

## THE ROWAN

The rowan's magical properties were subject to reversal if you pruned the branches, the way Old Mr. King did, or if, like his sister, you brought the berries into the house for decorative purposes. That she did this was hearsay, since the only time we saw the inside of the Kings' house was on Halloween, when if you wanted a piece of candy you were made to perform a trick. The Kings weren't the least friendly of the three childless households on the street, merely the least interested, unlike the Howells, who radiated what felt like seething pent-up hostility, and Mr. Harbison, who was clearly and unspokenly gay, and who, together with his housemate Jimmy, gave out exotic candy all year long. The rowan tree is the guardian, the protective spirit every Highlander plants beside their cottage. Of course we didn't know this. We were American children, even those of us whose families came from elsewhere, Venice, San Juan, Armenia, Sweden. The idea was to be American, a good thing to be since, after all, America had won the war—one of those wars of which there always are so many. You have made your battleground, say the protestors. How do you think the people who live there will procure firewood and hay? A single general's reputation is made of ten thousand corpses. The berries were the blood of the rowan tree and woe betide any man or woman who brought them into a dwelling. When you did this the thing that was supposed to protect you turned on you.