

When you grew up in a Soviet republic, you learned to lie from very early on. Not the kind of lie that weighed heavy on your conscience but the ones you told with a slight turn of the head, with silence where a truth should have been. Your beloved grandmother might have sung you a ditty about the little lamb from Pelkinis while bouncing you on her knees, when she abruptly stopped, clasped a hand over her mouth and said sternly: “Hush, don’t say Pelkinis, say Ventara.” Or your parents might have had a whispered conversation in the kitchen, and you clearly heard them say “*Kruvinasis Krikštaitėvis*” and when you asked them who and what the “bloody godfather” was, they looked at you with hooded lids and said you misheard, they were talking about the pear tree (*Kriaušė*). No, they weren’t.

And you learned the name of your village was once Pelkinis, which meant *little swamp place* and was too backward sounding for the Moscow functionaries, who drew lines on maps and named the ten thousand hectares parcel the *Ventara Kolkhoz*, after the river, and that was that. Everyone born in it belonged to it. Your parents, you, your brothers ... you were expected to live, work, and eventually die in service to the glory of the farming collective and the rise of real socialism. And it didn’t seem to be so bad, not really — not the lying, the whispering, the looking sideways, the art of appearing interested or busy, the hiding in plain sight — because you enjoyed life, you didn’t mind the work, you loved the natural beauty of your surroundings, you had a big group of friends and were basically happy.

Until one day your father—your *Tėti*, the man from whose shoulders you discovered the world, who taught you how to tie your shoelaces and how to drive a tractor, the man who spoke, time and time again, of the joy he felt when once you fitted into the crook of his elbow as though you were a key sliding into the lock—looked at you with all the ice of Siberia in his eyes and spat through clenched teeth: “I don’t care what you feel, or what you want.”