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THE YEARNING FOR LIFE

By Mai Misfeldt (translated from the Danish by Thomas E. Kennedy)

Lotte Inuk's *The Hunger Sculptress* (or: ICE AGE) builds on strong, autobiographical experiences, but it is controlled and told with a sure hand.

For someone who once lived in the psychotic world of anorexia, reading Lotte Inuk's account of it entails a shock of recognition. She hits the bull's eye of that reality in which every day is an extreme effort to avoid eating and in which the hours are precisely divided up into strict rituals. There is no master so strict as the hunger sculptress.

The framework, in brief, is that the 11-12 year-old Charlotta, nicknamed Charlie, moves with her mother to Nuuk sometime in the mid-1970s. The mother is busy taking care of her job, and lonely Charlie is largely left to her own devices and her sense of being unwanted. The yearning and hunger for a real life is strong and unclear and fills much of Charlie's round body. A number of harsh experiences, physical and verbal assaults by adults, leave their marks, and when the one and only girlfriend, who Charlie without really understanding it herself has fallen in love with, turns her back, there is only one way out: To completely disappear from the world as a physical being. To erase the body she cannot stand or like and which always feels wrong. To be pure and invincible.

When she hits 28 kilos (about 62 pounds at a height of 5'5"), the world around her recognizes that this is a child calling for help. Charlie is admitted to hospital and falls into a deep coma, into a dream world where good and evil forces fight over her. The novel shifts

between sections that tell about Charlie's life before and during her illness and those more floating, dramatized mythological scenes from the dream world.

Fortunately, however, the novel is also so much more than an account of anorexia. Anorexia is only a symptom, a picture of the fight against normalcy's nice girl which the adult world wants to force through. As a 40-year-old, one can recognize Charlie's yearning and dreams as freedom, just as well as a 14-year-old would read the book and recognize herself.

Outsiders

Not least, the novel provides an important description of how it was for a Danish child to move to Greenland in the turbulent years before home rule. A place which is striking in its indescribable beauty, which later lodges as a yearning in Charlie's body, but also where the Danish children are strange outsiders. No one knows how long they will stay there, they are told the language is too difficult to learn, people come and go, and even if Charlie tries to be like the Greenlander children and admires the beautiful Greenlander boys, she's still an outsider. "Go home, whore," the native girls shout at her. But there is no other home for a child than where she lives.

With *The Hunger Sculptress*, (or *Ice Age*) Inuk has hold of autobiographical material which clearly is burning hot, but she manages to handle it with the insight of distance. And if she could straighten up a little in the language, which occasionally runs away with her in purple frills, it would definitely strengthen a body of work which is taking serious form.