Furuset

*by Linn Strømsborg*

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Foreign Rights Manager, Silje Mella: [silje.mella@cappelendamm.no](mailto:silje.mella@cappelendamm.no)

***s. 9-22***

**PARIS, HØYBRÅTEN**

It’s two days after Christmas and I’m on the subway heading towards Furuset. I’m sitting close to one of the windows in the foremost car and am taking up a whole section with my suitcase and bag. It’s wet on the floor, muddy footprints and brown snow. I peer out through the front of the car and see only snow. The tracks swing in and out of tunnels, people get off and on. The next stop is Brynseng, and most of the other travelers disappear to transfer, but I’m still only halfway. When we start up again, it’s just me and a little girl with her dad left in this car. She comes over to me to look out the window, and I let her sit on my bag so she can get up high enough. She makes a kind of swooshing noise every time we make a turn as though we’re flying away with the wind. I turn away from the window and look over at my suitcase to make sure it’s still there, and check if I have my phone in my pocket.

*Hello?*

*Hi, Mom.*

*Hi, Eva! So nice to hear from you.*

*Yeah.*

*How are you doing?*

*Yeah, alright.*

*Good.*

*Yeah.*

*Have you found somewhere to live yet?*

*No, not yet.*

It takes about 20 minutes to get from the Central Station to where I grew up, the second to last stop on line 2. When we stop at Lindeberg, I get up and drag my suitcase over to the door then go back to heave my bag up on my shoulders. The little girl hops off and runs back to her dad. I almost fall over when the subway stops at Furuset, but I manage to grab onto a pole in the middle of the car and hold myself up. I meet the eyes of someone I don’t know who was in the car behind me. He dashes past and disappears up the stairs. I drag the big suitcase behind me through the puddle that sits there like a thick layer on the floor of the station. It’s dripping, and small rivers are running along the stairs I have to go up; I drag my suitcase behind me step by step instead of just carrying it. Allegedly they’ve spruced up the station since I was last here, but I can hardly see a difference. It’s always been black and grey and white. The kiosk is closed and yet the shopping center is still open, but there aren’t many people out. It’s snowing, and I set aside the suitcase to shift the bag into a better position on my shoulder.

*No, it’s tough right now in the housing market.*

*Yeah, pretty tough.*

*You could come here?*

*Home?*

*Yeah?*

*Move home, you mean?*

*Well, I don’t know about move, but you could stay here until you find something new? Your room is still here. No one’s using it for anything.*

*....*

*Are you there?*

*Yeah.*

I stand for a moment in the open area in front of the shopping center. It’s already dark even though it’s only five. Over by the police car that’s always parked there is a group of teens, and just around the corner outside the Blockbuster where they also sell cheap pizza is another group. I adjust the straps of my bag a bit, jump up and down to make sure that it’s sitting right, then grab the suitcase and start pulling it after me in the snow. I don’t know any of these boys. Puffy jackets, beanies, hoodies and jeans. If it were ten years ago, I definitely would’ve known them all, but I still would’ve hurried past them just as I’m hurrying past them now, with my hat pulled down low on my face and my feet moving quickly, quickly on the sidewalk, and I would’ve thought they were laughing at me if I heard them laugh.

*Just think about it, Eva. It would be nice to be together with me and Dad a bit.*

*Yeah, maybe.*

*You can decide before Christmas, then we could get some things before you come here.*

*Yeah, actually, Mom, about that. I was thinking of maybe celebrating Christmas with Miriam this year.*

*Oh?*

*Yeah, since she’s back from Paris and stuff.*

*Ah, yes. Okay.*

*It’s been a while since I’ve seen her.*

*Yes.*

…

*But you should still think about it.*

*Moving home?*

*Yes.*

*Okay.*

*But we’ll talk later, then, sweetie.*

*Yeah, bye.*

*Bye.*

There’s light in almost all the windows of the apartment buildings I pass. I look into the kitchens of people I don’t know, windows to rooms that belonged to people I went to school with. I see doorbells with pieces of tape and scraps of paper over last names I used to know. I wonder who still lives here, whether everyone I know has moved. Some of them lived in the apartments down here right next to the shopping center and went to my school even though they actually should’ve gone to the one closer to here, but most lived in the buildings on the other side of the little field, both where I lived and on the other side of our school, and then there were some lucky bastards who lived in the houses right below the school. I continue through the buildings, walk over the bridge and down the road on asphalt covered with a thin layer of snow and gravel. I blow a bit of hair away from my face, straighten my hat, which has slid down over my eyes, and start to move again, down the hill instead of over the field – the longest way home. The 79-bus drives by, a fire truck passes, two cars and a truck. The suitcase tips over two times, and after the third I sit down on it and take a break.

I think back to the rooftop terrace in Bislett, to early summer and my graduation party: Miriam, Einar and Cecilie had surprised me, invited Mom and Dad over, made dinner, hung up multi-colored light bulbs. Mom and Dad hug me, Miriam squeals and hugs me even harder. It’s warm and we have a barbeque on the roof of the neighboring building. June is almost over, my master’s thesis has been submitted. I haven’t done much else in the last weeks and months than get up at the crack of dawn, take the trolley to campus, write, rewrite, rewrite some more, come home late, find the sofa, find the bed, hear the others come home even later, turn over and stare at the wall, *awake, must not be awake*, hear the alarm clock ticking behind me, dread waking up, then wake up, then trolley, then write, then finish, then stand here, a bit surprised but not too much, a bit happy but not too much. I know my thesis is good, I know I’ve done a good job – that’s why we’re celebrating. We eat and drink champagne, but Dad drinks soda since he’s driving. Mom is so proud of me, she says over and over again. I smile and toast with her and the others. We talk about the summer ahead. Miriam’s going to work and save up a bit of money. Cecilie and Einar are going on vacation together, but they don’t know where yet. I recommend getting an Interrail pass through Europe and ending up in Greece, but Cecilie is skeptical. Einar pulls it up on his phone right away and starts discussing possible routes. After all, it isn’t so bad to ride a train, and if they’re extra thrifty in June and July, maybe they can even get first class here and there, and stay in hotels instead of hostels.

Dad asks me if I’ve started applying for jobs yet, but I say I’m going to wait until later this summer. I want to take it easy, maybe just work a few shifts at the bookstore where I’ve filled in here and there.

“But you shouldn’t wait to long,” he says, and I shake my head. “Even though you’re one of the best, you also have to be the first, you know.” I nod.

It gets late and Mom is a bit drunk, Einar and Cecilie are talking politics with Dad, and I lean against the railing and look out over Oslo at all the lights in the windows like tiny lanterns in the summer night.

“How does it feel?” Miriam sits down next to me and pokes at my arm with her fist. I shrug.

“I don’t really know,” I answer.

“You don’t know? It’s *now* you should know, *now* that everything really begins,” she says, flinging out her arms. I smile and tug at my dress, pull it over my knees, look down at my feet. Mom comes over to us and says that they’re thinking of calling it a night. I hug them and tell them it’s nice that they came. Dad hugs Miriam too, while Einar and Cecilie are already clearing the table.

“Sweetie, please don’t let it be too long before we see you again,” Mom whispers and hugs me again. I shake my head and smile, promise to visit this summer, grill, eat Sunday breakfast with them. I help Einar and Cecilie carry plates and leftovers across the backyard and into the apartment. They say they’ll take care of the cleaning up, that I should just relax tonight. Cecilie hugs me and says she’s truly proud. I laugh and say that’s very nice, and I mean it.

I follow Mom and Dad out to the car. I wave at them and stand on the sidewalk for a while. It’s dark, but not cold. A bit windy, though, and I have to hold my dress so it doesn’t blow up.

“Eva!” I look up and see Miriam, who is still standing on the roof. She lifts up a bottle of champagne and I smile, open the door and run up all the steps. Miriam pops the cork and I ask her where this last bottle came from since I thought we were all out.

“Carefully planned hiding,” she smiles and fills up our glasses.

We raise our glasses and I say we have to toast something, not just toast for the sake of it.

“That’s unlucky,” I say.

“Okay, then shall we toast you, then?”

“Rather not.”

“Then we toast the summer,” she suggests and I nod.

We clink our glasses and I take a sip.

We sit at the top of Bislett and look at the light bulbs that blink different colors, we watch people turn out the lights in their windows, the sky that grows darker and darker and then light again almost right away, cars driving past, cabs with their lights on, people going to or from parties, someone walking their dog, a group whizzing down a hill on their bikes, and we hear one of them shouting.

“I thought it would be a little different to be… here,” I say, the bottle of champagne between my bare feet.

“How do you mean?” Miriam leans her head on my shoulder and empties the last glass.

“To have submitted, to be done.” I look at her. “I thought that something would start, inside of me, or at least continue, but I just feel like everything’s ended.”

Miriam doesn’t say anything. We hear faraway voices, someone shouting, someone laughing. A car honking. It’s the sounds of summer at night. The city that never sleeps, that stays awake – in contrast to the winter, when it only sleeps. Snoozes and barely moves under a thick layer of soundproof snow.

“I think I get what you mean. But it’ll pass. Tomorrow we have to get up again, like all other mornings we’ve gotten up, and even though we don’t really know what we’re doing, we’re still going to do something.” She sets her empty glass on the stone tiles.

I shrug and smile.

“And anyway, you still have a long time until you have to find yourself, Eva. And first of all, you have to enjoy the summer vacation! We’ll swim and bike and go to parties and never sleep away the summer nights, and when autumn comes you’ll have a job and a place to live and everything will be as it should.”

“A place to live? Won’t we live here?”

“Maybe, maybe not.” Miriam gets up and goes over to the railing. I find my feet and stand next to her.

“What do you mean?”

Miriam laughs and bumps her body against mine, and I bump her back.

“Should we go in?” she asks.

“Okay.”

We take the glasses and bottle and shut the door behind us. I walk in front and she follows, we go down the stairs as quietly as we can and toss the bottle in the recycling before we lock ourselves in our own staircase and tiptoe up towards our own door.

A blue van slows down and swings in front of me. The passenger door opens and someone sticks their head out.

“Eva?”

I look up and into the car.

“Eva! What are you doing *here*?”

He turns off the motor, hops out of the car and walks over to me.

“Jo?” He grins and almost lifts me up from where I’m sitting. My hat and headphones fly off and the sound of *“Things She Said*” can be heard faintly from the ground.

“Oh my god, is that you?”

I hug him, and though I can’t see his face I still know exactly what his smile looks like.

“Is that *you*, is the real question! How long has it been since I saw you now? Five years?” He puts me down and picks up my hat, brushes it off and hands it to me before bending over to pick up my headphones. I thank him and put on my hat, turn off my mp3 player and stand there looking at him. It’s strange how someone can look exactly the same, while simultaneously entirely different. I wonder if I’ve changed just as much, and just as little.

I nod at the car and ask if it’s his.

“Yeah, or, it’s my work car.”

“Work car?”

He points at the IKEA logo on the hood and says he works in the warehouse.

“We deliver with this one, but I get to use it privately sometimes, like when it’s this kind of weather out. They don’t want me to like, get the flu when I’m standing outside waiting for the bus.”

I want to say that the flu is a virus and that you don’t get it from the cold, but just smile instead.

“But hey, are you going home, then?”

“I’m going to stay at my mom and dad’s for a bit, yeah.”

We look at each other, and then he simply walks over, picks up my bag, opens the doors in the back of the car and tosses it in, then grabs my suitcase and puts it in next to it.

Then he slams the doors. “I’m driving you.”

I open the door and get in. It’s warm in the car. Jo hops in the driver’s seat and turns on the engine, puts on his seatbelt. I do the same and then he swings back out on the road.

It only takes two minutes to accelerate up the hill to the apartment building where I’ll be living. It’s snowing, and a snowplow is clearing the parking lot.

Jo turns off the engine and we sit there for a moment. He casts a quick glance at my bags.

“How long will you be here, actually?”

I turn and look at my things. Our heads are almost touching between the seats, and in the big trunk of the van my suitcase has fallen over my bag. I took all my clothes, a few books, a couple pairs of shoes. I sold my furniture online – what little I owned that wasn’t part of shared flat. I had a bookcase, a nightstand and a bed. A guy bought everything for 500 kroner. He picked it all up yesterday so I slept on the floor last night. I gave away the books that had been in the bookcase at the moving party. I let people take whatever they wanted after I’d packed up the ones I wanted to keep.

“I don’t really know. The people I shared my apartment with got together and wanted to live alone, and then our contract expired, and then I didn’t really find anything else.” I don’t say anything about Miriam, or that you don’t find anything when you’re not *looking*, and Jo doesn’t ask either, just like Mom and Dad.

“Yeah, it’s hard to find a good place to live that doesn’t cost an arm and a leg. Unless you move out here!” Jo looks out the window again and I follow his gaze: Apartment buildings and row houses as far as the eye can see.

“No, I don’t think so. But it’ll nice to live with mom and Dad for a while. At least while I look.”

“It’s *nice* here, Eva. Come on, we can be neighbors, just like the old days, what do you say?” He laughs and punches me playfully in the shoulder so I almost hit the passenger door.

“Great,” I say and take in the view again. Grey snow, grey buildings, grey row houses, dark sky. Great. I take a breath and open the door. The cold hits me and I turn and grab my mittens, rubbing my hands together. Jo hops out on his side and opens the back, lifts out the bag, slings it over his shoulder before he takes out the suitcase, pushes the doors shut and starts walking towards the entryway. I turn quickly from the car and jog to catch up with him.

“We could hang out a bit while you’re here, if you want, and have time?” He sets down my bag and suitcase and rings the doorbell, turning towards me. I look at him and nod. Then I hear my mom’s voice over the intercom.

“Eva?”

“Hi, Mom, it’s me.”

She doesn’t say anymore, just presses the door opener, which drones worse than ever. I push the door open and am about to pick up my things, but Jo already has and is ready to follow me in. It smells just like it always has in the stairwell: linoleum, cork boards with messages about the homeowner’s association’s decisions, empty mailboxes and wet strollers.

Mom is standing in the door when we come up and almost claps her hands at the sight of who I have with me.

“Joseph? So nice to see *you* again!” She comes out into the stairwell and gives Jo a hug before embracing me. She’s warm and her hair is soft. Behind her I see Dad shuffling over. He smiles and walks past her into the stairwell. He greets Jo and mumbles a “nice to see you” before giving me a bear hug. Then he takes my bag and goes into the hallway again, sets it in front of the door, and takes the suitcase that Jo hands him.

Mom says that she’s busy with the food and goes back to the kitchen. I hear her shout that Jo should stay for dinner. It feels like I’m in the seventh grade again and have brought my boyfriend home. Jo smiles and says he has to head out, but that he’d love to come another time.

“Any time. Just set something up with Eva?” Dad looks at Jo, then at me. I nod.

“Yes, great. Just come in when you’re ready. We’ll be waiting for you.” He waves at me and disappears into the kitchen as well. I shake me head and look at Jo, who is smiling.

“Nice folks, your parents.”

I just look at him.

“What are you doing for New Year’s Eve, by the way?”

“I don’t know. Don’t have any plans.” I tuck my hair behind my ear, knowing he wants to suggest something.

“We’re having a party at Nilen’s. You should come. The others will be stoked to see you again.”

“Yeah, maybe.” I nod and slip out of my shoes, peering down at my feet, at the contours of my toes through the thin, red socks.

“Yeah, well, give me a call. Talk to you later,” he says and sets off down the stairs. I take off my jacket and smell the scent of meatballs coming from the kitchen. I can’t bear to carry either my bag or my suitcase into my room and just leave them in the hallway.

We eat dinner: Mom’s meatballs are just as good as always. I know that she’s made them for me. We’re pretty quiet. Mom talks about work, that a client gave her a bouquet after they were done with a case. I ask for more sauce and she goes into the kitchen to get some. Dad asks me if I want to watch a movie later, and I say that would be nice. After we’ve eaten I help Mom clear the table, and suddenly recall that I never used to do that when I was visiting here.

“It’s too bad you weren’t here for Christmas,” says Mom.

“Yeah,” I say. Dad doesn’t say anything.

“Was it nice at Miriam’s?”

“Very,” I answer, feeling like I should say more, but I don’t know what else to say. I wasn’t at Miriam’s; I was alone at the apartment. It was actually pretty nice – I watched TV all day, bought Christmas candy at 7-11 and a frozen Christmas dinner that I warmed up while I watched Donald Duck on NRK. I knew that Mom always got stressed about the food, that Grandpa complained that it was just red cabbage and not sauerkraut, even though it tastes exactly the same, that Dad took a cigar on the terrace in the cold even though he didn’t actually smoke, that Mom got started on the cleaning right after we were done eating because she wanted to be alone in the kitchen. I don’t know how it would be this year, but I just couldn’t bear it, so I lied and said that I was going to celebrate at Miriam’s. I didn’t even have to argue.

“How is Miriam, anyway?” Mom asks while we put the leftovers in Tupperware containers: green for the potatoes, blue for the meatballs and sauce. The kitchen windows are decorated with red tape and fake snow.

“She’s back in Paris,” I say.

“So soon?”

“I think she had a lot of schoolwork she wanted to finish during break.”

I rinse off the plates and put them in the dishwasher.

“It must be exciting to live abroad,” Mom says as she puts the cutlery into the holder in the machine. She doesn’t sort them, just puts forks and knives all together. I want to take them out and sort them, but put the glasses in instead. There’s almost nothing in the machine from before.

“Mm,” I say. “Must be nice.”

“Eva?” Dad calls from the living room, and I go over to the door and ask what it is. “Do you want to watch *Top Gun* or *Lethal Weapon*?” He holds the DVDs out towards me.

“*Lethal Weapon*,” I say and walk back to the kitchen to finish the cleaning.

“Well, then, I guess I have to stay up a bit, since you’re going to be watchin a Mel Gibson movie,” Mom says and gets some wine glasses from the shelf above the counter. I take the glasses into the living room.

Mom and Dad chat a bit as they set up the movie, struggle with the menu and the subtitles. I look out the window at all the snow that lies on Furuset, and then I think back to Sognsvann just a month or so after the roof terrace. It’s me and Miriam, we bought beer and cherries and are dangling our feet off the dock. Our toes touch the surface of the water and it tickles a bit, and not far away some ducks are swimming in circles around each other. It’s starting to get late and most of the families have gone home, but we’re still sitting here. We ate ice cream and barbecued, swam and dried off and swam again. It’s the kind of day that will never end (before it suddenly does), the kind of day where the only thing we undertake is squinting into the sun and feeling the warmth in our bodies, the chilly water that embraces us when we hop in, the breath that disappears down there and then fills us up again when we break the surface and the sun touches our faces.

“It shouldn’t be legal to do anything else all summer,” I say as we lie on the dock again, staring up at the sky. Small cotton-ball clouds above us, never a shadow for more than five minutes.

“I know.”

Miriam puts two cherries in her mouth at the same time and spits out the pits onto a napkin we put next to us. I take the cherry she gives me and bites into it until I feel the pit. I like the sound it makes in my head when my front teeth scrape against the red berry.

“They should just shut Oslo down entirely between November and February,” I say and sit up. “And then we can open things up again in March and work until the end of May, and then just lie here like this.” I point at Miriam, at our towels, the beer cans in our shoes, the cherries between us. “Just like this until… shall we say September?”

Miriam sits up as well and looks at me over her sunglasses as she chews yet another pair of cherries.

“But someone has to keep the stores open?”

“Nope, self-service. Or – if you absolutely *have* to work, then you can, but it’s not mandatory. And if it rains, then you can work. *Save it for a rainy day*.”

“Isn’t it the other way around? Because isn’t that what you say about something that’s good?”

“What’s that?”

“Saving something for a rainy day? Something that makes you happy, you know, something that makes a grey day better.” She spits out the pits and picks up two new cherries right away.

“Maybe.” I get up and shake my hair. It’s dried since we last jumped in. I walk to the end of the dock and stand with my toes just over the edge, but the rest of my body safely within. I’m so wimpy when it comes to jumping in. I *know* that it isn’t cold – we’ve been swimming all day – and yet I still hesitate on the edge.

“Jump,” says Miriam and lies back down on her towel.

“Yeah, I’m going to,” I say.

“Jump!” she shouts suddenly and gets up and runs over to me and I hurl myself out, get water in my nose, open my eyes underwater and see that she hasn’t jumped in after me. I break through the surface and rub my eyes. She’s sitting down on the edge.

“What would you do if I moved to another city?”

I tread water and look at her, dunk my head under and come back up again. Splash her. “What do you mean?” I’m out of breath from holding myself up but don’t swim over to the dock to get out. I’m staying in the water.

“If I moved, to another country or another city. What would you do?”

“I don’t know, why do you ask? Come with? Or? I don’t know.”

She leans her body all the way off the edge, hops halfway in but holds herself up with her arms so she doesn’t disappear beneath the surface.

I climb up as she swims and dry myself off as she climbs up as well.

“Miriam, what did you mean?”

“Nothing.” She lies down on her towel without drying herself off first, her red hair making a wet puddle around her head. I toss two cherries over to her and she catches them without looking, sticks them both in her mouth. I lie down and see that the sun is moving across the sky, all the way down behind the trees. We don’t pack up until later in the evening, our skin tender from all the warmth and a bit tipsy from the beer. We bike down and my legs are freezing.

Five months later, I’m sitting in my childhood bedroom in Furuset. Mom and Dad and I have watched the movie and are chatting a bit afterwards. About nothing. Or, almost nothing. And I’m tired, but not really sleepy. I peer out the window, down over the field, follow the road with my finger, count a few cars whose headlights I can see through the snowy weather, and finally lie down without shutting the curtains. On the ceiling I can see the dim light from the streetlights and small shadows of large snowflakes. It feels like my body is an enormous hole and I don’t know what I’m going to fill it with. I get up and find my mp3 player in my jacket pocket. I turn up the volume a bit and get under the covers, all the way under, breathe deeply into my lungs and twist the cables around my fingers. I imagine the route I used to walk when I lived here, all the times I just wanted to get up and out, away from the restlessness in my own teenage body, my legs that barely moved, around and around the apartment buildings, past the schoolyard, through the schoolyard, down to the train station, all the way around the gravel paths and back, endless walks to pass the time. I feel the warmth of my own body, the weight of myself on the mattress beneath me. Outside, it keeps snowing.

***s. 29-30***

**HØYENBRÅTENVEIEN 23 K**

It starts again, this feeling in my stomach, as soon as I’m home and alone in my old room: the feeling that time is standing still, that I’m the same as when I was eleven and fifteen and 24. I lie on my bed, get up and walk around a bit. Peek out the window, draw the curtains so I can’t see the windows on the other side, all the lights from kitchens, bedrooms, kids’ rooms. I open the closet and toss in my bag, shut it again. I can hear Mom and Dad talking in the living room. The sounds are so familiar, my room so small I feel I am filled with a kind of nothingness, and that feeling you have that everyone is out there experiencing things except for you, that everyone else has started living their lives for real, going to the parties you only see in movies, kissing the boys you don’t even dare to say hi to in the schoolyard, they go around and go to bed with a smile on their face while you lie awake and write in your diary about everything that isn’t happening. From when you start at school and start seeing other people, from when you’re sitting and trading stickers with Nina in her room after school and dreaming of one day being just as cool and pretty as her, with just as many stickers – you long to decide yourself, you long for a kind of new start, or maybe a kickstart, for the life you know from TV shows late at night, and you think that’s how it should be, in just six years, four years, two years it’ll start, but when you get there, when you’re standing there like a normal 15-year-old and you don’t look like the posters on your wall, you think you’ve failed and that you’re the only person in the world who hasn’t managed it, and you want the world to end, and you want the world to start again.

Where are the parties you saw on TV, where is Johnny telling your parents that nobody puts you in a corner, where’s the guy who asks you to prom, where *are* the proms actually, those things in the gym are just stupid, and you still spend your nights lying alone in your room and writing in your diary about everything that isn’t happening, and you start at high school, and when the ball finally starts to roll, when the boy says hi to you, when you no longer grieve at the sight of your own face in the mirror, when the nights are just cans of beer and graduation parties, when you’ve forgotten why you *wanted* all of this, when you’re sitting in your own apartment, completely alone, and watching one after another of your friends moving abroad, getting boyfriends, getting engaged, graduating and starting jobs, when you get up and go to the same places, whether it’s to a job or a spot in the library, when you realize that things are starting to be as they should, that things are starting to fall into place, you maybe long for the bench you liked to sit on when you still didn’t know the person you’ve become today, when everything that hurt was the worst thing that had happened to you, when everything that was good was the most beautiful in the world, when your feelings filled you up, and at least your heart was still warm.

***s. 47-51***

**THE BENCH**

We can sit here and look out over our old school, and you can give me a beer and we don’t have to say anything even though we always used to talk over each other, I can point at the roof of the school where we also used to sit, where we drank our first beer, where we always looked for tennis balls and soccer balls that mysteriously disappeared from the schoolyard, where you taught me how to hoist myself up and heave my legs over, something that made it so I always got up on the dock from the lake without using the ladder, I can just imagine your face looming over me and hear the voice instructing me how I should swing a bit, get ready, and hurl my legs and body upwards, not to worry that my arms were tired, and I remember how many times I fell down, from the edge of the dock, trees and tall walls, how strange it was that the worst thing that ever happened was a sprained wrist and knocked out baby tooth, and I remember that you followed me home while I cried, that you followed me home when I got a flat tire, when someone had stolen my stickers, when someone had pushed me in the snow and stolen my mittens, when my first boyfriend dumped me, when I got too drunk at a class party and didn’t want to unlock the bathroom door until I heard your voice, and we walked together along the same roads we’d always walked, from when our parents still followed us to school until we walked home for the very last time, after an oral final in math in the tenth grade, and you kept tossing pebbles at my window at night in the summer, and I kept jumping out to be with you, whether we just sat on the roof at the school and dangled our legs off the edge or went to a party at someone’s house whose parents weren’t home, and we can sit here, right now, many years later, and each drink our own beer that you bought at the shop next to the video store, where I got a job yesterday, and we don’t have to talk, it’s nice to just sit here.

“So, you got a job?”

I nod.

“Yeah, at the video store.”

“At the *video store*?” You were about to take a sip of your beer, but you just hold the can in front of your mouth and look at me.

“Yeah,” I say.

“What are you gonna do there?”

“Open and close and stuff. Clean up the shelves. Sell pizza, candy, used films, rent movies, you know.”

“For how long?”

“I don’t know, a couple months, a couple years, a couple lives?”

I take a sip of my beer, and you finally drink from yours. We can see the stars over the school and the lights from all the windows in the buildings around us. I wonder if we can hear the train when it rolls past down by the train station, whether we can see the windows whoosh past, small squares of light that become a thin line when at speed.

You already finish your beer when I’ve only had half of mine and I push the bag towards you in the snow on the bench. You open number two and sit with it in your hand for a moment.

“I always thought that you would…” You stop yourself and take a sip. “I don’t know, Eva, I just, always thought like, you’d achieve something.”

“Achieve something?” I chuckle and set my beer between my feet, making a little hollow in the snow.

“Yeah, fuck, now I sound like I’m your mom or something, but you were always so fucking good at everything. What if our old teacher came to rent a movie one night and *you* were at the cash register? She’d choke on her candy, I’m not even kidding.”

“Well, I can recommend some really good movies to her,” I say, poking at your arm. “And anyway, I don’t think she spends her time watching movies, she’d rather be at the theater or opera or something.”

“Yeah, but you know what I mean?”

“Yeah, Jo.” I pick up my beer and take a few sips. It’s almost as if it’s even colder than the last time I drank from it. The can is slippery in my mittens, almost like I could drop it if I don’t hold it tightly enough.

“I just think it could be nice to have a job where I don’t have to think all that much,” I say, tossing the almost empty can away from me. “Just for a bit. And it’s not like you’re really ‘fulfilling your potential’ at the IKEA warehouse, are you?”

You emit a small laugh and meet my eyes. I hop down from the bench and brush snow from my clothes, shake my legs to get the warmth back in my body again.

“Come on, let’s back to your place and drink the rest there. We can save the world tomorrow.”

You get up slowly from the bench and pick up the bag of beer before we plod through our own footprints from earlier.

We get into the hallway and I knock off the snow that’s gotten stuck to the bottom of my shoes. Jo goes ahead of me into the living room, tosses his jacket on a chair and continues into the kitchen with the beer. He sets it in the fridge even though it’s already ice cold. I go into the living room and settle on the sofa. There’s a copy of the local newspaper on the table that I pick up and leaf through.

“Do you actually read this?” I hold it up to him as he comes into the living room with two beers. He shakes his head, pointing at it with a beer in one hand and says that he just bought it.

“Check out page four,” he says and sits down next to me.

I flip through it to find a story about blown up cars at Haugenstua.

“Ashkan told me about it. He lives in the building right by the train station down there. He woke up from the explosion.” Jo hands me the beer and I take it.

“A bit worse than what we got up to,” I said.

“You didn’t really *get up to* anything,” Jo says, laughing.

“I made a bonfire with Ashkan one time!”

“Yeah, cool shit.” He shoves my shoulder and we tap our beers together.

“But,” I set my beer down next to the paper on the table. “What’s the deal? Is it like a gang? Has it happened before?”

“To be honest I think they’re just trying to see what they can get away with.”

Jo leans to one side and grabs a blanket that he hands me. I spread it over my legs and pull it up to my neck, packing myself in.

“Typical,” he continues. “They saw it on TV and want to do it in real life.”

“Do you remember when there were fires in the parking lots around here when were little?”

“Yeah, I think so, but there weren’t any cars that got blown up then? Or were there?”

I think about it but can only remember a little bit. We were pretty young, maybe second or third grade. It was spring and early summer and there were several fires in the parking lots around the apartments and one in the garage, and then suddenly they just stopped, and come fall everything was like it was before.

“We lay around in the parking lots everyday after school and tried to be spies. You thought it was the janitor, I remember. The guy who coughed so hard the whole building shook.”

“You have to agree he was suspicious!” Jo looks at me and I start to laugh.

“Yeah, sure, but I don’t think he was a pyromaniac.” I lean forward and sneak a hand out from beneath my blanket tent to grab the cold beer and take a sip.

“The car gang didn’t ever get caught, did they?”

“Think that we called them that.”

I shake my head.

“Now I remember! There was a car that burned up then, too!” Jo sits up on the sofa and claps his hands together. “It was in the parking lot right by the community center, one of those cars that had been sitting there forever.”

“Yeah!” I say. I remember the burnt remains on the hill, and even though they removed the wreckage there was a huge black spot where the car had been, with small charred pieces from when it had once been a red Lada.

We drink one last beer and then I get up from the couch and set the blanket on the armrest. Jo follows me all the way home and I tell him to watch out for himself.

“If I see any kids with lighters, I’ll make a citizen’s arrest!”

“Great, Walker Texas Ranger.”

“Hey, Eva! Did you know that Chuck Norris can’t do push-ups?” Jo is walking backwards down the street as I fiddle with my key at the door. I shake my head.

“Do you know why not?”

I shake my head again.

“Because if he does push-ups, he’ll push the earth out of orbit!”

He lifts an arm to wave and I wave back. I hear hear the sound of the door shutting behind me and toss my keys in the air as I walk up the stairs.