

**Kristof MAGNUSSON****Summer of Love**

Outside my window a lemon tree is steaming in the rising heat. Eyes closed, I feel all over the large mattress, although I know there's no one else there. I'm lying in bed in a hotel room in California reading about Australia in a guidebook.

The trip round the world was the idea of the head of personnel who appointed me. For the first three months, he said, my position was free, after all the stress of the examinations I could take time out to *live* a little, to see something of *life*. The next day I paid three thousand marks for an air ticket with the words 'Hamburg — London — New York — San Francisco — Hong Kong — Bombay — Hamburg' printed on it in slightly smudged red ink. I'd already ticked off London, New York and San Francisco, I hadn't seen anything of *life* there. To me the red double-decker buses, yellow taxis and cable cars looked like poor, dirty copies of the double-deckers, taxis and cable cars I knew from films. In each place I stayed one night and flew on, only in San Francisco did I stay two nights, because I had a hotel room with cable TV. I began to get accustomed to things, bought a second deodorant, a rather sweet-smelling one by *Jean Paul Gaultier*, which I used for my left armpit. For the right one I continued to use the *Hugo* by *Boss* which I'd bought for my job interview. It was fun being able to distinguish left and right, port and starboard, the two halves of this body that was to carry me through the world, by smell.

On the fifth day of my trip round the world I hired a bicycle and rode across the red bridge and out of the city.

Soon I had no idea where I was any more. I was riding through pinewoods along a country road with no markings and which wasn't on my map. Coming round a curve, a village suddenly leapt out at me. It was simply there; without there having been any signposts or a board with the name, there were wooden houses in front of me with blue scraps of sea hung between them.

I rode past a filling station with *Save the Rainforest* banners hanging out of the windows. Shortly after that I stopped and asked a man, who was sitting in the sun outside a house with paintings on the walls, where I could buy something to drink. The man had long grey hair and his beard was spattered with flecks of colour. He asked me how I liked his wall painting and pointed over his shoulder: animals, naked people and pink clouds, with flowers in all the colours of the rainbow twined round them. Above it was written: *30 Years Summer of Love 1967-1997*.

I was told there was no supermarket there and was sent instead to *Bolinas People's Store*. There I had just put a bottle of Calistoga Water and some fairtrade *Save-the-Rainforest* chocolate in my shopping basket when my attention was caught by a woman at the back of the shop who was absentmindedly twirling a stand with indigo jeans. When she noticed me looking at her she seemed to wake from a trance, let go of the stand and walked past me to the bread shelf. Sunglasses pushed back on her forehead kept her shoulder-length hair from falling over her face. She picked up one of the loaves with pumpkin seeds, weighed it in her hand a few times, squeezed it, stuck her thumb and forefinger in, tore off a piece and tasted it. Then she put the loaf back, took the one behind it and tested that one too. She settled on the second loaf and went to pay at the till. Now she concentrated on her money, looking at every note as if she were wondering which one she could best be parted from. I remembered that in America one-collar bills were called *singles*, but she had paid and left before I'd managed to make a pun on it.

I followed her out. She pulled her sunglasses down and chucked the loaf through the open window of her *Volkswagen New Beetle*. Then she leant against the mudguard. I looked at her. And she looked in my direction, though because of the sunglasses it was difficult to say whether she

was really looking at me. Once I thought I could feel her eyes on me and tried a smile, but there was no response. However, she didn't look away either.

The painter with the flecks of colour in his beard came up to her and said, *Hi Debra*. She gave him a kiss. They got in and Debra drove off with him. I went back into the shop and bought the other loaf; it smelt of perfumed hand lotion. I sat on the porch outside, tore off pieces of the bread and ate them. *Clinique* perhaps — a mild-scented perfume, not with alcohol, healthy rather, good for the skin. The scent of a woman one would gladly spend a long time waiting for until she came out of the bathroom.

*What's the difference between the Germans and God?* The question in German came from behind me, from out of the shop. The man was also grey, around fifty. He was wearing a pale red T-shirt with white batik circles swirling round on it, all with their centre in the region of his navel. They were very rounded circles, for the man was a bit fat. *God is everywhere*, he went on in German, *and the Germans have been there already*. Hi, I'm Günther he said, and I was surprised at how strong his handshake was. He had two dogs with him, which he introduced to me as Burroughs and Kerouac. Günther had bought some sausage in the *People's Store* and he gave it to the dogs. Kerouac gave the sausage a good sniff, before eating it slowly, like a dog that's grown up with cats. Burroughs ate quickly; it looked sick and only had three legs.

Günther told me that Bolinas was a fishing village that had been taken over by hippies at the beginning of the seventies. He himself had been there for ten years. He was actually a driving instructor from Bochum, he said, but after a win on the lottery he'd dropped out of *Germany Ltd*. He'd found peace here, he went on, no *mass tourism* brought *violence* and *consumerism* from the *outside world*. All the signposts the Roads Department put up disappeared overnight. Hastily he added that I was *okay* of course, because I wasn't a *mass tourist*. Life was good here, there was always a party going on, a joint being handed round; especially today, at the birthday party for the *Summer of Love*. And you could sit in the saloon as well, which, by the way, rented rooms, and drink *Gün and tonic* or *Gün Fiddich*. He laughed and offered to give me a massage. I got up and was given his visiting card: *Günther, massage for the working class, Ocean View Boulevard, Bolinas*. I left.

It was a hot day. At my first steps on the village street I noticed how soft and sticky the tar was. A woman with long grey plaits was struggling with a hand-mower. It got stuck in the grass, which was far too long, but she kept on trying with a persistence I would never have expected in a hippie village just to mow the lawn. On the way to the beach things got more and more hectic: bowls, food, cans of beer and bottles of cola were being carried down to the beach and a band was starting their sound check. I went to the saloon and booked somewhere to stay.

The band began to play when the sun hung like an orange hole low over the sea. All the others, apart from me, were around fifty and looked like Günther: long hair, no shoes, not fat, but definitely not slim any more. You could tell that their colourful shirts and jute bags were old originals, just like the musicians in the band — this wasn't a sixties revival, these people had never lived any other way. Finally I saw Debra, she was at the barbecue. The hippies queued up to get a hamburger or a hot dog from the young woman in a plain black dress. There was something of *Snow White* about it, only the dwarves weren't small and Debra was a brunette with a suntan.

Günther was sitting in the sand with his dogs, talking to a blonde who was wearing an Indian sari; he put a daisy in her hair. People were smoking pot in thin joints that looked like hand-rolled cigarettes. I remembered a photo I'd seen in BRAVO years ago. It was in black-and-white and showed a dozen naked people with long hair: women with small breasts and men with little Frank Zappa beards lying on top of each other. I could still remember the caption, I had been very impressed by it at the time: *Clusterfucking in a commune in the sixties*. I couldn't help feeling that the others missed it too, that they avoided looking at each other, not wanting to see what had become of the generation of love. Debra concentrated on the barbecue. Only when she handed

over the plates with the cooked hamburgers and hot dogs did I have the feeling she was looking past the people standing in front of her and smiling in my direction.

I went to get a hot dog. Debra treated each ingredient with proper respect, taking ketchup, mustard, sauerkraut, barbecue sauce and arranging them carefully round the grilled sausage.

‘Welcome to Bolinas.’

‘Thanks.’

I took my sausage away, like a dog that had cadged a chop. The roll that Debra had held in her hands for so long, didn’t taste of her.

By this time it had got dark. Torches were lit and one couple started to kiss. The band was good, I knew most of the songs: *If you’re going to San Francisco, California Dreaming, Hotel California*. With bands I like watching the drummers best, I always wonder what’s going on inside them. Guitarists think in chords: E major, E major first inversion, A major, B7, E major. Do drummers really think something like: bumchikka, dumchikka? I liked the idea that there might be someone at the party who had no worries in the world and spent all evening just thinking: bumchikka, dumchikka.

In the meantime several couples had started kissing. By now the man of the one that had started before had one hand up her shirt. Some people were shouting, *Yeab guys, let’s go*; I wasn’t sure whether it was directed at the band or the couple.

Debra was still at the barbecue. I went to get another hot dog because I’d finally thought of something to talk about.

‘Very interesting, these hot dogs. With sauerkraut,’ I said with a distinct German accent.

‘Günther told me you come from Germany.’

‘In Germany we eat Danish hot dogs with fried onions and pickled gherkins,’ I said. It was strange using words like ‘onions’ and ‘pickled gherkins’ in Debra’s presence.

‘Okay, that’s interesting,’ said Debra. I looked at her, realised I was staring and looked away. Then the woman behind me ordered a vegeburger.

‘I’m impressed by the enthusiasm you put into this,’ I said and went quickly, back to the band and my beer.

By this time the woman had taken her shirt off. When the man pushed his trousers down to his knees, more and more started shouting, *You go girl! You go boy!* The man of another couple who were kissing began to grope her between the legs; she whispered something in his ear and he stopped. Günther had a joint in one hand, a can of beer in the other and had to be careful not to tread on the couple on the ground. They were sleeping together right next to his feet and Günther started to bellow, *Yeab, make love, make love*. A few immediately joined in: *Make love, make love* and clapped their hands, glad that someone was finally doing it.

There was nothing else to do. Debra came over to me. You couldn’t tell she’d spent hours at the barbecue, not a single splash of fat on her skin.

‘Great party,’ she said.

‘Yes, but why are we the only young people? Apart from us they’re all . . .’ I didn’t want to say ‘old people’.

‘All the kids of my generation left after they’d finished school. I’m only here today because my parents asked me to come.’ She pointed to the couple lying on the ground. Only now did I recognise the man down there as the painter with the colour-speckled beard.

‘They do seem to really love each other,’ I said, without looking at them. I didn’t want to see Debra as the product of this of this act between these two people.

‘My parents have been in love since the Summer of Love. I envy them.’

*Make love*, Günther bellowed, right in my face. He smelt of beer and hot dogs, a line of ketchup like a trail of blood spoilt the batik circles on his T-shirt. He had to stand on the tips of

his toes to be able to look me in the eyes. *You've fallen in love. Crazy! You've been here three hours and you've fallen in love. That's the magic of the Summer of Love.* Günther was bright red, his eyes had vanished behind the heavy mop of hair falling down into his face. I felt like hitting him, but more and more hippies gathered round us, even Debra's parents stood up. A few sang and shouted out things I couldn't understand. Debra looked first at Günther, then at me, calm and focused. *It's finally happened, we're so happy for you, Debbie. Love is the most important thing in life,* someone said. I was going to say that it was quite different, that I was on a trip round the world, that I'd got used to remarkable things, that everything would be back to normal when I got home. Günther put his arms round us and cried, *Don't talk man, don't talk, just kiss.* He grasped my head and slammed it against Debra's. She managed to turn away in time, my lip hit hard against her cheekbone. It immediately brought the tears to my eyes, my lip went numb. I hoped Debra would explain. *Just kiss, man, just kiss.* She took Günther's hand, liberated her head and said, 'Günther's high as a kite, he's not usually like this, honest.'

Then she ducked under his arm and walked off. Günther embraced me.

I decided to fly on to Australia. If I could get a flight the next day, I'd have Hong Kong and Bombay as well to do and I could be back home in less than a week. Debra's parents were lying down in the sand again, a joint in their hands, looking up at the sky. Her mother kept pointing out shooting stars that weren't there. I looked forward to the aeroplane seats, sleep-mask, blankets and earphones. That was real peace; peace such as you only get in solitude, such as these people here would never know. On the black water the moonlight shattered into tiny fragments which flowed into the bay on the incoming tide. A dog jumped out of the sea, shook itself and ran off. All the others here were asleep, but I did not regret having laid out the money for a room.

I pass my hand over the mattress again — no one. Suddenly I'm properly awake, I couldn't care less about the stupid lemon tree, no more than I care about stupid Australia. The stickiness disappears in the shower. I go to the beach, it's covered in rubbish: beer cans and bottles, paper plates with the remains of food and frozen-food packaging. Joints and cigarettes are in the sand, the brown ends sticking up. In some places someone has gathered the rubbish into heaps, the greasy barbecue grills and tongs for turning the sausages are already soaking in warm soapsuds. Bubbles, blue-green like a fly's eyes, burst in the sun. Debra's parents are still in the same place. She's lying on his chest, a thin thread of spittle joining her mouth to his shirt.

I find Debra behind the stage. She's wearing heavy-duty rubber gloves and collecting the rubbish. She doesn't see me, she's working too fast, jerkily so that beer cans keep missing the black plastic sack and bits of food slide down the outside.

'Can I help?' I ask. She gives a slight start.

We walk along the beach. Someone has scratched letters into the soles of their shoes so that at each step they print the word *Peace* in the sand on the left and the word *Love* on the right. We talk about the weather, riding bicycles and about cars. I explain the meaning of the word *Fahrvergnügen* Volkswagen use in their American advertising. Then we talk about Danish hot dogs and Debra explains that in America a 'Danish' is a pastry we call a *Kopenhagener*. We don't talk about her work in Chicago or mine in Germany. The beach gets narrower and the pine woods come down closer to the sea. Here the *Peace* and *Love* footsteps disappear. The beach is so narrow, we're already walking in the water, that is sucking at the beach with tiny, quiet waves. At every step a light circle forms in the dark sand round Debra's feet; round my feet as well.

'So we have fallen in love,' I say.

'Yes.'

'What now?' I can't just stay here.

'Can't you just stay here?'

'I think so.'  
'Really?'  
'I'll have to go back to Germany sometime or other.'  
'Of course.'  
We stop and embrace.

Translated from the German by Mike Mitchell

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