

Christmas and Other Love Stories

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An extract

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Christmas

He had waited too long; the Christmas trees in the local shops had all been sold. Half past five. The Turkish and Moroccan shops in the south of the city stayed open till long past eight o'clock, but Cathy got restless if she didn't get fed at exactly six o'clock. Weird, isn't it, he thought, Turks and Moroccans selling Christmas trees. He entered a small super-market, and took a box of disposable napkins, a large tin of cassoulet and a bottle of lemonade from the shelves. He was the only customer. As he passed the delicatessen counter, the assistant looked up hopefully, and then carried on painting her nails. He only realised how quiet it was, when his trolley knocked into a display of dog food and two tins crashed to the floor. No music was being played. He heard his footsteps on the tiles, and the squeak of his trolley's wheels, he even heard his own breathing. He coughed and picked out a bottle of wine that was displayed exactly at eye level. He looked at the price and put it back. He picked up a wooden corkscrew, held it in his hand for a moment, and then put that back as well. A white plastic Christmas tree stood at the checkout, on top of a stack of shiny red boxes containing identical, as yet unassembled Christmas trees.

'They sell like hot cakes.'

'Excuse me?'

'Those trees. We've sold a lot of them.'

She bent over and groped around under the counter. He heard a click, and then immediately after, Christmas music.

'One hundred and twenty five francs. They were double the price until an hour ago.'

A part of her disappeared back under the counter. The music grew louder. She glanced at his trolley and said - probably inspired by the napkins -: 'Children love them. They can't tell the difference. One payment of a hundred and twenty five francs, and you get years of pleasure. Lots of people buy two, one for the lounge and one for the dining room.' She stretched out over the counter, raised the white Christmas tree, and took two boxes from the pile.

'I only need one,' he said startled.

'Are you sure?'

'Absolutely certain.'

'Oh. All right then.'

It had started to rain. The Christmas lights, hanging across the street, were swaying in the wind. Each time he passed a side street, he heard snatches of A White Christmas. He turned up his collar and quickened his step.

He didn't see her at first. She was sitting in her pink night-dress, between the television and the couch, huddled up against the radiator. The room was sweltering hot, but he felt at once that the stove was out. It was a dry, stuffy, central heat-ing warmth.

'Cathy?'

He knelt beside her, but she wouldn't let him touch her. He had been away too long.

'Cathy is scared of the stove. The stove hurts Cathy.'

She had smothered the fire in the stove with disposable napkins: three, four, five, six, seven. He took them out. Their plastic under-sides were melted and shrivelled, they stank ter-ribly. Twenty-two francs apiece they cost, he could have cried. If she carried on like that, he'd have to tie her up when he left the house. Put a couple of napkins on her, one on top of the other, and then tie her to the bed with leather straps.

'The stove won't hurt you, Cathy. It's the central heating that matters. That runs on oil, and oil comes from far, far away. Leopold has to pay a lot of money to get that oil to him and Cathy.'

He had worked out that the stove would pay for itself in a couple of years - if Cathy stayed away from the cen-tral heating. It had cost him 19,640 francs, but he had no other expenses. He knew lots of people with wood they couldn't get rid of. The one had cut down a tree; the other had installed new windows, yet another had a shaky old cupboard. They telephoned him, and he cycled round with his delivery bike to pick it up. Usually it was lying ready, in tidy piles, but at some addres-ses he had to saw the wood himself. Within a couple of weeks, they'd all be phoning him. Could he come by and collect their Christmas trees? He'd have the oil tank emptied. That would also cost him money, but what else could he do? Cathy was not to be trusted. Should he punish her?

'Cathy, come here.'

Cathy didn't budge.

'Cathy.'

'Cathy's not wet. Cathy's been to the toilet four times. Through the cold hall.'

True, he couldn't smell anything, but he wanted to feel for himself. Again he knelt down beside her, again she pushed him away.

'Cathy is dry!'

He grabbed her by the hips, she bit him in the wrist. He let her go, and then grabbed her by the shoulders. She clawed at his face and chest; he closed his hands around her wrists. Together they rolled across the carpet, bumped against the coffee table and then against the radiator. She set her teeth in his neck, he crumpled up in pain, but he kept his grip. 'I'm stronger,' he thought, 'I'm stronger, I'm stronger.' Now he tried to reason with her.

'If Cathy walks round with a wet nappy on for too long, her skin will get all sore. Her lovely, soft skin will get all red and sore. Now Cathy wouldn't want that, would she? And Leopold wouldn't want it either. Leopold wants to stroke and kiss his Cathy-'s skin.'

His head crashed against the couch, he had to let her go.

'Cathy isn't wearing a nappy!'

She stood in front of him with her legs slightly open and lifted her pink nightdress over her white thighs and over the ginger curls of her pubic hair. No nappy! He shuffled towards her on his knees and touched her with his fingertips. She was dry! She'd wanted to surprise him, and he hadn't trusted her. He pressed his face against her dear pubic hair, tasted bet-ween her lips with his tongue and made her wet. But she took a step back-wards and he tumbled over. She laughed out loud, so loud that he saw it before he heard it. Dripping down her legs, over her feet, on the carpet. Then hissing and splashing. He scrambled upright.

'Cathy, quickly!'

He dragged her barefoot along behind him, through the cold hallway and pushed her into the toilet. Incredible how much water the woman could hold. It kept on splashing and hissing out of her, she must have been saving it up all day. Cathy laughed, and pissed, and shook with pleasure. Completely helpless, she let him push her on the toilet bowl. The toilet was just like a sauna; sweat sprang to Leopold's pores. That was the final straw! He grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her roughly.

'Cathy lied,' he screamed. 'She never went to the toilet. Cathy simply came to the toilet to turn the electric heater on... To annoy Leopold!'

The bars of the electric heater were glowing red and the radiator was so hot that Leopold burned his hand on it. For ages al-ready, he had been planning to fix a time switch, so that the electric heater would only burn for a couple of minutes. He'd get down to it as soon as the Christmas rush was over. The doctor had said: 'To some degree, it's simply a matter of laziness. They often can't be bothered. Make the toilet as cosy and comfy as possible. Sometimes that helps.' He had painted the walls in apricot-orange, covered the window with a flowered curtain. There were fashion magazines, a vase of flowers, and a poster with a beautiful seascape. He felt like destroying the lot, throwing it all in the dustbin. All that understanding! He tore off a couple of sheets of apricot-orange toilet paper.

'Here!'

She dried herself obediently. Giggling.

'You know what they do with kittens that haven't been house-trained?'

But she threw her arms around his neck.

'Cathy wants a kiss,' she said.

'No, Cathy. No kisses. Leopold is very angry. Cathy has been a naughty girl... And why are you wearing a nightdress?'

Before he had left, he'd helped her put on an extra sweater. He'd built up the fire in the stove and made sure she was warmly dressed. What more could he have done? She slid from the seat to the floor, and sat there like a rag doll. Her lower lip was trembling.

'Cathy is hungry,' she said.

'We'll eat in a moment... Put some clothes on.'

At the table, she ate her share of the cassoulet, without spilling any or making a mess of herself. She had draped a woollen shawl around her shoulders.

'Tomorrow we'll have turkey breast in mushroom sauce.'

She smiled weakly, looked down at her plate. Suddenly, he noticed tears rolling down her cheeks. She cried without sound or movement.

'Cathy, please, it's Christmas Eve.'

'Leopold promised he'd buy a Christmas tree for Cathy. A big, beautiful Christmas tree. And Cathy'd decorate it for Leopold.'

He thought of the white, plastic tree, lying in the hall on the hat rack. Then he thought of her thighs and her ginger curls. He closed his eyes. He couldn't bear to look at her any longer."

'Is Leopold still angry?'

'No, I am not angry.'

'Can Cathy come to Leopold now?'

'Yes.'

She pressed his hand to her face, licked the palm and fingers. Then she rubbed her head against his hand, as if it was he caressing her.

'Will Leopold still get his Cathy a Christmas tree?'

'Yes,' he said, 'Leopold will buy his Cathy a wonderful, beautiful Christmas tree.'

It was still raining. He waited for a couple of minutes at the tram stop and then decided to walk. The shelter had been destroyed, only its metal frame was still in place, the rest had been removed. He hurried across the street, stepped in a puddle, and realised he had forgotten his glasses. If he had left them in the toilet, Cathy was quite capable of flushing them away. Behind him, he heard the squeal of a tram. He turned around, waved his arms and stepped in the puddle again. But the driver had noticed him. He stopped the tram and waited.

'Filthy weather,' said the driver. 'If you didn't have a calendar, you'd never guess it was Christmas. Fancy a sweet?'

'Thank you.'

They were jelly babies.

'Don't be shy,' said the driver. 'Take a handful.'

'Are you sure?'

'Of course I'm sure. And don't bother about that,' he said when Leopold went to stamp his tram card. 'Everything's free this evening.'

'Won't you get into trouble?'

'What trouble? Who drives this tram, the boss or me? Just give me a sign when you want to get off. I only stop if there's someone waiting.'

'I'm going to the South Station.'

'What on earth for! Sorry, none of my business. Live and let live, that's my motto.'

Leopold picked out a seat halfway down the tram, near the doors and the window. He was the only passenger. From under the seat, hot air wafted against his legs. His socks would soon be dry. The driver put his foot down. At every crossing he rang the bell and zoomed ahead. The tram suddenly shud-dered to a halt. The doors swung open.

'You're there.'

But here he was also much too late. In the third shop he tried, the man offered him the holly and the mistletoe that was gracing the counter.

'No,' said Leopold. 'It has to be a Christmas tree.'

All the stock was lying in cardboard boxes on the floor. Two children were sitting on the floor, so close to him that they could have grabbed his ankles, if they'd wanted to. Each of them held an orange, ready to play marbles or catch with it, but his arrival had spoilt their game. They stared at him with open mouths. Would he give them a nudge with the toe of his shoe? So it wasn't clear wheth-er he was kicking them, or patting them? He bent over and swiftly tweaked their rosy cheeks. Then he quickly poked out the tip of his tongue and stood back up again.

'It's for my daughter,' he said. 'She's sick.'

He thought of Cathy's beautiful, perfect breasts, so lovely and flawless that they almost seemed to have been made from plastic, or foam rubber. The man came out from behind the table on which his cash box stood, took the oranges away from the children and put them back into one of the boxes. 'Tut,' he said, and gave them a slap on the back of the head. The children's heads jerked forward, but they kept on staring at Leopold.

'Here,' said the man. 'Some sweets for your daughter.'

He took a hold of Leopold's arm, and before Leopold knew what was happening, he was back in the street. He heard the door being bolted behind him. Then a curtain was drawn. He took out a sweet and put it in his mouth, and then he spat it straight back out again. Sickly sweet! Those were for Cathy. The bag of sweets was pushed deep in his jacket pocket. 'Cathy gets a sweet, if Leopold gets a kiss.' Once she had said: 'Cathy doesn't want a sweet. Cathy wants a baby.' 'No, no. Cathy can't have a baby. If Cathy had a baby, she wouldn't be pretty anymore. And she'd also be very, very frightened.' That very same day, he'd made an appointment to have her sterilised. Suppose she insisted, and wouldn't take her pill? She was so incredibly devious. He couldn't trust her. My God! A child with a child! And it was a possibility. The doctor had told him so. She had the body of a normal, adult woman. There wasn't a single, physical reason for her incontinence.

Ten past eight. He'd still try one more shop. After that, it would truly be too late. He wondered what she was doing. After what had happened, she'd be on her best behaviour, and he'd reward her, if nothing else turned up, with the plastic Christmas tree. He'd explain to her that pine trees didn't belong in living rooms, that it hurt them when you chopped them down. His Cathy wouldn't want that, would she?

The man gave a beaming smile, and a row of white teeth appeared from under his moustache. The two upper canines were made of gold.

'But of course,' he said. 'Of course I can sell you a Christmas tree.'

His hairy hands lay on the counter. On his little finger, he wore an enormous signet ring, and on the finger next to it, a ring with a glittering, red stone. Here too, everything was stacked on the floor in cardboard boxes. 'Lots of show, hides shit below,' thought Leopold.

'Come,' said the man, and opened a curtain to reveal a doorway. The room behind the shop was lit by a weak bulb. If only he'd remembered his glasses! 'Come,' said the man and tugged him by the sleeve. Leopold stumbled. He heard gig-gling, snickering, he'd tripped on a carpet. Now he spotted them, sat against the wall on orange crates. That's why he hadn't seen them at first, they were sat so low. 'Come, come,' said the man. What a hurry! Leopold was hustled through a tiny kitchen, which was crammed with pots and pans and sacks, and amongst them all, two women, shrouded from top to toe in black robes.

'They are timid creatures, Turkish women,' laughed the man.

Another door, and then they were stood outside. The backyard, thought Leopold, al-though he couldn't see a thing.

'Wait,' said the man and disappeared.

Suddenly a weak light fell on the yard. Leopold looked around and saw the man's smiling face behind the kitchen window. He had opened the curtains. And then Leopold realised what the Turk was planning. There it stood, in the middle of the yard: the tree! Three metres tall, guessed Leopold, but he couldn't be sure, because, to his short-sighted eyes, the crown of the tree and the sky just melted into inky blackness. Now the man was standing beside him again, with an axe in each of his hands. 'Come,' he said. Leopold hesitated, but the man just kept on cackling 'Come, come, come', so that Leopold had no choice but to take the axe, raise it high and, when it was his turn, to bring it crashing down against the tree trunk. Was he doing it right? Clang! Their axes clashed together. Where was the light? Five faces at least were pressed against the window. Unveiled women's faces. One step, and the Turk was at the kitchen window. The faces disappeared.

'Wait!'

With his axe still in his hand, he went inside and returned with a woman. He stood her in front of the window, turned her to the light and removed her veil.

'This is something you don't have!'

'I've forgotten my glasses,' said Leopold.

'Come closer.'

The girl shyly drew the veil across her face, but the mouse-tailed man pulled it back again. Leopold brought his face closer to the girl's and sighed deeply. Her eyes were lowered.

'No,' said Leopold, 'We don't have that here.'

The man released the girl and laughed.

'But you wanted a Christmas tree,' he said.

'Yes,' said Leopold, 'for my sick daughter.'

'Just a few more blows.'

They were alone in the yard, the Turk, Leopold and the tree.

'Stop!'

The man drew him aside and gave the trunk a shove. It was over, the tree was felled. The Turk threw his arm around Leopold's shoulders. 'Friend,' he said. Together they looked at the tree.

'How much do I owe you?' asked Leopold, after a suitable silence.

'Nothing!' roared the man. 'The tree is a gift from a Turkish man to a Belgian man, a token of the friendship between my people and your people.'

'But I want to pay you. I have money with me.'

'No, no, it's a present. For you and your daughter from me and my daughter.'

What a friendly man! But how would he get the tree back home? And how would he drag it through the kitchen, the living room and the shop to the street? As if the man could read his thoughts, he opened a door in one of the backyard walls. It opened onto an alley that then came out in a side street of the street where the shop was sited. The two men hugged each other, and the door closed behind Leopold. There he stood with his tree. He'd have to come back, tomorrow, or the next day. To repay the Turk for his trouble. A little gift for him, or his beautiful daughter. But they didn't stay that lovely, not for long. Those Turkish girls had too many children, much too young. Where in God's name was he? Was it a trap? Were the Turk and his comrades waiting for him, with clubs? He was a helpless victim, loaded down with the Christmas tree. Where would they strike? In this alley, or on the street? I'm scared, thought Leopold, and he began to giggle nervous-ly. How long was it since the last time he had been afraid? Step by step, he shuffled forward, in the direction the Turk had pointed. The tree scraped along the ground. Sing, he thought, I have to sing. If you're scared in the dark, you have to sing. 'While shepherds watched their flo...' There were footsteps behind him! Hurried footsteps, following him, chasing him. He started running, dropped the tree. The light at the end of the alley got closer and closer. Come on, Leopold, do your best. Raise those knees, pump those feet, chest out. Hup, two, three, come on, you're almost there. Keep it up! One great leap and he was back in the street, in the blue lamplight. But again he heard footsteps. He sprang into a doorway, and saw a man appear from the alley. He turned left, away from Leopold. Saved! He tiptoed back into the alley, but he couldn't see a thing. He had to get used to the dark again. He swung his feet gingerly forward. 'Tree, where are you? Leopold is here. Leopold has come to fetch you.' He felt the branches of the tree, scratching his shins and ankles. 'Yes, tree, Leopold's here. Were you scared that he'd gone and left you? Cautiously, he felt for the trunk and grasped it. It was leaking resin. 'Oh,' said Leopold, 'So you want us to stick together. Silly tree. Well, don't you worry; Leopold will never abandon you, whatever happens. Were you afraid there, all on your own on the ground in the alley?' Together, step by step, branch by branch, the man and the tree shuffled towards the dim light at the end of the alley. 'Did that nasty man just step on you, tree? Well don't you worry. In a moment, when we are back home, I'll fix a foot to your trunk, and then you can stand up nice and straight. And Cathy will decorate you. She's the best there is at that. You shouldn't underestimate Cathy, tree. People are always underestimating Cathy. Because she's a little bit childish, they think she's helpless. They are all mistaken, you'll see.'

At last they were back in the street again. 'Now you'll have an experience you've never even dreamed of. We are going to catch the tram.' Leopold stopped in his tracks. I am talking to a tree, he thought. He opened his hand, but it stuck to the resin. Irritated, he shook the tree loose. What now? The tram stop was very close. 'Just a little further, tree. Come on, we are almost there.' He gripped the trunk in another place, but again it was leaking resin. Leopold sighed and walked towards the tram stop.

'Out of the question,' said the driver.

'But it's Christmas Eve.'

'Out of the question. You can come, but the tree stays here.'

'Come on,' said Leopold.

'I said no. And no means no.'

'But there's nobody else in the tram.'

'This tram is council property, Sir, and I have to keep it clean and tidy. I can't go letting people get on with half a forest.'

'With one tree. A Christmas tree.'

'Are you getting in or not?'

It was half past nine. On foot with the tree, it would take him at least three quarters of an hour to get back home. And Cathy had to be in bed by ten o'clock. The driver rang the tram bell.

'Can you wait a moment?'

He hid the tree between the shelter and the brick wall behind it.

'I'll come back and fetch you tomorrow,' he whispered. He'd come by bicycle. He'd tie the tree to his delivery bike and wheel it home. 'Stay where you are, don't go away.' He got on the tram.

'Look at the state of you,' said the driver. 'If it wasn't Christmas Eve, I wouldn't take you either!'

Leopold looked at himself. His trousers and shoes were covered in mud. He tried to wipe the mud from his trousers, but he simply smeared them with resin.

'What on earth are you doing now?' said the driver. 'Get out and scrape your shoes on the pavement!'

The doors of the tram swung open again, and Leopold hurriedly carried out the driver's instructions.

'Can I get back in now?'

'Let me see your shoes first... Yes, I suppose so.'

Leopold sat at the back, as far as he could from the grumpy driver. His whole body was tingling and pounding and throbbing. He had to pee. He wondered if he could ask the driver to stop for a moment, but controlled himself. The tram approached his stop. He got up slowly, rang the bell, even shouted goodnight to the driver and got out. Two hundred metres and he'd be back home, but he couldn't wait so he pissed against the metal skeleton of the broken tram shelter. And then he heard the screech of brakes. The tram had stopped! Without buttoning up his trousers, he hurried away from the shelter, and away from the driver who was probably chasing him now. 'That shelter is municipal property!' He didn't want to hear it. With his one hand, he held up his trousers, and with the other he flailed through the air. One, two, one, two, one... He didn't look back, didn't want to know if the driver was in close pursuit. Home! He warily turned his head, the street was empty. Maybe the driver had not got out at all. Should he ring? No, there was no point. Cathy wouldn't open the door. First he'd get his breath back, calmly button up his trousers, and fish the key from his trouser pocket. Now he hoped that Cathy had left the heating on, it was as if the cold had seeped to his bones.

'Cathy, Cathy, Leopold is home!'

He cautiously opened the living room door. There she lay, curled up on the carpet next to the radiator. He tiptoed up to her in his stockinged feet. She was dry! No disposable napkin and Cathy was dry! 'Cathy, Cathy!' She opened an eye. 'I am back. And I have got a wonderful tree, but I can only fetch it tomorrow.' She rolled over onto her back. Her nightdress was wide open; she had been playing with herself again.

'Shame on you, Cathy!'

'Cathy is dry.'

'That's very good. Good girl. Leopold is very pleased. But...' How could he make her understand? He swallowed, brushed her nightdress further open, and laid his hands on her breasts.

'For Leopold, not for Cathy,' he tried and bent over to kiss her nipples. But she pushed him away.

'For Cathy!'

Perhaps she was angry because he hadn't brought a Christmas tree.

'Cathy, Leopold has a plan. If Cathy goes to the toilet now, Leopold'll fetch her presents. She can have them now, because she's been so good.'

'Cathy's just been!'

'Cathy was asleep.'

'Just for a moment.'

Was she telling the truth? It was Christmas Eve, he'd believe her. He bent towards her, to button up her nightdress, but she growled at him.

'For Cathy,' she said, and lifted up one of her breasts as high as she could, stuck out a long, pointed tongue and licked her rosy nipple.

'Cathy!'

She laughed.

'Nice,' she said. 'That's what Leopold does.'

How could he teach her the difference? He'd have to be stricter. He stood up.

'Cathy! Either you behave yourself, or you go straight to bed!'

'Presents,' she said, and buttoned up her nightdress.

'Tomorrow.'

'Now.'

'Only if you go to the toilet.'

'Leopold is dirty,' she said, and pointed to his trousers.

'Of course I'm dirty! If only you knew what I've had to do to find you that Christmas tree. And still you don't behave yourself! I can't leave you alone for five minutes.'

'Cathy has been a good girl.'

'Been, been, but she's not anymore. If Cathy goes to the toilet now, then Leopold will put on other clothes and fetch her presents.'

The resin had left black streaks on the palms of his hands. It would have to wear off, soap did not remove it. Leopold is dirty! Damn it, she'd have to wait. He entered the shower and stood there under the warm jet for a long time, until the cold was finally banished. He laid his bathrobe on the radiator, and wrapped himself, meanwhile, in a soft, pink bath towel. Glorious! It wasn't a good example, but it was much too late to get dressed again. But what had happened to his bathrobe? His arms and legs poked out of it. It wasn't his bathrobe at all, it was Cathy's! But this one was nice and warm. He'd use it just this once. He had three parcels for her: a cuddly toy, a coral necklace and a beige, woollen dress. 'Not too strict,' the doctor had said. 'You have to be flexible sometimes.' Well the cuddly toy was not too strict, the dress was to keep some order. To make her realise she couldn't walk round in her nightdress day and night. Naturally, it was the cuddly toy that she liked the best, but she put on the necklace and tried the woollen dress. It fitted perfectly! If she put on high heels and sheer black stockings now, she could be a model in one of those glossy women's magazines that lie in doctors' waiting rooms.

'You know that you're really gorgeous?'

He crawled up to her on his hands and knees, threw his arms around her legs, lifted up her dress. She pushed his hands away. 'Cathy has to learn to dress herself,' she said. 'Cathy has to keep her clothes on.'

'Well Cathy has to also learn to start wearing knickers.'

'Cathy hasn't got any knickers. Cathy only gets nappies from Leopold.'

She was right! He would buy her some tomorrow. No, the day after, when the shops were open.

'Tell me what knickers you want, Cathy, pink, or with lace, or high-cut, or...'

She burst out laughing, threw her hands in front of her mouth, and then pointed to his penis. It was sticking out from under the folds of his bathrobe. Her bathrobe. What a sight! And this time she did not push him away, and he lifted her dress even higher, over her belly and her breasts, arms raised, and over her head, and he promised that he'd buy her knickers, and perhaps she was cured, and it had only been a phase, and she could abandon the nappies... She pressed her finger to his lips and pushed him, but not away from her, she pushed him on his back. And she mounted him, like a proud Amazon. 'Cathy is a good girl,' she said. 'Cathy is a good girl. Good and beautiful.'

Especially beautiful.' And she rode high above him, faster and faster, wilder and wilder. For a moment he was scared that she'd get too wild, that he'd feel nothing, only fear it was going to hurt. 'Take it easy, take it easy,' he whispered. But she threw back her head, and he reached for her breasts and found her rhythm, one, two, one, two, one, two... And then a flood broke over him. And he thought, this is impossible. But she laughed and let the flood flow over him. He slipped out of her, the rhythm was broken. Now she lay beside him, her water dripped from his belly to the carpet. She straightened up, and said: 'Leopold is dirty! Leopold has to wear a nappy, dirty, dirty, Leopold!' I'll push her away, he thought, but he pulled her towards him and kissed her and was hard again. The surprise had unsettled him, but now... now he wanted to whisper in her ear: Give me more, nice and warm, go ahead, let it flow, not now, but in a moment, when I'm almost there, when I tell you: now. But he didn't dare, so he hoped she'd feel it without him saying, know what he wanted, and that she'd do it together with him, that they'd empty themselves together. And tomorrow, he'd pay the Turk, and bring a present for his beautiful daughter, and he'd bring Cathy along and say: But have you got this? And he'd collect the tree and they'd decorate it with lights and globes and garlands, and it would be Christmas.
