

## Appendix

### A Man of Habit

Every morning my grandfather takes a walk in the woods behind his house. The morning is a bit early for me but, when I can overcome my sluggishness, I walk with him. He takes me on the same route he has walked for forty years, and what amazes me is not how clearly defined the trail has become, but that it is not by now deep enough to channel water.

Walking toward the woods, we pass through a field and my grandfather tells me that a farm house once stood here. "There" -- he points -- "was a cow stable. There was the hired man's house. There..." The farm was owned by a Mr. Jennings, who, after his wife died, felt unable to run it himself. He called his son back to help him, and his son did come back -- reluctantly, for he had just married. Once when my grandfather was having tea with Mr. Jennings' daughter-in-law, Mr. Jennings and his son passed by outside, carrying buckets of dung to the beet patch. Mr. Jennings told his son, "I wish I were dead". Said his son, "I wish you were dead, too."

We pass through the cow stable into the woods and my grandfather asks if I still compose. Oh yes, I tell him; I am sketching a quartet, or setting some poems for soprano -- whatever I am working on at the moment. "Ach, Pauli," he says, and pats my back, "it is high time we had a musician in the family. Enough of these professors, neh?" And I laugh and nod my head.

There is a field to our left, and my grandfather walks to it and looks at the flowers at its edge. One he points out to me; it looks as if someone has spread the color out from the center, leaving trails of light mauve on the petals and a deeper mauve at their tips, which droop as if weighed down by color.

"What is this called?" I ask him, thinking that if I know a few flowers' names I will be able to bear the endless botanical passages in some otherwise impeccable novels: "The Boddingshams' garden was lovely. On each side of the entrance were

some of the finest dahlias in our memory; while within we were greeted by a dazzling array of posies, orgenias, and thrushes-of-the-meadow."

"I don't know what it's called," my grandfather answers. "I concern myself with looks, not names." And we walk back to the path.

Here we are usually joined by Coco, the ugliest dog I have ever seen. Coco's fur is faded orange and always looks and smells wet. When she walks (a little slower than a person, but always beneath a person's feet), her toenails drag on the ground. If her legs were any stubbier, or her neck any droopier, her nose would drag on the ground too. A family down the street owns her, but she stays at my grandfather's house during the day -- contaminating a sofa (she growls if you try to budge her) or walking in circles around the first floor, begging food each time she passes through the kitchen (my grandfather always gives it to her).

"Ach, Coco, you dear thing," my grandfather cries, "there you are!" And she runs into the woods.

We walk down a shallow slope, and my grandfather looks back up it. "Quite a harmless affair now," he remarks.

In the winter I am not so sure. On skis, looking down the hill I can see roots and stones sticking up through the snow. And when I see the fork at the bottom I always think with envy of the Charles Addams cartoon. Ski tracks down a mountain, separating to go around a tree, as if the person between them could pass through it.

My grandfather is not so sure in the winter either. "At the tops of these things, you know, one looks down and thinks perhaps it is wisest to turn back. But then one reproaches oneself, 'Coward!' and pushes off." He pauses. This is the root my ski caught...And this is the rock my hip hit..." After he'd been gone a couple of hours my grandmother sent my uncle Arndt out to look for him. When Arndt found him he was using his arms to drag his body out of the woods.

We begin to climb again, and my grandfather gives me some advice. "No matter what field you go into, Pauli, you must not be discouraged if people do not at first understand you. They'll come around. For thirty years they did not believe my ideas, but and then, when I finally proved them so they could understand, they said, 'Hah! We knew it all the time.'"

We reach the top of the hill. There is a tree to our right - a tree with a large clearing around it, so that it looks as if a pagan ritual has recently been performed here - and below us lies the goldfish pond. The water is still and brown from the dead leaves that line the pond, and the orange fish lie still beneath its surface. We walk down to the pond and cross the dam that contains it.

There is a steep hill at the end of the dam, and as we climb it we say nothing, using our breath for the exertion. At its top we lie down in a clearing. I run my fingers through the moss while my grandfather muses aloud. "Who would have thought it? When I was your age, going into the war, then study, and this Nazi

idiocy. Traveling place to place, and all those years at the Institute. Who would have thought it would end up here. With such a lovely family, and nice grandchildren." He puts his hand on the back of mine.

"Now, Pauli, how shall we return: by the road, or through the woods?"

"Through the woods." Although I know that, when I return, his housekeeper, Margaret, seeing my mud-caked shoes and thorn-scratched thighs and the burrs on my sleeves, will ask, "Did he drag you through that swamp again?"

It isn't really a swamp. Just tall grasses that conceal the trail and make it impossible to see where the wet places are. My grandfather determined years ago which was the best way to stay on dry ground, but I don't care what it is. As we walk through, I can hear the swishing of his short cautious steps and the splashing of my great reckless ones.

We come out of the grasses into a grove of hemlocks. The trees are old and tall and let through shafts of light like pillars in a cathedral. A moss-covered tree lies on its side, and we sit down on it. "This tree," my grandfather says, "was knocked down in a hurricane in 1938. I think I have told you about that."

"Yes, but I'd like to hear it again."

"Your grandmother called me at M.I.T. and told me to come home because a hurricane was coming. One doesn't have to think long about advice like that.

"I left through a hall made mostly of glass, and the wind was shaking it so that it resounded like an organ. I reached the car safely enough, but driving home was a real adventure. Trees kept falling across the road behind me, and once I saw the roof of a warehouse fly by. That was something I always wanted to see!

"Finally there was a tree in front of me and a tree behind me, and I had to leave the car. I crept to the fallen tree ahead and hid in its lee until I thought the wind had let up a little. Then I ran to the next tree.

"When I got home the house was shaking and Old Man Jennings was lying on top of his chicken coop, trying to keep the roof from flying off."

We get up and leave the grove, and the house comes into view. Coco turns up again -- I can never contrive to shut her out -- and slides in past my feet when I open the basement door. My grandfather and I take our shoes off in the basement and, as we walk up the stairs to the kitchen, he says, "Now, Pauli, how about a cup of tea or something?"

"Sir," Margaret calls, "your kettle's boiled."

--Paul von Hippel (1983)