

HARE AND HOUNDS

Childhood memories are impressions; fragments and flashes of memory recorded by our senses. The creaking of a swing, the smell of the forest, the sand on a dune, a bleeding knee.

When I was small I lived in the Zaspia district of Gdansk, a port city in the north of Poland, on the seventh floor of a drab, prefabricated tower block. Around broken stairs, a few concrete bunkers and piles of debris. Once a week my mother, my brother and I went to Sopot, a neighbouring town up the Baltic coast. On the way we passed the fire station, the university and villas with large gardens, hidden behind hedges. At the end we reached the road lined with chestnuts. There, near the forest, was where my grandparents lived.

Their house was made of dark, almost black, wood and it creaked in the wind. They kept jars of jam in the basement, Wobo scaring in the attic and Kanapons living in the armchair. I remember pictures on the walls, books and mysterious objects. I remember the gnarled hands of my grandfather playing with us and his firm grip when he pulled out splinters. The garden was my grandparents' pride and joy and delighted grandfather with its vitality and grandmother with its beauty. Grandmother would pick up snails and take them to the forest since they were devouring the flowers. Grandfather would bring them back, saying that they'd starve in the forest. The forest was his natural environment - a remedy for migraines and daily life. He used to take my brother and I for walks which could take several hours, regardless of the weather and at all times of the day and year. He always decided on a purpose for our outings which would motivate tired children's legs. Either we were picking a bunch of flowers for grandmother or we were checking whether the wild strawberries had already appeared near the 'outlaw's' house. Sometimes we went to the army compound.

From the air, when I fly over Sopot these days, I can see my grandparents' house, all wrapped in the forest. All my flashes of memories and countless impressions are hidden there. Nowadays I take my children there so they can capture their own impressions.