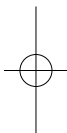
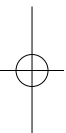
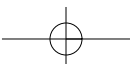
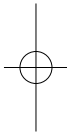
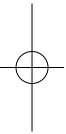




SPLITHEAD





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JULYA RABINOWICH

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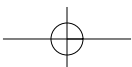
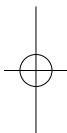
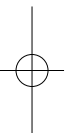
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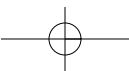
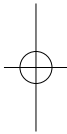
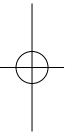
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Bitten Off, Not Torn





LESSON 3

Hop, skip, cut

BILE-GREEN WHEREVER YOU LOOK – WATER, SKY, COASTLINE, all the same shade – like me, feeling downright cool. I am taking a trip. I'm on board a ferry that is just leaving Ireland for Scotland. I'm pregnant and I'm convinced I look gutsy.

I jump again. My game is hopscotch from one land to another. It would be unwise to miss one; you'd get eliminated. The other players are still out. They're in Russia, waiting to leave for Israel. At this point, some of them still have no idea how lucky they are; others don't know that one day they will turn their backs on this destination, too. Go on home, shoo, shoo, back in your basket.

It's boring when you're out. You watch the player whose turn it is and comment on his moves. This distracts him and speeds up the turns. My father's out and it's my turn.

So, I'm travelling. I never did arrive, not on my first trip, not after my second. The journey is not ending and the holiday is long. I'll refuse to pay the travel expenses.

The coastal strip looks like it's been bitten off; you can clearly see its layers of flesh. I feel like I've been bitten off as well, because

the land I came from doesn't cling to me and I don't cling to it. No strings tie me to it any more.

This trip will take me in succession through Scotland, Holland, Vienna and through the birth of my daughter. Between Glasgow and Amsterdam, I feel my child take her first steps in my belly. It throws me into a panic. Even my daughter has already set off on a journey. So we're both in transit.

LESSON 1

Whoever is crazy now will be for a long time.

They'll read, roam and write long letters.

I'm sitting with my parents, my grandmother Ada and my doll in the plane. All the players are frozen (in standby mode). The chocolate sweet, a Mozart ball, melts in my hand, but its colourful wrapper seems too valuable to tear off. I've never seen anything like it before.

I'm convinced, because of what my parents told me, that we're heading to Lithuania for a holiday. Shortly before landing, there's a difference of opinion. Another child insists we're flying to Vienna and refuses to change her mind. I'm meant to be the one who's mistaken.

The toilet is a palace and the chewing-gum dispensers promise a beautiful new world. The four of us live in one room in a hotel that seems to be a brothel. So I'm put in solitary confinement and am not allowed outside.

My father and I both suffer nervous breakdowns when he tries

to exorcise three years of Communist socialization in one evening and I simply cannot comprehend that Lenin, friend of all children, whose pin is still emblazoned on my dress (lost in the excitement of the trip), is suddenly an arsehole.

What my father can't do one glimpse of a Barbie doll does. In five minutes I'm converted to the West. I'll remain so for a long time. Years later, I can barely remember not being born here. I'm prepared to speak German better than my classmates. I'm prepared to go voluntarily to catechism classes, while the Turkish children get to go home early. I'm prepared to imitate prayers, whose words at first aren't clear to me. Later, it will be other dogmas. To be part of a group – as long as it isn't too big – I'm ready to sell my soul to the devil, even if they're only interested in LSD. I'm willing to spend twice my salary on eccentric clothing, even if it means I'll suffer agonizing money problems at work afterwards.

The objectionable whiff from a little immigrant girl can't simply be washed away with Chanel. A loss must be recovered right away – instantly. The emptiness can't be left yawning for a single moment.

I go shopping when my father dies.

I go shopping when I break up with my first boyfriend.

LESSON 2

Travellers should not be detained.

My father goes on a final journey and leaves behind for me, as a small souvenir, a debilitating fear of trips of every kind. For a time, I turn into a display case of neuroses: claustrophobia and agora-

phobia, fear of flying, fear of tunnels, trains, relationships and death.
Robbed of my range of movement, I begin spiralling round myself.

I'm often sick.

I write.

I get caught up in endlessly complicated love affairs.

They are as convoluted as the paths I'm not able to follow.

The world is round.

Once you let loose, you can't stop any more. Soon you're drawn over the edge, then still further. You advance like a skipjack. There's hardly an inclination that can flatten you. Longing wells up for the good old days when turtles and elephants held up the disc of the world! It would have been so easy to sneak up to the edge, peer over the side and be done with it.

But our kind sits on the carousel, even though we're close to vomiting.

I'm on my way back to myself through drugs, analysis and bouts of work.

I'm a bulimic perpetual-motion machine spasmodically plagued by the desire to incorporate and the inability to retain anything.

In short, I've adapted.

The world is round.

LESSON 4

Fast-forward.

I'm standing on a mountain spur, looking into the depths: the Rhône meanders at my feet. France is to my left; to my right, the abyss.

The wind is warm. Early signs of spring are everywhere.
The water in my river is sluggish. Yellow and bilious, it rolls
on.

Faced with a choice between two stools, I take the bed of nails.

I am tired.

I'm not home.

I have arrived.

