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CLAN OF THE CENTAUR

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Something lies within us that causes us to draw in and creep about like a thief in the darkness of the night, or like a man who, dizzy with wine, greatly offends his master and then apprehensively awaits the morning to see how it all will end. From whence has it come? This sentiment is not characteristic solely of me. I remember how Kukovaitis, my father, would suddenly start awake from his seemingly peaceful noon-time siesta and would dart his gaze about as if looking for some foe lying in ambush. I did not know why he used to do this. I thought perhaps he was really concerned for his life. But only when I reached a mature age did I realize the enemy forcing us to twitch awake and stare about resides within our very selves. But even further, I have now seen several times how my young son, Šventaragis, while playing, or practicing archery, or deep in thought, will suddenly start. His pupils will narrow and his muscles will tighten like those of a lynx before a leap. All of us — including my father, and myself, and Šventaragis, are healthy and strong men, who should grab life by the horns and throw it on its side, who should make life kneel to us, who should make of life a useful tool to achieve our purposes with. But we have a certain indolence, a certain indecision of action and thought that makes us resemble a hand with its fingers outspread, through which life pours like sun-dried sand. Instead of ourselves ruling life, we allow ourselves to be ruled by it. We all of the time are waiting for something; however, judging from the way we act during this waiting, this something must be — disaster.

It seems to me someone of our family once made a mistake, and the results of this mistake have continued to persecute us. I even believe I know what kind of error it was. In a word, it seems to me the cause of our weakness must be searched for in the past.

Varšas told me the tale.

Varšas lay half-sitting on bear hides amongst a multitude of figures of men and animals carved from elm and juniper wood and smeared with grease mixed with ash. Many who have seen these figurines believe them to be tiny idols which he reveres and to which he prays silently when alone. But Varšas has explained to me that these are representations of those men and beasts whose lives he has taken over the course of his own unusually long existence. Still, I believe Varšas only told half the truth: his own life, in this way incarnating itself in so many different representations, has through the course of time become itself a holy thing to him. I think Varšas has deified his own life to such an extent that his real life appears to him not to be his own, but that of everyone. Listening on windy nights to the sounds of the forest, earth, air, and houses, Varšas imagines he has lived so long only because the lives of those he has killed have devolved to him.

It may be I am wrong, and the wooden figures are merely carved pieces of wood Varšas keeps to decorate his room, like a former hunter who decorates his home with the horns of elk and bison he has shot.

"Tell me, Varšas," I say to him, "Why have you decorated your room with those you have destroyed and not with those you have created?"

His white lips part just the thinnest amount into a smile; the ends of his fingers, thin with age, tremble.

"You'll find out when you reach my age, Utenis."

Varšas' voice is gentle and pleasant, and, after he speaks, the air in the room vibrates for a time. Varšas is dodging the question. But his answer is not really important to me. What is paramount is Varšas understands life. That is what I want to ask him about.

Varšas is my servant who does not serve. No, that is not quite correct. He performs no chores and brings me no flagons of water to drink; he does not prepare my bed and does not bring to it Princess Visgalė. He is too old for these things. But he serves us in other ways. Along the difficult road to awareness Varšas is our sole support. Varšas extends us a hand when we become tangled up in our thoughts, when we no longer know what to do, when we cannot think of how to punish the guilty, when, in sum, we want to know who, indeed, it is we are.

Varšas knows how to write letters. He served my father Kukovaitis; while yet a boy he served my grandfather Živinbudas. He has to know the answers to many questions that leave me no peace. He who knows how to write letters knows such secrets as people carry to their graves without having disclosed them to a living soul. There is no reason Varšas should hide anything from me.

He takes a strip of dried venison and begins to suck upon it, at the same time chewing it with his pale, soft gums. A small pile of dried meat lies before him on the table. Sucking on the meat, Varšas' eyes darken with pleasure, but their gaze is still riveted on me. It seems Varšas' glance holds it against me, that I am not as old.

The door is wide open. Outside the sun shines and wind blows. The north wind makes the trees dance and shake along with the bushes, the grass, and the few white clouds in the sky. The pure light of the sun is indifferent towards the earth. It is cold. I wrap myself tighter in my cloak, thinking of how best to explain to Varšas what it is I would like from him. Here, in the half-light Varšas' body seems light and transparent. At any moment Varšas could melt away like ice.

"Varšas," I say, "I want you to explain something to me."

He says nothing, merely gazing at the raging wind outside and at the swallows shooting across the fields. I could swear he knows the question I have come to ask him.

"How is it, Varšas, that we, living almost at the very center of our country, always feel as if we were at the ends of the earth? As if something were guarding us from the whole world, just like a gardener guards his vegetables."

Varšas shakes his head, not answering.

"No, Varšas," I say, "You know the answer. I command you. Give us the answer we are waiting for."

"You can order me or not, just as you please. At my age that signifies nothing."

"Answer me, Varšas." My tone suddenly loses its sharpness.

"People are happy when they are able to live quietly and without worry. It would be hard to imagine a life more peaceful than yours and your son's and your intimates'. You are fortunate. The whole world of people boils and bubbles like a kettle of fat meat. It brims with danger, for people are predatory. You have no fear of such dangers, for no one has an eye to your domains or your life."

"Varšas, whatever I do, I always feel eyes fixed on me. I turn around swiftly, as unexpectedly as possible, but I see no one watching me. But, even so, there is someone watching me. They watched my father like that, and they are watching Šventaragis. We are all awaiting an attack. What is going on, Varšas? You know the answer."

"I know," quietly says Varšas. "I know."

A swallow flies into the room, circles around our heads, squawks, and flies outside again. There are many of those birds in this area, but right now I am excited and the swallow's flight into the room seems to me to be a sign with which to shut Varšas' mouth, to stop him from saying anything. A half-sigh, half-moan forces itself from me. My emotions are stretched to the limit. But Varšas does not see any of that. Now he, having fixed his eyes on one point, is searching for words with which to begin to speak.

So, like I say, Varšas told me the tale.

"The Centaur is to blame for everything," he says. "And Jučas, Jeremferden's servant. That was long ago."

Varšas' voice waxes stronger and then weaker, as if he were singing a long, slow hymn.

"But even longer ago, Mandazig's son Attila appeared; he, who, for his cruel nature, was named the Scourge of God. He murdered his three brothers — Achiar, Rocha, and Bledon — and the princess of a far land with eleven thousand of her handmaids who had sinned against no one. He liked thick, flowing blood. He enjoyed the color red, and his nostrils trembled like a wolf's at the pungent scent of warm blood. Having murdered his brothers, Attila reigned by himself in Hungary. With five hundred men of his clan, also thirsty for blood, he went, to Italy, and everything living ran from him to hide in the cracks of the earth. Marcus Antonius Palemon, the son of the king of Pontus, became afraid of the word spreading about Attila and, with four clans of patricians, took flight in ships. After many long wanderings in oceans and seas, they reached the river Nemunas and sailed upstream, looking for a place where they could stop and live without fear,

for they were ever haunted with a vision of Attila breathing down their necks. Sailing up the Nemunas, they came to the river Dubysa, turning up which they found high hills on either side, and, beyond those hills, wide meadows and luxuriant oak forests, full of game — bison, aurochs, elk, stag, deer, lynx, marten, fox, squirrel, ermine, and all sorts of others while the river teemed with unusual fish, and not only those which bred locally, but also many which came in from the sea, as the mouth of the Nemunas was not far.

Near these rivers, the Nemunas and the Dubysa, and near the sea, they settled and multiplied. They called that land Žemaitija.

The four clans of patricians who arrived here together were these: the totems of the Centaur, the Pillars, the Bear, and the Rose. Their leaders were Dausprung, Prospero Cezarine, Julian, and Hector. Palemon had three sons of whom only one, Kūnas, had descendants: Kernius and Gimbutas. These also had a son apiece. To Kernius was born Živinbudas, and to Gimbutas, Mantvila. And when Živinbudas had as many years as now does your son Šventaragis, Prince Kernius took me from Bisėnai at the age of eleven to serve him and his son Živinbudas.

"No, Varšas," I say to him, "My grandfather's name was not Kernius. You yourself said the Centaurs descended from Dausprung. You made a mistake, Varšas. That was so long ago."

"Attend me softly, prince. I have not erred. Your grandfather in truth was the brother of Mantvila Gimbutas-son. And you would to this day be the prince of the Palemons, if not for Jučas, may he not be reborn to a new life."

Varšas becomes silent, gathering his thoughts about the most important things, while I sit completely still and feel my face growing warm.

Jučas was first seen by Sudvajus, Horsemaster for Prince Kernius, as Jučas, having swum the river, waded out from it and dried his clothes on the sun-heated sand of the riverfront. Jučas was a massive man. About thirty-five years of age, strong as a beast and with eyes of an indescribable color, eyes which pierced everything to and through. If of four jugs only one held milk, Jučas would reach right for that one, without even having lifted the cover to see what was inside. Jučas had one tremendous singularity: on his whole massive body, there was not a single hair. Not on his head, nor on his neck, nor under his arms, nor below his belly, like other men. He did not even have eyebrows, and his eyelids were without lashes. Jučas' sun-reddened skull was just exactly like the egg of a thrush. This all appeared very unusual, and we all would have wondered greatly at it, but Jučas bore himself as if not we should wonder at him, but that instead Jučas should wonder more at us. I would not, however, say that Jučas was haughty. For he could have presented himself as being a free man, and no one would have doubted it. But all the same he introduced himself as being a servant.

"I am Jučas, the servant of Jeremferdenas." Such were his first words, spoken to the prince. "Jeremferdenas sends his greetings."

The prince and his intimates did not know what to say in answer. No one had ever heard of Jeremferdenas.

"What do you want of us, Jučas? Who is Jeremferdenas?"

"My lord Jeremferdenas did not charge me to speak of him. He commanded me to bring you news that will sadden you. But Jeremferdenas does not wish you ill. Send for your brother, prince, and then I will impart to you what I have been charged with. And now let them show me where I can rest. For forty days and nights I have marched without sleep. I am fatigued."

Jučas' speech had been simple, without adornment, but impressive nonetheless. Immediately upon laying down on his bedding, Jučas fell asleep and did not rise until Prince Gimbutas rode in from Kaunas and the steel shod hooves of his horse sounded in the courtyard. Jučas had slept for four full days, not waking to eat, nor even having moved. I had brought food to him several times, but had always found him in the same position. It was also astonishing that Jučas slept with eyes wide open. When I would walk about in his room, the pupils of Jučas' eyes would follow my movements. But he himself truly slept. His breathing was regular, his body relaxed, the tip of his tongue hung out of his mouth, and from the corner of his mouth a trickle of saliva had run and dried.

Having come to the guest hall, Jučas bowed to both the princes and sat before them. We all waited for what he would say.

"Jeremferdenas sends his greetings to the house of Palemon," Jučas began, "And informs you, through his servant Jučas, that the House of Palemon is fated to perish in its twelfth generation."

I saw Prince Gimbutas' face grow pale and his hand squeeze the handle of his dagger, but Jučas did not even flinch.

"The men of the House of Palemon will kill each other or will simply pass away without heirs. Jeremferdenas, for whom there are no secrets in this land, has seen how the last of the Palemons dies with a flagon of wine in his hand. This my master has commanded me to say to you."

Jučas became silent, and all those who were there looked from one to the other in great confusion, angry or afraid. The first to recover from his astonishment was Prince Gimbutas.

"He is a trickster. Bind him."

But Prince Kernius stopped the servants.

"What house will arise after us?" he asked.

"The Clan of the Centaur," without cavil answered Jučas.

"And after them?"

"I do not know," said Jučas. "But Jeremferdenas certainly knows."

"Where is this Jeremferdenas?" growled Prince Gimbutas. "Show me his dominions. I will kill him."

"Jeremferdenas cannot be killed," calmly replied Jučas; it seemed he was immune to all passion, so well was he controlled. "You should not concern yourselves with him. At this time you should look to yourselves."

"If what you say is true, it hardly seems there is anything to be done," remarked Prince Kernius.

"But yet there is," answered Jučas. "One branch of your clan must become Centaur."

His words could have had just one meaning. In the region of Ukmergė there lived the sole descendant of Dausprungas. He would be condemned the moment one of the two princes sitting in the hall would agree to take the totem of the Centaur for his own.

For some time silence reigned in the hall. Again Gimbutas was the first to interrupt it.

"I don't believe a single word this beardless trickster has said."

He jumped up and stomped the ground from anger.

"Our house is eternal. No one can doubt that without fearing for their lives. I will slay the Centaur, and he will no longer threaten us, the Palemons, neither now, nor ever in the future. This I, Gimbutas, do swear."

"After the Palemons will come the Centaur," repeated Jučas, the servant of Jeremferdenas.

Prince Kernius kept his gaze fixed on Jučas' eyes. Prince Gimbutas trembled when he heard his brother say:

"I agree. Yes, I believe you, foreigner. My son Živinbudas will become the Centaur."

Prince Gimbutas, clenching his fists, exited the hall with his escort. We soon heard them riding away.

"From now you will have simply to wait," said Jučas. "You will do nothing more as you watch how, one after the other, your relatives will die. Your lives will be long and slow, but your relations' lives will be short, fiery, and without peace. Every step they take will bring them closer to the abyss, and every step of your own will bring you closer to that greatness which is fated for you."

"I agree," breathlessly repeated Kernius.

"But this is not all," Jučas said, rising and approaching Kernius to bend and whisper at his ear, so softly we could barely hear him. "This is not yet all. For the lives and honor of your clan you will have to pay."

Prince Kernius started, then leaned back and ran his gaze over Jučas from head to foot.

"No, not to me," Jučas almost smiled. "Neither Jeremferdenas or I need anything from you, you need have no dread of that. But, you realize, this is a matter of cheating the gods. You are deceiving them, not wanting to accept the fate which has been ascribed to you from there," he said, pointing up above. "That is a transgression, and transgressors are punished, are they not?"

"What type of punishment can we expect? Has Jeremferdenas not seen this?"

"No, he does not know this. But I myself greatly dislike the Centaur. Half man, half animal."

"But that is just a totem," weakly answered the prince.

"True," confirmed Jučas. "But so much is clear: this is the only way the House of Palemon can survive."

"But perhaps ..." Now the prince was beginning to feel uncertain. "Will we not be forced to pay too high a price for this?" he said, turning to us, as if seeking our support.

"Father," said Živinbudas. "I assent to being the Centaur." Jučas came to his full height and, for the first time during the days he spent with us, he laughed, showing strong, white teeth. Without uttering a further word he departed from the hall. After four or five days he, still without uttering a word, disappeared, never to be seen again.

Varšas became silent and fixed his gaze upon something behind me. I turned around. In the doorway stood Šventaragis, my son. His face showed he had heard Varšas' tale. In the beginning anger overcame me and I was about to throw something at him. But Varšas restrained me with a glance. Well, then, all to the better. Sooner or later Šventaragis would have to learn everything; he undoubtedly would eventually mature to those questions, just as I had.

"How much longer do we have to wait, Varšas?" he asked.

"Not long, lord," answered Varšas. "You are the fourth generation after Prince Kernius. But from Gimbutas there have been already nine. Like Jučas said, they hurry to live and to die. Mantvila, Gimbutas' son, begot two sons: Vykintas and Erdvilą. Vykintas died without heirs. Erdvilą begot Mingaila. Mingaila begot two sons: Skirmantas and Ginvilas. Ginvilas begot Borisas, Borisas — Rogvolodas, Rogvolodas — Glėbas, who died without heirs. Skirmantas begot Prisimantas, Liubartas, and Treniota. The first two died without progeny. Treniota begot Algimantas, Algimantas — his son Ringaudas. Ringaudas begot two sons: Mindaugas and Dausprungas. The latter begot Tautvilą, who died having left no one. Mindaugas begot Vaišvilkas, Repeikis, Girstutis, and Ruklys. Of those four only Vaišvilkas remains, the ruler of Lithuania. He has no sons, no authority among the princes and nobility, has no virtue, and is completely given up to drunkenness. After him it is Šventaragis, your turn, if Jučas told the truth."

"Leave us now, Šventaragis," I said, and he left looking so serious and thoughtful that it touched my heart.

"Are you happy with what you have learned?" asked Varšas when we were alone.

"I can say this, Varšas. I do not understand why that feeling of waiting which afflicts me is so much like a feeling of awaiting *disaster*. Should it not be the reverse?"

"You have become used to waiting without knowing for what. A person's life is arranged similarly to the four seasons. Joy's analog would be summer. The remaining seasons are cold, foul, wet, and grim. So much for man's dismal emotions," replied Varšas, and I perceived he knew nothing more and could be of no further help to me.

Again he took a piece of dried meat and began to gum it. The face of old age is repulsive, I reflected, as I left him and strode back into the day, which was brimful of sun and cold wind. Nearly four months of the usual waiting had past since that day until that happened, which, it appears, had to happen, and which has changed my view of the world and of the nature of man in its essence. Not even Varšas could give me any advice. He just sat, all enwrapped in ermine furs, looking with watery eyes at the reflections on the walls cast by the fire, and kept repeating:

"Jučas is the one who did all this. I know: Jučas is to blame for it all."

But in truth Jučas, who must long ago have become dust, was innocent of this charge. Nevertheless, Varšas could not give up and show he was incapable of giving some answer. What would his long life have been worth if it had become clear there were things he was powerless to understand? I did not gainsay Varšas, but it pained me to witness his pain and his own tormenting of his defenseless, impotent memory.

When the first snow came, when animals first begin to leave clear tracks that enable day-long pursuit, we held a wonderful, large hunt. Having invited guests from the neighboring areas, we planned to enjoy this diversion to the limit. The beasts were fat, having foraged through the cool summer and the long, warm fall; the fresh, squeaking snow reinvigorated their senses, like the touching of a newly closed wound, and they were yet quick and strong. How all of this — the crunching of the snow, the warm smell of the horses, the rough jests of the men, the fever of the hunt, the baying of the hounds, the sweat on the face from the effort of the riding and the throwing of the spear, the cup of yet hot, sweet blood from the neck of a freshly slain beast that caresses the parched palate and causes a feeling of unsurpassed satiety — how all of this renews a man's soul and forces the heart to beat at a faster rate!

Having broken all four spears I had taken with me, I, instead of sending a servant, turned my charger around and, heated by the passions of the hunt, galloped towards home. My falcon's name is Nestanas. Varšas raised him for me, and he always accompanied me on the hunt. Nestanas, unlike other falcons, did not need to have his eyes hooded while being brought to the place of the hunt or returned from there. As I would ride out, I would command that Nestan be released, and he would continually circle in the sky, high overhead, my silent companion. When the urge struck him, he would descend from the sky to rest upon my shoulder. But this occurred relatively rarely. Most often, I would lift my eyes skyward to see him, with his wings widely outspread, gliding high above in the sky.

The winter before last, while in the hunt, I had fallen from my mount and had injured my knee. I laid half the day in the already deep snow, unable to rise and remount my horse. The cold began slowly to seep into my body, and I began to think I would die, but then they finally found me. The lodestar of their search had been Nestanas, patiently and loyally circling in the air over that area where misfortune had struck me. Anyone, wanting to know which side of the forest I might be on, needed only glance at the sky to gratify his wish.

I had spurred my mount and headed homeward, when suddenly I felt someone grip my shoulder strongly. It was Nestanas, my falcon. His sharp talons pierced my clothing and painfully bit into my skin. I shook myself, wanting to throw off the bird and force him to fly. Nestanas eased his grip somewhat, but did not arise into the air. At another time I would have understood that Nestanas wanted, in his own language, to tell me something, to communicate something to me, to affect my actions in some way. But at that time, like I said, I was excited and paid no more attention to the falcon. Nonetheless, when I think of it now, it might have been much better if he had continued to fly high overhead. Perhaps then everyone would have known where I was, and it would have been possible to avoid that which was to occur.

Jumping from my mount in the courtyard, I ran inside and hurried to my sleeping rooms, where I kept my spears, so that they would always be ready to hand if needed. Balčiukė, my wife's Princess Visgalė's, servant, upon seeing me became afraid and dropped an urn filled with ashes. But I paid no attention to this. With several strides I ran into the room and grabbed up a spear. I turned around wanting to speed back to the hunt. And then I witnessed a sight which I absolutely had not expected. In our wide bed, amongst long-wooled blankets, were lying two people: a man and a woman. Not wishing this and knowing nothing, as the God is my witness, I came upon them in that moment, when the passion of love and propagation had plunged them into oblivion. The white face of the woman, with eyes closed and hair spilling over the pillow, was that of my wife, Visgalė — and I had never seen her more beautiful. Who the man was I could not yet tell at that first glance.

My hand acted faster than thought. Giving off a short cry, as I was accustomed to doing in the hunt, as if to lend the arm additional strength, I drew back and let fly the spear with all my might. The well-made spear pierced the man to and through, for when he groaned and collapsed and then fell to the side, I could see that the point of the spear, coming out the far side, had left a small wound on Visgalė's breast.

Now I recognized the man. It was Lisica, one of our servants, a youngster of twenty years, whose glance and mouth for some unknown reason had always been full of derision. Because of that expression, he had always appeared wiser than in truth he was. I am convinced death found him before he had recovered from the intoxication of love-making, and that he had had no chance to return from the void. Blood coursed from his wound like water over ice when it is newly broken through; it poured out over Visgalė's stomach and thighs. She opened her eyes and stared at me, but she still did not see me. I thought she would begin to shriek and scream like all women. But when her gaze fixed on her lover and returned to me, I heard nothing. She did not move, did not even pull up the cover to hide her nakedness. Nevertheless, her eyes keenly followed me when I took into my hands another spear.

"You will follow him," I heard myself saying.

It was then she opened her lips to speak.

"We would not be born, if there were no other existence to wait for."

My face twisted, but in my heart I hesitated. Visgalė was an intelligent woman, very intelligent, and I have not to the present day ceased to wonder what impelled her into such a perilous path of secret love. I perceived, however, that her words were too wise for the occasion and were, therefore, false. Yes, there was uncertainty in her voice. As if she were assaying with a staff whether an abyss was to open up before her in that spot where she purposed to step. I never have understood women. They are too foreign. They live among us, and yet apart: like cats, who never attach themselves to a person. I never troubled myself overmuch with this, but even my mother, who loved me a great deal, was alien to me. Women are strange even just for their contention that they understand us, their sons, husbands, and brothers.

"Why did you do this?" I asked.

"Don't think this is the first time. I have been doing it all along."

Only now did she begin to recover. She began to shake and ceased holding herself in. She virtually went mad with anger. I stood there with a spear in my hand and a falcon on my shoulder and listened to her insulting words. The more impassioned she became, the calmer I grew. She spoke with pale lips.

"Nothing ever mattered to you other than that damned fate of yours. What kind of a man are you? Other men walk firmly upon the earth; they eat, drink, hunt, war, and do not forget to give their due to women. They are hale and do not concern themselves with nothings. What of it if you are taller and stronger than others if you only stare off into shadows, murmur nothings beneath your breath, and walk about as if in a dream. I even envied the maids that the man servants at least occasionally would lean them up against the wall in a dark corner. You never really needed me, and if you did, it was just to

breed another demented half-prince like you. The Centaur! Just think. Half man, half horse. A full horse would be better. Don't you know everyone makes fun of your totem's other half — that it's no horse but a mare!"

I shook when she mentioned Šventaragis. All the rest of her jabbering was nothing and I knew it. Even she, if not for her anger, probably would not have spoken in this way. Nevertheless, I was greatly displeased by her belittling of Šventaragis. I trembled and raised the lance. The dark glistening eyes of Visgalė grew large.

"No!" she screamed. "No! You can't kill me! You won't dare!"

I answered nothing but merely brought back my spear, as if about to use it.

"I am the princess!" She was shrieking now. "I am your wife, do you hear? Don't you dare! I will call the servants. Yah! Help! No, Utenis, you won't dare."

She turned over onto her stomach and tried to crawl to me. Tears flowed down her cheeks, and her screams became hisses.

"You won't dare, you won't dare. You can't kill me, Utenis. You can't."

"I can," I said. "You very well know I can. You know even more: that I am going to. And no one in the whole world will stop me."

"No," Visgale whispered, crawling closer. "No, no."

I drew back my lance, but then she lifted her head to me and that which I saw withheld my hand. Her dark and moist eyes became round and yellow like two translucent stones. Those eyes met my gaze without any emotion. I will never forget this. Somewhere I had seen eyes like unto those before, but at that time I could not recall where. I closed my eyes, and then it became clear. Such are the eyes of a viper. The short time I had my eyes closed was enough for me not to see the most important thing. When I looked again upon my wife, Visgale, I no longer beheld the princess. In front of me on four crooked legs stood a large, man sized lizard, with protruding yellow eyes, a scaled hide, and a red maw, full of sharp teeth. Its throat pulsed. I froze, and the lizard stepped towards me. I drew away backwards and again brought back the lance. The lizard hissed and jumped towards the wall. I turned, intending to run out, and in the doorway I saw Varšas. He held me back with a gesture and pointed to Lisica, lying in the middle of the room. I gripped the end of the lance, lifted the run-through body and, so carrying it, walked out. Varšas slammed the door shut and barred it. When I turned to him, wanting to ask what, in his opinion, should be done next, I perceived that his whole body — his legs, thin as arrows, and his arms, carved with black, pulsating, finger-width veins, like snakes, and his decrepit throat with its sharp Adam's apple, and his large head with its closed eyes — was trembling and twitching. Having thrown down the lance with its speared corpse, I grasped the shoulders of the servant.

"Varšas," I said. "Calm yourself. Don't be afraid, Varšas." He continued to tremble like a frost-bitten boy. I don't quite remember what I myself was feeling. As if nothing.

I wanted to take care of everything before the end of the hunt. I had a good half-day's time.

We buried Lisica, chopping a hole in the frozen earth a league from the house. The biggest worry was the lizard. In the beginning I could not bring myself to think about it, that I would have to unbar the door of my sleeping chamber and go inside. But the reptile could not remain in the house. That we well understood, both I and Varšas.

"I would help you, but I am now too old and would just get in the way."

I heard sounds of the hunt carried by the wind, cries free and jubilant, the sharp baying of the hounds. Even when you go up against a bear with a knife, you are certain you will prevail. Otherwise you would not go. But now I was face to face with a phenomenon I could not comprehend, something completely alien. Therefore I did not even feel my strengths and options. As if I were suspended in the air, unable to gain purchase against the earth. Tears came into my eyes when I thought of how happy I had been just several hours ago. I wanted to still be in the hunt, I wanted that nothing should have happened.

"Take a strong and sharp spear." said Varšas. "No matter how sharp his teeth are, he will not withstand a weapon. Or perhaps it would be better to make a small hole in the roof and shoot through the hole with a bow until it dies?"

"No," I shook my head. "I cannot."

Because Varšas did not understand, I explained:

"I cannot go in and kill it in cold blood. One way or the other, that is Visgalė." It was hard for me to say these words; the abominable, dumb beast in no way comported with the image of my beautiful, intelligent wife which continued to stand before my eyes. Still, the words I had spoken were true.

"But at first you wanted to take her life. Now, when she has lost her form it will be easier for you to do so."

"I cannot," I repeated. "Do not try to persuade me, Varšas. I will not be able to convince myself. Before, my sinews acted without reference to my head. Now my head is once again in charge."

"Then everything is somewhat more complicated/," Varšas said, deep in thought. "I no longer know how to help you. I will go be by myself for a time and consider."

I did not want to be left alone. I had no dark corner with figurines amongst which I could recover my balance. So I asked him:

"Stay here, Varšas. Right now I need you very much."

He agreed without a word.

In a short time we came to several conclusions. I had a cellar dug into a hill. It was a large, cold room with a door made of thick logs, split down the middle. If some one of us died during the summer, we would put their body in there, and it would not spoil for twenty or more days until the burial was prepared for in the appropriate manner. We decided to put the reptile in that cellar. The hardest problem was how to lead him from the house to the hill. But we found a solution.

Taking a rope as thick as a wrist, we made nooses in both ends. At the door we tied a horse and fixed one end of the rope to it. (Other than Balčiukė, there had remained in the house about ten people. I ordered them all to gather in one chamber, and, when all were inside, I locked them in for a time. I did not want what I wished to do in secret to be compromised by the household servants. The thus imprisoned did not even show much displeasure: apparently, I looked very wroth and, of course, they could clearly see my clothes, covered with Lisica's blood.)

And so, more calm now we were certain of not being discovered, we continued our design. Varšas carried my lance. He held it with both hands, firmly clenched, but even so he was hard put to retain his hold: his weakened fingers kept opening; his face from the strain was flushed with some kind of old, dark, yet somehow grey, reddening; the wrinkles in the corners of his eyes and mouth vibrated; the widely stepping feet barely upheld his body, weighed down by his burden. But Varšas bore it heroically. What impelled him? Devotion? Habit? Self-respect? Stubbornness? The conviction that without him I would fail? I do not know. I carried the noose. I shot the bolt open and abruptly jerked the door open. My heart pounded, expecting an attack. But the reptile did not attack. It lay in the same place where we had last seen it, stretched out in its full length, with its head lying on the floor. One of its eyes, yellow, cold, and sparkling, regarded us without moving.

It had to be made to move: as long as the lizard's head stayed on the ground, it could not be ensnared in the noose. I took the spear from Varsas and stepped closer, suddenly calm and no longer worried, as if I had been catching such creatures all my life. Women transformed into lizards. I made no unnecessary or clumsy moves. Holding out the lance, I tapped the animal with the sharp end in the neck: even with a spear it was unpleasant to come near it. It lifted its head and angrily opened its maw. In that instant I threw the noose. It was not even necessary to make the horse, standing outside, move in order to tighten the rope, so swiftly did the lizard jump to the other side of the chamber and toss about until the noose was tight and it began to choke. Our fears proved unwarranted, for it did not act like a human being, but like any animal. Instead of having jumped to our side so that the rope would loosen, it panicked and tried to run from us, in this way itself helping us achieve our goal.

Varšas was now just as calm as I.

"Along with her body, God took away her mind," he said. "Poor thing."

A lump arose in my throat, but I swallowed it down.

"Take the horse towards the hill, Varšas," I commanded him. "I will walk alongside with the spear and make sure nothing happens."

Soon the sturdy doors of the hill-cellar swung shut in order to trustily safeguard the strange creature. Varšas was breathing hard but smiling. I heard in the distance the voices of the returning hunters and hurried to release the servants and domestics.

In the evening, forcing myself to smile and urging the revelers to make merry, I felt sorrow and longing. Like never before I longed for my beautiful Visgalė, beloved wife. I would have given anything to find her at my side. Seeing that the men had grown intoxicated, I rose and left the hall unnoticed. Snow fell silently in large clumps; a dog yelped from choking on a bone or from an injury to his side sustained in the hunt. Other hounds, having left him alone, with eager, damp snouts milled about among the guests or ate cooked meat, of which there was an abundance. For a time I listened to the lone dog's whimpers, then, wading through the snow, I went to visit Varšas. He was sitting near the fire, watching the flame with glistening eyes. He did not turn at my entrance.

"Jučas is to blame for everything, the servant of Jeremferdenas . . . Not a single hair on his whole body ..."

I had thought to find solace with Varšas. Alas. I returned to the night and snow, which immediately covered my shoulders, hair, and beard. It melted when it fell upon my heated face. My body was full of never experienced feelings, as if I stood at the boundary of a completely other existence. Visgalė . . . How I needed her now! Feelings flowed in my heart, my chest; hard and chill like an icy fluid. I had never experienced anything like it. I stood with eyes closed under the naked sky. I longed for the past. The dog continued to whimper. It snowed.

After a time I realized I was no longer alone. Someone other than myself had come outside. Deep in thought, I had not noticed. I saw a dark shadow several steps away. I could not tell if he could see me or not. Nevertheless, I could not stand there any longer, almost totally covered in snow. I shook myself to lose at least some of the snow and walked toward him. The man, shorter than myself, was standing with his back to me, with his head thrown back and turned upward to the heavens. The snow crunched under my feet, and he turned around slowly, as if displeased that someone was disturbing his interesting and important work.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

"I knew you were here," he answered. "I saw you leaving the hall."

"What could you have need of from me at such a time, Šventaragis?" for, in truth, it was my son.

He did not reply at once, but remained silent. I was uneasy, fearful he would inquire of that upon which I wished to remain silent. The cold began to grip me. The night would be truly frigid. Šventaragis, it seemed, did not feel the cold. He again leaned back his head and, with his mouth wide open, tried to catch the falling snowflakes. He looked like an idiot.

"Well? Say something, Šventaragis."

He turned around, and from the light in his eyes I could tell he was intoxicated. He had had too much wine. From that time, when I had allowed him to participate in the hunts, Šventaragis had also participated in the banquets. Sometimes he would drink. I did not like that, but I gave him the benefit of the doubt. Even though of tender years, he was a person who perfectly understood his limitations and would not even dream of attempting something he could not achieve. That is a rare quality. Even those come into their years of mature discretion tend to overrate themselves and their capacities.

"Since returning from the hunt, I have not seen my mother. Where is she?"

But I had been expecting that.

"She is at her sister's."

"Without saying goodbye to me ..."

"She was in a hurry." I thought such an answer would satisfy him, but I was wrong.

"Who escorted her?" Even intoxicated, Šventaragis did not lose the clarity of his mind.

"Lisica."

"Lisica?" I could feel in his voice great anger and bitterness.

"Lisica?" he repeated and was about to add something, but bit his tongue and remained silent.

I then comprehended he knew about poor Visgalė's relationship with the servant. It angered me that even my son knew more than I. Suddenly Šventaragis lifted up his head, and in his look I could see suspicion.

"Are you certain mother truly went to her sister's?"

"Yes."

I had answered too quickly and too strongly. Šventaragis at once understood I knew everything. Everything he, for who knew how long, had hidden from me.

"Why did she act like this?" His voice was at once both disappointed and insultingly sharp.

"It is improper to judge one's parents."

He squeezed the handle of his knife.

"I'll kill Lisica. I'll catch him and do him in. I'll find him no matter what!"

"That is no longer necessary."

He gave me a sober look; he understood.

"And mother? You said he escorted her."

"Almost ..."

"What happened to her? Where is she?"

"She is not here." The cold's grip was ever more chill, but my back was wet from sweat: I was not bearing this inquisition easily.

"You killed her?"

"No."

"I don't believe you."

"I swear to you," I said, feeling some relief in telling the truth.

"I thank you," said Šventaragis. "It would have been very unpleasant for me if you had soiled yourself with my mother's blood."

Although I was not wanting to speak, he raised his hand to ask my silence.

"Let's speak no more of this."

Suddenly I felt as I had felt many a time before, that someone was watching over my shoulder. Šventaragis also gave a start. When after a time he went back inside, I turned around. Directly behind me stood the *hill with the cellar*.

I can now swear with certainty that time disappears for that person whose senses are multiplied a thousand times and then are made a thousand times stronger. I began to understand those wise philosophers who abuse themselves with fasting and thirst in the dead of the forest so as to perceive the world as it really is, as it really is in itself, so as to experience the holy joy of touching with the tips of one's fingers that quintessent reality which has no top, nor bottom, nor beginning, nor end. I had not reached the levels of the masters, but I now could understand them. Having no other way to awaken their soul, they scourge their flesh.

Varšas was in any case smarter than I. If not for him, I would have died that winter. He fed me with concoctions of bees' honey, heated syrup, and milk; made me drink of many different herbs; ordered me to swallow spiders' webs folded into spheres the size of peas; and only because of him was I able to continue to be able to draw breath and to make some sense of the reality lofting me skyward (although in the deep, dark winter nights, full of delirium, I called it a reality casting me down). If not for Varšas, who himself was just barely hanging on because in truth he was already standing near the border of oblivion, I would have died one of those winter mornings while snowflakes were quietly falling and never would have realized that I was dead. But Varšas did not abandon me, and when snow began to melt from the rooftops, I became aware one day that I lay in my chambers, enwrapped in furs, among which I saw Varšas' white ermine.

During that time while I was elsewhere I learned much, although not everything. Most importantly, I forgave Visgalė her transgression. Now her form ceased to be important to me. No room was left in my consciousness for a reptile. I thought of my wife as of a woman, such as she once had been. I swore to myself I would not lose her. In my thinking I felt no repulsion toward that awful, unhappy creature her body had become.

I heard footsteps, and into my chambers ran Balčiukė, carrying two steaming clay pots. Meeting my gaze, she stopped. I smiled.

"How wonderful! How wonderful you have recovered, my prince!"

"Was I ill?" I asked.

The girl became confused, not knowing whether she could tell me all. After a moment she drew up her courage and said:

"I don't know. I've never seen anyone be sick like that. People were saying . . . But Varšas said this was an illness and that you definitely would recover. How wonderful!"

Through the window sunshine was slanting in, lighting up Balčiukė's face from one side and enhancing the beauty of her features. I felt how a light tremor ran down my spine, as if a breeze had blown by.

"Come closer, Šalčiuke," I said.

She put her pots on the floor and approached trembling. At one moment I almost forgot myself and came near to saying, "Visgalė." It seemed to me everything that had happened from the day I had rushed home with Nestanas on my shoulder to get some spears was just a dream. But upon opening my eyes I saw Balčiukė's smooth eyelids, and the illusion vanished.

When everything was done and we rested for a time, I questioned Balčiukė as to whether there had been any changes in my absence. Nothing had happened at home, but in the world — much. Prince Levas during a banquet had killed King Vaišvilkas with a knife: Vaišvilkas, the last of the Palemons. I was shocked. What is this, coincidence, or the fulfillment of old prophecies? I wanted to get more detailed information. I turned to the girl:

"Get dressed and call Varšas to me. I want to see and speak with him."

She obeyed. Swiftly she threw on her dress and was on her way out when she remembered why she had come in. She placed near my bed vessels of food, which smelled of mint, thyme, and meat, and then hurried off to find Varšas.

"Glory be to the Creator of the world," said Varšas. He stood leaning on a thin rod of birch — which was enough to uphold that shadow of a body — and his eyes shone with joy, for it could well be said he had caused me to be born anew. At that moment he was father and mother to me. He approached and kissed my forehead.

Balčiukė had told the truth. Vaišvilkas was dead. But she had not known all. The princes had deliberated and decided Šventaragis was the best candidate for the throne. They had sent a messenger to ask for my consent, but not able to obtain that, Šventaragis, having counselled with Varšas, made his decision independently. He ordered the messenger to report his consent to rule the country. There remained only his coronation ceremonies, which were to occur in several months. Jučas had not lied. I was the father of the ruler of Lithuania.

"You are not happy, prince," said Varšas.

"I am happy," I answered, "But I would be even more happy if Visgalė, my princess, would be able to share my happiness."

"Alas," spoke Varšas with his head bowed low.

"How is she?" I asked weakly: I could not remember or speak of her without sorrow. "How is she?" I repeated.

"More probably a 'he.' Although it is hard to tell anything about that lizard's gender."

"How is she," I repeated.

Varšas took my meaning and from then on also spoke of — her.

"All winter I fed her and cleaned the cellar as well as I was able. I did not know what food would be suitable. Now I can say raw meat is best for her. At the beginning she would not eat anything . . . she would take nothing and would stare at the door as if wanting to escape. But now everything is well."

"Could a miracle happen?"

"I do not know. My heart tells me it has already occurred, and you will never again witness her in the shape of a woman."

I was myself convinced of that, though I did still retain some hope.

"Were you not afraid, Varšas? You are not so able."

"When you . . . took ill, after a month I bought a tamed bear. She was afraid of the bear."

For some time we both remained silent. Then I spoke.

"Have you not changed your opinion, Varšas?"

"No. I still believe this to be retribution for a deception committed long ago. It is possible Jučas knew even then, but did not say."

I believed him easily, somehow of itself, as if in my head there had long been prepared a place for such a thought. One might even say I took some ease from it.

"There is no guarantee such a misfortune might not yet afflict someone else as well. I do not believe it could happen to Šventaragis, but perhaps to someone else of the household. We all must be wary."

I remained silent, gazing at that spot where the sun had so recently illuminated Balčiukė. I wanted her anew.

"Thank you, Varšas," I said. "Now I will begin to look after things myself."

I never would have thought there would come to be a time in my life when a beast would become the most important being to me in the whole world. But this came to be. Two persons, who had been close to me all the time and even in a certain sense a part of me, slowly but surely began to draw away from me. The first of them, Varšas, who given up so much strength and effort in nursing and caring for me during the entire season of winter, grew weak. If he had not already been so ancient, the best words to describe his complete decrepitude would have been "old age." After the snow had melted, Varšas no longer went out from his peaceful room. He no longer had the strength. Although I did everything I knew how, it was clear Varšas would not see another winter. He just lay in a permanent twilight, became calm and at peace with everything, barely able to move his hands, while his eyes faded and faded until finally they completely lost their color, only just barely shining like two amethysts. To communicate with him was almost impossible. In order to hear what he was saying — more accurately, to hear what he was trying to say with his numb, withered mouth — one had to put one's ear to his lips. But even when he did hear, he did not always understand. Various times, past and present, grew so muddled in his mind that, having bent my ear to listen, I once received a promise from him that he would be a good boy and would never again wet his bed. In this way, gradually, a little at a time, I lost Varšas.

The other person whose nearness I missed, but did not have the courage to demand, was Šventaragis. He avoided me. When I would approach, he would remove himself at the first opportunity. I do not know what motivated him to act in this manner. He probably did not believe my oath that I had not killed Visgalė, his mother, and, his first flush of agitation having passed, he had begun to grieve and to long for her. I did not want to make, nor indeed could I have made, any explanation to him which would have restored his faith in me, so I believe he considered me the killer of his mother. He restricted himself to only those relations between us which were unavoidable. Varšas had told me that during the entire winter Šventaragis had not once entered the chambers in which I lay. It may be I was wrong and Šventaragis had simply needed to be by himself and to collect himself. He had to make ready from inside to become the sovereign. I would have given anything to have been able to see inside my son's heart. But that, of course, no one could give me.

Under these circumstances I became friends with an animal. That was Kutlubugas, the bear purchased by Varšas. Removed from the woods and from others like himself, he, it seems, also needed a creature with whom he could associate. During the first days after having taken him over from Varsas, I had kept and led him by a chain, because the bear seemed short-tempered and likely to attack me. But I soon saw his irritability was more likely a facade, or, more accurately, that which I held to be irritability was his habitual attitude, demonstrating he is not slumberous, but is alert. When he would be full of meat and become lazy, he would stop growling, and would become sluggish and indifferent, as long as no one would bother him. Having discovered these features in him, I removed the chain, for Kutlubugas always perfectly walked at one's side, never trying to run or otherwise make any opposition. But I shortly had to replace the chain, because, having attached himself to me, the bear felt enmity towards the rest of the household. It required but a more harshly spoken word or a quicker motion to cause Kutlubugas, growling and with wide open jaws, to rise up on his hind legs, ready to attack. No one in the household could stand the bear, just as Kutlubugas disliked them. He had given his entire beastly soul up to me. Wherever I went or rode, I would take him along. Being left alone in the house, he would bellow and tear at the doors with his claws, driving great fear into the servants. The horses at first were afraid of the bear, but they soon grew accustomed to him and would greet him from afar with their neighing. Sometimes, having awakened in the night and not being able to fall again to sleep, I would listen to the chirping of the crickets in the dark, gently running my hand through Kutlubugas' fur and speaking with him: I would speak all sorts of nothings, as if a mother to her child or a man in love to his girl, or I might tell him of my life. The bear would growl contentedly, and then I would begin to question him regarding all sorts of matters, saying to him, "What do you think about that, Kutlubugas?" Kutlubugas did not grow fond of Balčiukė, and I ceased to invite her: women no longer had any attraction for me. I would awaken in the early morning, when Kutlubugas, murmuring and sighing, would lick my feet. Then I would arise and take up some meat that had been laid aside the evening before, and would walk to the cellar hill. Yes, I would visit her every day.

Even having decided not to view her as a lizard, at first it was difficult. The unventilated cellar was full of some sort of strong, oppressive odor. I never found her asleep. The glassy gaze of yellow eyes would always meet me. I felt some sort of distress in my conscience. Although she was virtually in terror of Kutlubugas, I did not dare to enter without the bear. And the bear was entirely indifferent to her. I would throw the meat down on the stone floor and would immediately make my exit. She would not touch the meat in my presence. She would simply stare at me unceasingly all the while I was there. I tried to spend as little time there as possible. That duty depressed me.

With time, I slowly began to grow used to it. Already in a month I caught myself thinking that her eyes show she still has awareness. I would try to communicate with her, asking, when I would come in, "How are you, Visgalė?" But I never received any response. Not a word, not a gesture. But nevertheless my feeling did not weaken, although it was never reinforced. I was probably wrong, and my wish to see in her traces of humanity rendered me blind to my error. I became accustomed to speak with her in the same way I would chatter with the bear in the night. Even though the talk would be all one sided, having poured out my worries, apprehensions, and problems, having told her of what I was happy or of what I dreamt, I would feel better. A person after all must have someone to speak with. I came to understand that only after I began to converse with animals. Sometimes from the depths of my memories would arise some memory from the beginning of my life with Visgalė, from youth, or from childhood, and I, telling the story, would cry. But she, on her part,

would make no response whatever to my remembrances or my tears. Kutlubugas would sometimes lick my tears away. He liked them for the salt.

More and more often I would think about the past. The further removed, the more real it became, and the more important for me. I loved the past's Visgalė as if in the present. With my whole heart I hated those, of whom I had sometimes felt unfavorably or whom I had belittled. Very close to me became my mother, whom in childhood I had poorly understood; I felt a deep respect for my father, whom I had formerly been afraid of. But Visgalė took up most of my thoughts. My memory reawakened even such details of our life which I had never noticed, or had noticed and immediately forgotten. As if before me I saw her as a shy maiden with upright breasts, disrobed for the nuptial bed; I saw her white, even teeth as she laughed at Šventaragis crawling on the furs; I reached out my hand, wanting to touch her, as she danced the sacred dance for Šventaragis to grow strong and hale. But the hand gripped only air, the eyes perceived, after a time, the wall or the table, and that, which had seemed to be laughter, was only the squeals of the young servant girls. Longing would grip my heart, and I would promise to think no more of this and to cease tormenting myself, but I would not hold true to my promise. Nor, in reality, was this in my power. Without noticing it, I would drift away into the past, realizing it only upon my return. In small stages I began to understand Varšas: what meaning his dried and soot-blackened figurines had held. I do not know how long this process of understanding would have taken until complete. But nothing is permanent. We must be wary, says Varšas. Something more must yet occur. And it did.

One morning I woke while it was yet dark, and although I had slept but little, I was in very good spirits, better than I had felt for some time. I rejoiced, without myself knowing why. I felt young and strong: I even tried to wrestle with Kutlubugas. Then, cheerful and excited, I fixed the chain to the bear and, taking some meat, went out to the hill. It may well have been such a night as lends energy to everyone (on such nights the best, strongest, and smartest children are conceived), because this time even *she* was not lying in the depths of the cellar, by the wall, but stood in the middle of the floor with her head up, as if listening to sounds coming from afar.

My head was a bit light from the strange joy, and, it appears, that was enough to give birth to an unwise thought. For the first time in many days I felt an urge to give delight to *her*. I fancied letting her out for a bit into freedom, so she could breathe fresh air and look, with eyes disused to the light, towards the heavens, which she had not seen for so long a time. I went out, leaving the door open, and tied the bear to a tree. I myself stood nearby, watching what would happen. After a time her unwieldy body crawled out from the dark of the cellar and froze by the doorway. For some time she stood motionless, breathing in the pure air through her round nostrils, and then she moved. If necessary, I thought, with Kutlubugas' help I would easily return her to the cellar. I felt good for having released her for this space.

Suddenly the bear bellowed. I turned around, but I was able to glimpse only the silhouette of a rider and hear the frenzied galloping of his mount. Šventaragis, with his thighs gripping the sides of the horse, with arm thrown back and spear ready to fly, was racing right at her.

"No!" I screamed, but was too late.

The blade of the spear pierced the side of the reptile and tore out a hunk of flesh. The lizard curled up from the blow like a crescent moon, and from its throat escape a weird, gasping sound. Šventaragis forced the horse backwards, tore out the spear, and began to draw back for another attack. Quicker than I could myself believe, I ran up and, grasping the haft of the spear, pulled it towards me. He swayed and fell off the saddle. Immediately he let go of the spear, jumped up, and drew his sword. \ drew backward, with one eye on Kutlubugas, who was throwing himself forward against the chain ("Let him only not break loose!"), and the other on the young face, twisted with rage, full of terrible sorrow. Šventaragis drew back with his shortsword and struck — I felt a piercing agony in my stomach.

"Take that," he snarled. "Take that. For mother. You'll not fool me anymore."

I could hear his teeth grind, as if they were crushing stone.

"Šventaragis!" I did not understand, it never occurred to me I was seriously injured. "Calm yourself. I am your father. Your mother —"

He again drew back his sword and again struck, spitting out, "Take that."

Two more times I felt steel cut me to the quick: flames sprouted up in my body. I grasped my belly with my hands, and only then saw there was nothing there to hold together: I had no stomach. In its place was only a sticky mess of meat, pieces of cloth, and blood. My legs bent, and I crumbled to the ground. I saw how Šventaragis wiped his sword on the lower part of his robe, slipped it back in its sheath, turned around and jumped back onto his mount. I wanted to scream something out to him, but I could not. Not only because I was too weak. My entire body was gripped by a cramp. Fear. An indescribable, animal-like terror stole over me when I understood I was dying. I had never been so afraid. Nothing was left of me, but only fear. My body was that of terror. Everything, all my senses, all the pain, all merged together into one thing — fear. The orbs of my eyes hardened, my skin ripped and tore into a thousand shreds. I lifted my head and looked at Šventaragis galloping away into the distance. What I then perceived was the final blow. Something was different with the world. No, not with the world, but with me. I was different. *I had changed into a lizard.*

I was fated to die as a lizard. Suddenly my mind was clear. I understood everything completely. We were both wrong, both Varsas and I. Jučas was not at fault, as were neither the totem of the Centaur, fate, or the gods. Only just *fear* itself had transformed us into awful reptiles, animals, my wife Visgalė and myself. Nothing other than it, this feeling, incongruent with man's birthright, but nevertheless overwhelming him, was the cause of all the evil that had happened to us. The fear of oblivion, of no longer being able to play with one's feelings and sensations, of losing everything. If we had given ourselves over in this way to happiness, we would simply have melted away into the thin air. But we were afraid. We were possessed by terror for our lives. Fear .made *made us be like this*. Is it necessary to die to learn this? My poor dear Visgalė, my poor dear intelligent girl. How terribly she must have been afraid of me then . . .

I tried to rise on all four feet and crawl, but blood poured from me in waves. I was unable to move. I felt how something pressed itself to me. I turned my head and saw her. A lizard, such as myself, with a gaping wound in her side, crawled to me and laid down beside me, so that there was no space between us. A damp tongue licked my neck. We, Prince Utenis and his wife Visgalė, of the Clan of the Centaur; we, two people, man and wife, having experienced emotions of surpassing strength; we, two reptiles with amber colored eyes, died on dew-laden grass as the sun rose on a summer morning. That, which had separated us, now served to bring us together. Be happy, my son.