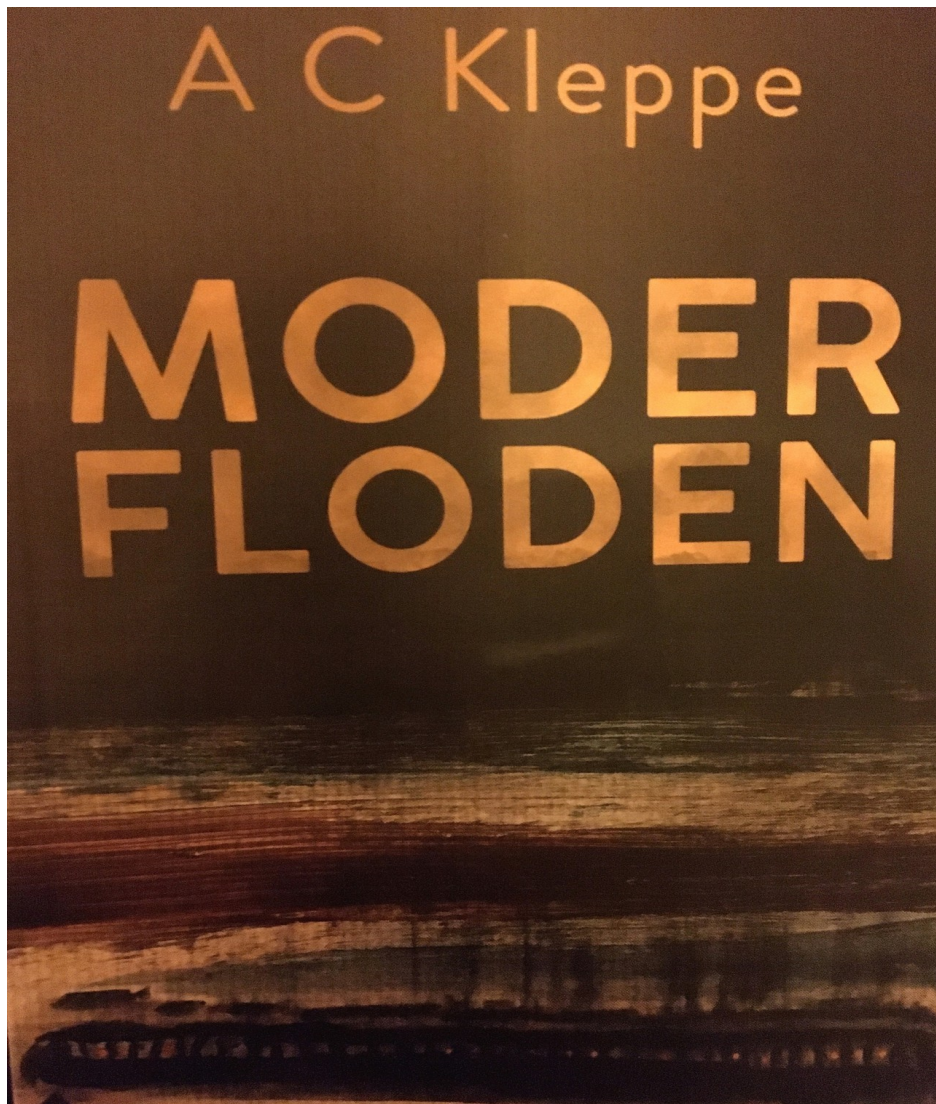


Excerpts of *Moderfloden – The Mother River*, translated to English



The back cover text of the book reads:

*It is the late seventies in Stockholm when Sunniva meets the much older Jaak and falls in love. They soon become a couple, and shortly before Christmas they travel together to Warsaw. They end up in a snowstorm, and the journey takes much longer than planned. On the long train ride through snow and darkness, they talk about themselves and their history, and Sunniva gains a whole new insight into his world, and the Estonia that he was forced to leave.*

*A couple of years later, Sunniva and Jaak have a little daughter, and Sunniva manages to convince Jaak that they should go to Tallinn together, so that his mother can meet her grandchild. She meets both Jaak's homeland and family, and a strong friendship develops between Sunniva and her mother-in-law, a woman who in 1939, just before the Russian invasion, killed her husband.*

The book has 21 chapters, here are translations of some parts.

1

Once, she had dreamt of Estonia. It was before she met Jaak, and she had a very vague idea of the Baltic countries.

In the dream, she was on her way to an inn in the countryside. It was autumn and very dark, and when the horse-drawn carriage stopped in front of the guesthouse, all that could be seen was a gray wall and a wet staircase, where the light from a single lamp went up and down along the stairs in time with the wind's whims.

The year was 1867, and they had brought her to the Estonian countryside because there was a child inside the guesthouse who was under a curse. They explained to her that she was the only one who could save the child, and she agreed to try. The dream was long and very complicated, but with a flawless inner logic.

Many years later, when she found the notes about this dream, she had been to Estonia several times and her first meeting with Jaak was already long in the past.

2

It was late summer, and it had suddenly become incredibly hot, almost hotter than in July. She jogged along Norr Mälarstrand, worried about being late, because it's not good to be late for a job interview. And that's what it really was, a job interview.

She wasn't sure what she should look like - what does a substitute teacher look like? - and had put on a clean shirt and collected her newly washed hair in a proper ponytail. The clean shirt was a precaution: *if you wear a clean, white blouse, you always look neat.*

The paper slip with the address lay as a little lump in her pocket, and although she knew roughly where the apartment was located, she was still worried about being late. After a while, she picked up the pace, soon she was sweating in the scorching sun, and the clean shirt no longer felt quite as white and clean.

They had agreed to meet as soon as she returned to Stockholm, yet she had postponed to contact him, because she had to concentrate on studying for the final exam that had hung over her all summer. She had felt guilty for delaying the contact, but when she finally called, he had sounded so enthusiastic, as if he was already convinced that she was a suitable substitute teacher. He asked if it was a heat wave in Oslo too, and as they chatted, she got

the same feeling as the first time she heard his voice, a few weeks ago when she was in Oslo to celebrate her mother's birthday. It had been a big party with lots of guests, and she had just sat down at one of the long tables under the apple trees when someone called from upstairs that it was a phone call for her, and she had hurried in, surprised that someone was looking for her here.

The voice on the receiver was Swedish, a deep and slightly nasal Stockholm voice. She got an image of the man with the Swedish voice sitting in a room high above the city, overlooking the sparkling water and towering houses, as if all of Stockholm was pouring towards her through the telephone receiver, with fluttering pennants and all its water.

He explained that he had received her name from an acquaintance, the thing was that he needed a substitute for the next school year, namely he was going to take a leave of absence to write a book. From what he had understood, she had the same subjects as him, so could she possibly consider substituting for him? She didn't fully understand what he was saying, but just answered yes to everything, confused and at the same time overwhelmed by being asked.

She stopped and took out the piece of paper with the address to check that she was at the right spot, it was a nice old art nouveau house on a small side street. A few floors up, a woman was reading on a balcony, and from an open window she could hear someone singing, it sounded like Leonard Cohen. According to the nameplate on the gate, the apartment was up three flights of stairs, and still worried about being out late, she took two steps at a time.

The man who opened the door was tall and slender, her first thought was that his elegantly curved nose was even bigger than her own. She examined him with interest, it was a handsome man, dressed in a pink shirt and thin brown corduroy trousers, on his feet he had Italian slippers of light leather. The dark brown hair was shiny and straight, and as he ran his hand through his bangs, she noticed that his nails were as well kept as a girl's. She couldn't tell how old he was, there was something agelessly refined about his whole figure, and when he asked her to enter, she felt embarrassingly aware of her unmanicured nails and dirty gym shoes.

- I am Sunniva, she said.

- And I'm Jaak, he said and made an inviting gesture towards the room behind him.

The apartment wasn't as high up as she had imagined when she spoke to him in July, but the room where they sat down was just as large and bright as she had pictured, and the whole apartment seemed immense. Room after room, an abode to get lost in.

Jaak explained that he needed a substitute for the entire school year, and brought forth a binder with an overview of all the hours. Philosophy only in the final year, but maths and physics at all levels.

When he talked about the four ways of computation, she anxiously asked what he meant. So it was integration, derivation, and then what? Jaak laughed:

- It's Swedish for plus, minus, times and divided.

Swedish - why did he say that the four arithmetic methods were *Swedish*? Jaak said that he too thought it was a strange expression, but that was perhaps because the Swedish language wasn't completely obvious to him. He was not Swedish, that's why he said *kovert* with o and a clear t-sound instead of *kuvär*, like the Swedes pronounce it, he explained and held up an envelope.

– I'm Estonian, he said and smiled.

She nodded. Yes, she had heard of Estonia. Somewhere on the other side of the Baltic Sea, she didn't know more, but she was aware that there were a lot of Estonians in Sweden, refugees from the Second World War.

Jaak said that the pupils came from all over town, many of them were young people tired of school, but who nevertheless wanted to finish high school. He added that the teaching plan for the autumn wasn't completely nailed down yet, but it would probably be something like the tentative plan, he handed her a piece of paper. She glanced at the schedule and said it looked good, the only problem was that she had no teaching experience.

– One day has to be the first, he said encouragingly, and this school is actually unusually nice, the pupils are usually decent, and the teaching staff is quite interesting.

– Interesting?

– Yes, you'll see for yourself, he said, with an almost imperceptible smile.

They chatted for a while, she told him that she had relatives in Stockholm, that's why she chose to study here, and Jaak continued to talk about the school. They were sitting on a worn sofa in a large and bright room. From the open window they could hear the diffuse noises from the city, the hum of car engines, children shouting, and far away the hollow sound of something like a foghorn. She had a sensation of floating above all the sounds, like they were in a craft overlooking the entire city, and winced when he asked if she wanted something to drink.

– No thanks, I unfortunately have to leave at once, she said dismissively, I have an exam tomorrow.

She quickly ran down the stairs, and slowed down her pace only when she reached the water. There she slowly walked back along Norr Mälarstrand, stopping every now and then, as if she was uncertain of where she was going. She noticed some election posters, the only faces she recognized were those of Ola Ullsten and Thorbjörn Fälldin, but since she was not a Swedish citizen, she was not allowed to vote anyway.

The heat was still oppressive, and even though she moved very slowly, almost tentatively, she felt overheated. When she arrived at City Hall Park, she found a shady bench where she sank down. A faint afternoon breeze rippled the dark blue Riddarfjärden, and while she absent-mindedly followed the festively bobbing steamboats with her eyes, she tried to grasp what it was that had happened. Because something had *happened*, and it wasn't about the new job, but about something entirely different.

An old woman sits at her desk in the heart of Tallinn. A piece of lace is hanging as a curtain in front of the window, and the white daylight streams in over her notebook and the big, green piece of blotting paper that she has placed on the table as protection. With small and precise strokes, she writes down her thoughts in the book.

She doesn't write about her life, not about the man she loved and whose life she took, and not about her little boy, or about his grandmother who took him away. About this she writes nothing; only about abstract principles, morality, and philosophy does she write, and about the lens grinder Spinoza's thoughts, about distancing oneself from the affects, and averting desire. She also writes about the Kantian imperative, this chilly moderation that should characterize an ideal person's life. But about passions, about the ecstatic joy and the deepest darkness, not a word.

Outside her kitchen window, the only window in her home that lets in daylight, people are engaged in more practical matters. Out there, history is taking place, things that concern the people, things that are important. No hairsplitting, no esoteric expositions, out there people are wholeheartedly engaged in building the new Estonian society. There is no time for Kant and Spinoza, let alone long-forgotten passion murders, there is more than enough to do with the unruly Estonian population.

The little woman writes and writes, unbothered by all the big and important things that are happening out there. Her concentration is absolute, her handwriting is even and untiring. She sits at her desk and writes, and she is happy. She is a free person, she has found peace. She found it already in prison, and when they let her out, it came with her. Not that she no longer feels or longs, but the tremendous restlessness has left her.

The wind is blowing in the big maple tree outside her window, the yellow leaves flutter wildly, it's autumn in the world. In the distance she hears the murmur, it's time to look forward! Let the dead bury their dead, and when you write down the entire history, don't forget that it happened in the name of the people, for the sake of the people.