

The traveler ponders some rumors that have reached his ears

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He's heard stories of amber, of winter storms that deposit yellow knurls and knuckles the length of the long beach that runs north to Palanga, of roads jammed even in winter on a fair Sunday with beachcombers eager for treasure. He's not found that road yet, shy or distracted or put off by some vague sense that the old powers should be cautiously approached. He's read that the Christians found this land hard to enter, the people stubborn, claiming to be happy with the gods they knew. That's been centuries. Still the borders mean something. Still the news is bloody and not so far away. The traveler read in the U.S. news that there's new word from Vilnius: if the Russians come, stay calm. Show up for work. Hug your children. The traveler has noticed nothing scary, but he knows he's wearing a snug cocoon of ignorance. Anyway another source insisted that the message was mostly about storms, fire, earthquakes, the Russians only one of many perils that need forethought but not fear. He doesn't know whether the bundled souls he passes on his night walks are brooding on blood, or thinking only of their doors and dinner and a drink, or wondering how much amber the last storm of winter washed up on the beach, how much waits half-buried to give itself to any walker, golden as cool fragments of a lost sun.