

Marga (with an authentic letter)

I wrote her a letter, and I couldn't imagine who I would meet behind the picture, presented by the mass media.

After her first letter of January 15 – 96, I was hopelessly fascinated by her fate.

(Shows an authentic letter)

State Prison, Annika Östberg Deasy, inmate no. 189 68/MB 135, Frontera, Ca 917 20 U S A.

This is one of the actual letter's to me from Annika, which I received on April 28 – 98. It's written on a typewriter that has no Swedish letters. ... She writes; It is pretty hard to remember that you have to use 2 keys, to make one of our Swedish letter's, 2 nedslag för att få en bokstav. My Swedish is limited. Could we write in English when it is about something important. In English – otherwise I will sound like some idiot! ...

1969 the so-called Manson's were sentenced to death and transferred to the only women's prison at the time - C.I.W. A special wing with 6 rooms was added, at the end of the Receiving Unit ... the very one where I landed that first night in the institution's paper dress, but that nightmare is another chapter".

After we had taped our program for Swedish Radio, but before it went on the air, I got the answer to a question I had raised: "Is there a death row at C.I.W? ... Way back before C.I.W was built, 1954, women were housed in a separate wing of San Quentin. As San Q. has a death chamber the few women who were actually put to death back then did not have far to travel. The women were eventually moved to a place called Tehachepi which was made uninhabitable by an earthquake while C.I.W was being built. The women were moved here at that time prior to the completion of this prison. I understand that in the beginning they had to cook outdoors, on what is now the Warden's lawn, while waiting for the completion of the cooking facilities. At that time they were inside each individual unit as opposed to the 'central feeding' facility we now have with 3 large 'chow' halls. Between then and 1969, I think it was? - no women were sentenced to death.

(The doors in the prison are slammed shut – sounds from the prison)

The Swedish Journalist

(Sound of prison that is later explained in the text)

This is the hour before six in the morning, when all the inmates are awakened by the doors to the cells being opened. They are opened by a control panel in the warden's office. *(Inmates - hustle and bustle)* An electronic system which pops the doors open, in total 950 steel doors opening at once. It sounds like machinegun fire. That's where Annika lives. I met her when she was about to go to her first 'board-hearing' in the hope of get-ting an

answer to her request as to the length of the sentence for her crime. So far she has spent 17 years in prison, The California Institution for Women, C.I.W. The year is 1998.

(Sounds from the cell)

Marga

(reads from Annikas letter) "It looks much like a college campus with 6 single story housing units, of red brick construction. Around the prison there is a barbed wire fence where a guard drives around in his vehicle every half hour, ensuring that nobody escapes.

(we hear birds singing)

Runaway Train. In the prison in Annika's cell. She sings.

Annika

"Runaway Train never going back
wrong way on a one way track
seems like I should be getting somewhere
somehow I'm neither here nor there".

So much madness in my life. Sane is one thing I have rarely been called!

Runaway Train – softer. Annika has a letter from Marga on her bed.

Marga Pettersson, Sweden. *(pause)* I'm not quite sure what it is you want to know?

Am I going to sit here for 30 more years or am I going to get to go back home to Sweden? I don't think anybody has ever been granted amnesty at the first application. Or the second. Am I supposed to be grateful that I don't sit naked in the suicide watch?

(Runaway Train - fades and stops)

Here in the US I have lived through many things, but it is all associated with sorrow and drugs. All my memories and surroundings seem blurry. There never was a transition from childhood to adulthood. One day I was a child dreaming of marrying a prince or being a famous movie star and the next I was a grown woman. I went from being a child of 12 to living on my own and masquerading as a grown up at 13.

The time in the confinement cell. They labeled it Suicide Watch because there were so many who died. They say

they killed themselves. Bob had just turned up dead. It was in a very small, conservative community, where it all happened. And it was in their prison I ended up. It was not a pleasant place to be. I assure you. A totally stripped cell. The beds were solid metal slabs, no bedding, not even a mattress, no sheets. I even needed to request toilet paper. I didn't have clothes in the beginning. But that was only the first month. Bob had hung himself, they said. And that was also what the report stated.

(Music - piano)

The cause of death, they said, was that he had broken his neck. But I wasn't allowed to see him. He was the third to commit suicide in 7 months, I was told. So he was gone and I was left with it. They beat me black and blue. But I did survive and I was transferred here.

(Distant sounds of inmates – Vonda appears)

The Swedish Journalist *(from outside the stage area)*

Also in the cell there is Vonda who is an inmate at C.I.W as well. She's also a lifer, sentenced for murder in the first degree. She killed her husband in self defense after being abused by him for several years. She never gets any visits by her grown children since they sided with their dad. Annika met her when she went to work in the prison kitchen in – 83. Vonda is about 60 and is one of Annika's closest friends.

(Sound from inside the prison)

Annika

What about this? Do you think it is a little pretentious?

Vonda

Do you want me to read... So this is the letter that you're going to send to that Swedish lady?

Annika

Yes, it is.

Vonda

Let's see... (*reads from the authentic letter*) I am not quite sure what it is you're asking from me?.. (*corrects*) .. of me? Do you want to do a play or what? I am certainly willing to share as much of myself and my world with you as I can. I am a fair writer myself and can paint you scenes of my world and the people in it. I'm not sure if it would turn out to be a tragedy or a comedy though! Perhaps something akin to the Greek tragi-comedies? (*Vonda returns the paper*) It's good. I think it's wonderful, Annika.

Annika

Vonda is another whole saga. She's recording the Reader's Digest version of the Bible on tape in a booth for reading disabled people and for the blind, during the evening, all on her own time.

Vonda

Would you help me out with this? I just want a little rehearsing, ok? (*reads*)

"My lover is radiant and ruddy; he stands out among thousands. His head is pure gold; his locks are palm fronds, black as the raven. His eyes are like doves...

Annika

This is what she is recording on tape, in Swedish: *Min älskade lyser och strålar framför tusentals. Hans huvud är rent guld; hans lockar är som palmblad, svarta. Hans ögon som duvor...*

Marga

(*skims through pages of the letter*)

She gives such a nice description of Vonda in her letter. (*reads from Annika's letter*) " She calls her 'the Mother Theresa' of C.I.W. Physically, she is small and sometimes appears fragile. But she's not! She has blue eyes and a warm and ready smile. And wisps of hair are always escaping from her bun and hang in tendrils here and there. Vonda works in what is called the 'peer helper' pro-gram. There are many broken, fragmented women here. Those are the ones that Vonda takes under her wing."

Annika

She is truly rare - a gentle loving spirit and artist extraordinaire...

(Vonda reacts to this and they laugh)

Vonda

Do you really think so?

Annika

Yes, I do.

Vonda

Amazing the things that are in the Bible.

(Continues reading and recording on the equipment) ...beside running waters, His teeth would seem bathed in milk, and are set like jewels. His cheeks are like beds of spice with ripening aromatic herbs. His lips are red blossoms; they drip choice myrrh. His arms are... His legs are ... marble... sapphires."

Annika

(writes)

We don't speak English in here anymore, we speak 'prison'. A language of slang in seemingly innocent words. There is also a language we speak through hand signals, called 'flagging', when you are being separated from your cellmate and communication is forbidden.

People say I am so Americanized now that I can't have any strong links with my Swedish home. They're wrong. I wasn't the one who wanted to come to this place, to the U.S. I hated it from the beginning. Marga, I gotta tell you, sometimes it's hard writing to you. *(Pause)* You want to get into my thoughts and feelings. You want to experience my world. And in order to show you my world I must show you myself. *(Pause)* You make me go places inside myself I don't often visit anymore. Sometimes I touch those memories - very briefly. Lightly as one would the soft fur of a wild and dangerous beast. That's part of why the drugs were so good for me. They helped

me block out the world. *(pause)* But, my first heroin fix, I remember. Sundance was black, with beautiful light green eyes and a dealer. We met “the summer of love” – 68, at Haight-Ashbery, San Francisco, where Green, my boyfriend, and I lived. Janis Joplin lived four doors down on Oak and Masonic and we got backstage passes at the Fillmore. We supplied half the gang with free LSD. Even in Hippiedom there was a social class system and we were the elite. Sundance did the whole thing. He measured, cooked it and drew it up. And right before he gave me my first fix he gave me a long sad look and said, “Someday, you’re gonna remember this and hate me and curse my name for it.” Strangely enough, I never have. He carried me to the bed. There I drifted into beautiful poppy fields. I was in Heaven. In Opium Heaven. I didn’t know, then, about the hell that followed.

(to her God)

We are much like Pavlov’s dogs. We are reduced. It is the slow death of humanity and compassion ...lift a corner of that lovely lawn out there, and you will see the maggots eating at the collective corpse of us all. If you are intelligent enough to know and understand what is happening it gets even more painful ’cause you try to fight against it. Then you come across a situation that presents you with a glaring comparison of what you once were, and what you have become. Intelligence is a threat. It’s hunted down and broken if possible. Now everything is just shades of gray here. I could see the colors once - even in this world. Paranoia is the normal state. There is nothing sacred. There is no neutral corner to which you can retreat and be safe. The human spirit can endure anything if it can see an end, something like a mirage. Once I landed in the hospital, for 3 days, a normal hospital. I was unable to cope with the simplest of things. They gave me a menu for dinner. Even though there were only 3 choices, I could hardly make one without an incredible effort. I cried for most of the time. The nurses were kind. They offered me soft drinks, smiled, talked to me as a person worth something and with half a brain. I had lost my bearings and was truly adrift in the darkness of my mind. It was frightening.

Marga

(reads from Annika’s letter)

This place was built to house 950 women. Today there are approximately 2000. With the new “three strikes” law, tredje gången fälld, they expect the number of inmates to exceed 2800. The cells, where they live were built for one person. They contain a set of bunk beds, a sink, a toilet, two lockers and a small desk. Everything is constructed of steel and bolted to the floor. The toilet has no cover and is within 2 feet of the lower bunk. It makes for rather intimate and embarrassing situations, at times.

The Swedish Journalist (*from outside the stage area*)

Annika's mother was married to an American citizen and lived for a number of years in the US. After the divorce she moved back home to Sweden and she tries to visit her daughter as regularly as she can. She supports Annika in her struggle to try to get her transferred to a Swedish prison. Annika has up until this day, as we speak, been imprisoned for 21 years.

The Mother

She was a sensitive and quiet child, not very gutsy, not very talkative. Unsuspecting and guileless!... yes, maybe... I'll never forget that day ... I always keep a room for Annika. I had been to Ikea and had bought more shelves to add to her bookcase. Just like me she devours books. I have to give away books to the library, we simply don't have the room. My life is Annika's life. It's as if I was imprisoned myself. I keep saying: "When will I be free? When will I be well and healthy?" I'll never forget that day when I went downtown to do some shopping. Big headlines everywhere ... on every newsstand ... big pictures of my daughter... on that day, over 20 years ago! Then I got a letter from Annika about what really happened. Well, I've tried to repress that time in my life.

Music – Some walk around in tattered and torn shoes. CornelisWreeswijk.

Annika

Sometimes I remember so clearly how it used to be over there, back home in Sweden. Places, colors, the landscapes, the scents. I take the subway and then I hop on to the #42 bus to visit Grandma and Grandpa. My best friend Madde! Madeleine really. She came from Romania. Her father and mother were immigrants. They lived in the same house as me and my mom, She had dark hair, I was blond, and we were the best of friends. We shared a secret wish that her dad and my mom would become a couple. Well, she had a mom, but she was very ill and was mostly in the hospital. Madde and I spent many happy days at Skansen. Once we tried to make popcorn, latchkey kids that we were. Of course we had been told not to, but we tried. We forgot to use oil, so we burned up the pot. We threw it off the balcony. I can even remember the parking lot below ... We used to write to each other, but when I ran away we lost contact.

Sometimes in the winter, when it's cold out, I think to myself that there are people, whole families, who have to live their lives on the streets. I tell myself that the Jews of WW II would have thought they were in heaven in my little cubicle. Others in the world are living under poorer circumstances in far worse prisons, enduring torture and even

death. Sometimes those thoughts help. But I would prefer living under a bridge in the rain and have a choice in the matter. Even if that choice only consisted of which bridge I would live under or how I would spend the day.

Marga

This letter came via the Swedish Consulate in Los Angeles, apparently due to the fact that there had been censorship problems. It was sent after the work at the Radio Theater on Swedish Radio.

(musik)

Thanks for the photos of the cast. I know this sounds strange, but until I saw those photos nothing was really real to me. I knew you were doing this play, but some part of me really didn't believe that anyone could possibly find anything interesting or valid in my life or my thoughts. All was kind of abstract somehow until I saw the photos - it brought all of you to reality for me. Wow! What a feeling. Exhilarating, humbling, ex-posed, I don't know, everything. All those things. I had no idea you had taught dance in prison over there in Sweden. I must admit that the idea of all those tough male convicts cavorting un-der your direction brought me a smile. With you in your twenties I bet they just danced their little feet off! !

The Mother

My husband was a callous and a manipulative man, he didn't like Annika. She was 9 years old and I was a single mother when I first met him. He was a successful and charming American. We moved over to the States. It was not long until I discovered that Annika's stepfather would have nothing to do with her. My daughter saw me change from being an independent woman to becoming repressed and weak. He could have gotten the Nobel Prize in manipulation. And I did nothing to help Annika. When she was 14 she ran away with an older musician. My husband forbade me to go and look for her. He was VP for a large company. I had no money of my own. I did have two small babies with him, so I stayed at home. I just didn't allow myself to think about it. If I hadn't done that, I would have gone mad. The next time I saw her she was 15. She knocked on the front door and was pregnant! And seriously addicted to drugs. I didn't understand that at the time. I feel responsible for what happened to Annika. I was so happy that she had come home. I did everything to make her stay, but it wasn't possible. I soon discovered how empty my life had been. Eventu-ally I gathered enough courage and got a divorce. Then Annika called and said; Have you finally divorced that horrible man? I lived alone for a while, but then I

moved back to Sweden cause I had to take care of my aging mother. Then I received a letter from Annika that she had been jailed. Her lawyer advised me not to travel to her. There was nothing that I could do. My ex-husband had a lot of money and so I asked if he would consider helping her, but no. Her lawyer promised that she would get a maximum of 8 years and get paroled after four. *(pause)* I've repressed that period of time. But I was so scared, so afraid of being pursued and scoffed at.... Strangely enough it turned out just the opposite. That became the starting point for a struggle I'll never give up. There's not one day that goes by that I don't sense the pain, the grief, the guilt. Well, what can I possibly call it? I have to do something for her, otherwise I'd go mad. I'll never give up.

(Annika moves around in her cell, trying to find one of Marga's letters)

Vonda

What are you looking for?

Annika

To be able to move about in this small space, sometimes it becomes like a dance.

Vonda *(Annikas voice simultaneously)*

How would this sound in Swedish?

Do not arouse, do not stir up love before its own time. How beautiful you are, *Stör inte kärleken förrän den själv vill. Så vacker du är,*

how pleasing, my love, my delight!

ljuvlig, min älskade, min glädje!

Your very figure is like a palm tree, your breasts are like clusters. I said: I will

Din kropp är som plamträdet, ... *Jag ska*

climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches. Now let your breasts be like *klättra i palmträdet, jag ska gripa tag i grenarna.*

clusters of the vine and the fragrance of your breath like apples, And your mouth like an excellent wine. Be swift, my lover, like a gazelle or a young stag on the *som ett utsökt vin.* *Spring som en gasell,*
min älskade, på

mountains of spices!

det doftande berget!

If she is a wall, we will build upon it a silver parapet; If she is a door, we will reinforce it with a cedar plank...so

now in his eyes I have become... welcomed...