hold his breath. There, under the water, the memory came back to me. In the few seconds I couldn't

breathe, I was back in the nasty room. Had to grab Johannes's little body, feel his warmth, know he was real. The holiday house was on a hillside, you could see the sea from the bedroom window in the morning. The horizon was over there in the haze. Before the others woke up, I would lie awake wondering how I could feel so disturbed by this view. I wasn't the right type for holidays like these. Wasn't the type for relaxing by the slippery side of the pool. I spent too long finding peace of mind in the sun, swimming in unfamiliar waters and eating out at strange new restaurants. I couldn't unwind until the trip back.

The children are asleep when I get home. It's ten o'clock. Terje's in the bathroom brushing his teeth. I go in, give him a nod and brush my teeth too. For a while I lived without thinking about the incident. I wondered if anything had actually happened. If it was really so bad. By the time I met Terje, I had stopped thinking about it. By not telling Terje, I could almost remove the incident from my memory. Then Johannes came. He cried a lot in the beginning, and the only one that could comfort him was me. I noticed that the outside world considered him a demanding child. He was big, almost grotesque. When people looked into the pram, their first reaction was to hesitate, because even I could see he wasn't a lovely baby. He was a little man. I thought I was the only one that could love him properly. It was just me and him, no one else could see him the way I did. I adored Johannes, and we withdrew into this love affair. That's when the old memory of the incident began to haunt me. It was something to do with the physical contact. The fact that he fed from my body, and fell asleep at my breast every night that first year. The memory slowly sneaked up on me, not in my brain but in my body. I got pains in my chest, spreading down my arms. I stopped sleeping on my back in bed, unable to breathe. Stopped taking the metro, unable to be underground. I was suffocating.

I went to see a doctor. Took the baby with me, and he sat on my lap yelling the whole time. I couldn't say the word out loud while Johannes was in the room, but I listed my symptoms. The doctor asked me to come back with a letter that went into more detail. Several months went by. I couldn't face the thought of writing that kind of letter. Johannes was growing, growing away from my body. I often thought of him as a little man, and I wanted the best for him. The memory came back more often, and the pain spread from my chest down to my stomach. I discovered a new way to exist. As long as I had Johannes, I could forget everything else. It was mainly in the in between times that the memory appeared. On the way to work, if I wasn't listening to music. Or at night, the moment I put my book down on the bedside table. I was still suffocating. I became increasingly entangled in something I had to bear alone, but which I couldn't exist in. Thought about people who start cutting their own bodies, that I could understand them. It was tempting to move the pain to other places in my body. I knew I would never pick up a knife and cut myself, but it was reassuring to think of it as an option. Now I've gone mad, I said to myself. I was so stupid to believe I wouldn't end up like this.

I wrote the letter. Sat in the changing room at the gym, wanting to be on neutral ground. It was hard to find the words; I wasn't sure if I was expressing myself correctly. At first I wrote non-consensual sex, it was okay to write that. But it didn't seem right, because it wasn't sex. If sex is a mutual act, it wasn't sex. I wrote sexualised violence, I wrote assault, I wrote sexual trauma, but nothing seemed right. There was too little violence or too little sex. Deep down I knew which word to use, I just couldn't bring myself to

write it. Couldn't face that word, that fucking lousy word. Rape. I wrote rape. The word was strong. Too strong? People came in and out of the changing room; the women around me changed, showered, put on makeup, blow-dried their hair. It was good that they were there, they were naked too. I counted us, there were eight women in the room. One in ten women has been raped. In that case, it was me here in the changing room. That's not so bad, I thought to myself. It's really not so bad to be sitting here in this expensive gym in expensive workout gear and to have been raped. I should be able to live with this. Pull yourself together, I said to myself. But I finished writing the letter. Explained it in the most practical terms. That this had happened to me and that the memory of it wouldn't go away. It was getting bigger, like a tumour.