



BRUNO GMÜNDER

**MY
BROTHER
AND HIS
BROTHER**

Håkan Lindquist

others. A black line framed four pictures. They were pictures from my brother's funeral. I could see the white coffin in all of them.

Mother and Father were there, though I really saw just my father. The woman by his side—Mother—was wearing a black veil over her face.

I tried to find someone else, someone I didn't know.

"Do you think she's in these pictures?" I asked.

"Who?"

"The girl Paul was in love with."

Daniel shook his head. "No, Jonas. The one he was in love with was not at the funeral."

"No? How come? Were they not lovers anymore?"

Daniel didn't answer. Instead, he bent forward and reached for a cigarette. While he lit it I repeated my questions.

"Was it like that? Were they not lovers? Maybe they didn't like each other anymore."

"You ask a lot of questions."

"But I want to know," I said, while trying to fan away the cigarette smoke. "Why don't you tell me?"

Daniel laughed quietly. "Well, I don't want to sound secretive, but sometimes it might be best not to tell the whole story. At least not at once. I've told you quite enough already. Perhaps I can tell you more some other time. In time. If you're still interested ..."

"But can't you—"

"No, not now."

"But I would like to—"

Daniel sighed. "Please, Jonas, I don't want to tell you any more for the moment. That you will have to accept."

"Okay," I answered sulkily, "but I *would* like to know. I wish I had my own memories of Paul, and all that happened to him, but I don't. That's why I have to ask the ones who knew him, the ones who met him." I stopped and looked at Daniel. "Please, couldn't you tell me a little more?"

But Daniel came close and silenced my lips with his forefinger.

"Hush!"

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There was a note lying on the kitchen table when I got home.

Hi, Jonas!

We've gone shopping. Also thinking of visiting Grandma and Grandpa for a while. We'll be home by eight. There's a pan with soup in the fridge. Warm it up if you're hungry.

Mum

I looked at the clock. A quarter past five. No, I wasn't hungry.

I fetched the attic key.

The wine-colored suitcase was standing where I had left it, right inside the door. I was filled with an almost devout feeling. I picked up the gray-checked trousers and the other clothes and put them on top of the sideboard.

When the light went off I lit my flashlight. And so I picked out Paul's books. I recognized some of the titles. I had borrowed them myself from the library. I put aside those I hadn't read.

Then I took out the first photo album. There was writing on the inside of the binder: *This photo album belongs to Paul Lundberg. 6 November 1967.* I recognized the handwriting. It belonged to my mother.

The first pages were filled with school photographs. With the flashlight I examined the black-and-white pictures in the search for my brother. He was smiling in the picture from his first year at school. In all the others his face was serious. I couldn't find any photograph from Paul's fifth grade. But beside the picture from his sixth grade was a copy of the photograph that stood on the TV set.

I turned the pages. In some pictures I found Daniel. In the first one he was standing on a beach, laughing. He looked so young. In the next picture he himself was holding a camera, pointing it toward the photographer.

Then there were some pictures of Paul I had never seen before. In the first one he was sitting alone on a rock by the shore. He was wearing a pair of checked swimming trunks. A large towel was hanging over his shoulders. He was smiling at the camera.

In the second picture Daniel had joined him. They were sitting close together on

the rock. Daniel was laughing, Paul was smiling broadly, and Daniel's arm rested on my brother's shoulder.

The other pictures I recognized from the album belonging to my mother and father. Birthdays and Christmases. I studied carefully the pictures from Paul's thirteenth birthday. Yes, there was the light-brown suede jacket in one picture of Mother and Paul that had been taken in the kitchen. I could see it, lying on the table behind my mother and my brother. Beside it was an ashtray. A thin bit of smoke from a glowing cigarette was spiraling up. It must be Daniel's.

I brought the album close and studied Paul's face. He seemed to be so happy. And I could see we were alike. I could clearly see the likeness. Almost like brothers.

Then I opened the other album. Once again Mother had written Paul's name on the inside of the binder. And a date: *28 December 1968*. Perhaps the album was a delayed Christmas gift.

The first photograph was of my parents. Our parents. They were standing arm in arm outside the garage on the other side of the yard. They were laughing and looking into the camera. Father had long sideburns. And on the right side of my mother and my father there was a glimpse of an old dusty Volvo.

Then I turned the page.

A picture of a boy I didn't recognize filled the page. It was taken outdoors. In the background I could see snow and something that looked like an outhouse. The boy could be fourteen or fifteen. He had straight black hair. He was smiling. He was wearing a dark heavy coat, which appeared to be rather ragged. The upper buttons were undone. The unbuttoned part revealed a neck that looked far too naked in the wintry environment. Still, he didn't seem to be cold. He was smiling, and his glittering dark eyes were turned toward the photographer. You're so beautiful, I thought. And read the text beside the picture: *Down by the bay. March 1969. Petr je tady.*

"Petr je tady?" I whispered. "What does it mean?"

The next page had four black-and-white pictures. The first one was of you, Paul. It was taken in my room. Or your room, rather. You're standing in front of the desk, leaning with one hand on the back of the chair. Whoever took the photo must have been in the doorway to the hall. You're looking at the photographer. Your eyes and your lips are playfully showing that secret smile you sometimes have in the picture on top of the television. You're holding a notebook in your other hand. It looks like the notebooks we used in school in the first grades, only this one is thicker.

In the second picture you're nude, moving out from a bathroom as someone catches you with the camera. Your hair is wet and straggly. In your right hand you're holding what I think is a towel. The picture is a bit blurred right there, since you were moving your hand. Perhaps you were trying to cover yourself in front of the photographer. You would look like a little boy, if it weren't for the dark hair above your crotch.

The third picture is a nature scene, a rock by the sea. Waves are crashing against

the rock. A lone pine tree bends in the wind. The sky shows thunderclouds.

And then—in the fourth picture—the boy from the winter picture is back. He is squatting on top of the rock. The wind ruffles his hair. He’s looking toward the sea and the waves. There is a shoulder bag by his side, and he is holding its strap.

There was no text to any of the pictures. Still, I could feel strongly that they were connected. There was a common thread, which I—at this point—could only sense.

I decided to return to the apartment. I wanted to be there when my mother and father came home.

They had not returned. The clock in the kitchen showed twenty minutes to seven.

I went into my room and put the books on my desk. Then I stood holding the photo albums in my hands, wondering where to hide them. That’s right, hide them. Because it felt as if I were poking into something I wasn’t supposed to, and I didn’t want my mother and father to know about it.

I put the albums in the bottom of my wardrobe. Before I covered them with the old clothes and stuff that normally lies there, I took another look at the picture of Paul on his way out of the bathroom.

There was something strange about that photo. I had a tingling sensation in my stomach. I could see we resembled each other. And I felt I wanted to touch him, touch his body. Or mine.

That evening I was lying in bed thinking of the things Daniel had told me. I understood he must know at least some of the answers to my questions. But I couldn’t understand why he didn’t want to tell me the whole story.

Before I had gone to bed I had a talk with my mother in the kitchen.

“I went to see Daniel today,” I told her.

“So you did go,” she said. “That’s good. Could he help you?”

“With what?”

She laughed. “With that name, of course. Princi, or whatever it was.”

“Oh, yes, he could. But it’s no name. It’s just like you said. It’s just a word. Even though someone seems to have used it as a nickname.”

“What are you up to?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“You’re up to something. That I can tell. You look like you do when you’re solving a crossword or playing chess. I could see it when we got home. What is it you’re trying to solve? Can I help in any way?”

I hesitated. “I’m not sure. Maybe.”

Mother smiled. “Maybe, you say. Maybe I can help. In what way?”

“I’m not really sure,” I repeated. “Perhaps by just talking to me.”

“Talking to you? But we talk all the time. Even now. Well, anyway, what do you want to know?”

“Well, yesterday when we were talking about Paul, you said he might have been thinking of a girl he had met. Do you know who that girl was?”

Mother shook her head. “No. I don’t even know if he had met a girl.”

“But you said you thought he was thinking of a girl, didn’t you?”

“I don’t know what he was thinking of. It was just something I said. Paul never said anything about a girl. Someone special, I mean. Not as far as I can remember. I don’t know what he was thinking of. I meant it as a suggestion. *Perhaps* he was thinking of a girl, perhaps it was something else. I don’t know.”

“Was he like that often? Daydreaming, I mean?”

“Yes, I guess you could say that.” She paused. “Stefan and Paul were a lot alike in that way. And you know how Dad is. Yes, it happened quite often.”

“Do you think he was sad?” I asked. “Could that have been the reason he was dreaming?”

“Sad? No, I don’t think he was sad. Why do you ask that? He wasn’t a sad kind of person. Not sadder than you or me.”

I turned away. “Daniel said Paul was sad now and then.”

“Daniel,” she whispered. “Well ... Yes, perhaps he was, but at home he was happy most of the time. And we talked a lot, Paul and I. About everything. But when he visited Daniel ... well ...”

“Yes?”

Mother sighed. “Well, I don’t know. Perhaps you’ve noticed it yourself. I mean, Daniel isn’t exactly a happy kind of person. I mean, he’s often feeling low. At times even depressed. And Paul spent a lot of his time with Daniel. Perhaps it was easier for Paul to talk about things that made him sad, when he was at Daniel’s place. I mean, it might have been that ... that atmosphere at Daniel’s ... An atmosphere that made it easier to talk about sorrow and sad thoughts.”

“Was Daniel feeling low even when you were young?” I asked.

“Daniel has always been a bit low-spirited. It’s in his nature, I suppose. But I’ve always liked him. A lot.”

“But why is he sad?”

She shook her head. “Well, Jonas, you’ll have to ask Daniel about that if you really want to know. I don’t want to talk about his feelings. It would be like gossiping, don’t you think?”

“Yeah.”

We sat in silence. From the living room we could hear the theme from some TV series. I looked out the kitchen window, and suddenly remembered my dream.

“Was Paul interested in butterflies?”

Mother laughed. “Oh, Jonas, you never stop confusing me. What makes you think that?”