

1

Unicorn

“I’m often told I’m childish.” I say.

Pat looks down at his hands. He has such adult man-like hands. Long and thin with little tufts of black hair. He holds a bunch of envelopes.

“But I AM a child, right?”

“Haha! Yes, you are certainly right about that,” says Pat.

“You’re considered a child until you’re eighteen years old, and I am only eleven and a half.

“Well then, probably best to continue being a child, right?”

Pat smiles.

I like Pat. Or Pat n’Pat. That’s what we call him.

Pat has been our postman since we moved in. I was really little then, so when I realised he was a postman, I started calling him Postman Pat right away. He must have thought it was okay, since I can still call him that. He probably has another name in reality. Or maybe his real name is Pat.

Haha!

“Right?” Pat says again.

“Yep. In any case, I want to be a child for at least another year. But with the friends I have now, I don’t know if I’ll make it. They’re not on the same wave length as I am.”

“What do you mean?” Pat asks.

“Do you want the long version?”

“The long version,” says Pat. “You’re the last stop on my route so I have a lot of time.”

“Okay,” I say. “It all started last Thursday.”

*

“What are you going to wear to the school ball?” Stina asked.

“School ball?”

“Aren’t you keeping up on things, Trine, or what? We’re invited to attend the seventh grade school ball this year!”

I had no idea what she was talking.

Sixth graders have never been allowed to attend the ball. Never!

What exactly are we supposed to do there?

“Knock-knock, Trine! I asked what you are going to wear to the ball, not the capital of Belgium. Answer me!”

“Brussels,” I said.

“Huh?”

“The capital of Belgium. It’s called Brussels.”

“Jeez, Trine! What are you going to wear to the school ball?”

I pretended I actually had a plan.

“It depends,” I said. “If it’s a carnival, I’m going to wear my one-piece unicorn suit.”

Stina got an expression on her face I’ve never seen before. And we’ve known each other for quite a long time, so to speak.

“Are you completely NUTS, Trine? Are you TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY NUTS?”

Stina raised her voice:

“It’s not a CARNIVAL! We’re talking nice dresses and suits and ties.”

“Uh,” I said.

But Stina was far from finished.

“Yes, maybe even TOPS that show some BOOBS. And since you actually HAVE a couple, then maybe it’s something for you.”

“But ...,” I said.

“But what? You plan on coming as a UNICORN?”

Stina’s voice can make your hair curl. Grandma used to say that when we were little. And Stina and I answered in unison: “But your hair does curl, grandma!” And then we quarreled while we sucked on the lollipops we got as a reward for going outside. Every time Stina called grandma grandma, we started quarreling about who had the right to call her that. I felt I had to protest, so that grandma would not end up with an extra grandchild with a loud voice. Deep down, I knew grandma liked Stina quite a lot. And even deeper down inside, I got a warm feeling every time Stina called her grandma. That way we sort of shared something.

“Yo-hoo, TRINE!?”

Stina waved her arms.

“Just joking about the Unicorn,” I said. “Actually mum owes me a new dress, since she dyed my white dress light green. She said the sock monster did it.”

“Stock monster? Omigod Trine!”

I didn't take the hint and babbled on.

“Yes, you know the little creature who eats your socks, so that one is always missing?”

Stina rolled her eyes.

She would not have done that if it had been half a year ago.

A half a year ago Stina still expanded upon her theory about the sock monster. She had said that it was probably the same creature who stole her homework. Stina never does her homework, but she always has funny excuses. However, over the past year Stina has become less and less funny. She becomes less and less funny for every layer of makeup she puts on.

I cleared my throat.

“Okay then, what are YOU going to wear?”

“Not a one piece unicorn suit, for starters,” Stina replied a little bitchy.

Then she pulled herself together. As if she suddenly remembered that I'm her best friend.

“I want a nice dress with sequins that glitter in the light from disco ball. Do you think they'll hang up a disco ball?”

“Definitely,” I said. - “It's, well you know, a BALL!”

Stina smiled.

I blushed

“Want to play at my house today?” I asked.

“Trine!” exclaimed Stina quite exasperated. “We're nearly twelve years old! We don't PLAY anymore! Can't we just nick some of your mum's make-up and clothes? Kinda like a dress-rehearsal for the ball.”

“Okay,” I replied. “Then I can ask mum about that dress too.”

“I think it's best if your mum isn't home. What about Thursday, when she's at yoga?”

“Yes! Sweet!” I said.

I really don't care about dresses. But I had to say something teenage-like so I didn't look so shocked about what she said: “*We don't PLAY anymore.*” What's that supposed to mean? Do we just like stop?

Anyway, that's how I discovered it. On a typical Thursday, when I was standing as usual in the schoolyard talking as usual to my best friend about what I thought was a COMPLETELY NORMAL party for school kids.

And just like that I found out that I, Trine Halvorsen, am the very last kid in sixth grade at Bjorkelunden school.

*

Pat is quiet. He let me finish talking, and I must have talked for a long time. Have I become such a talker, now? It almost sounded like a real story when I got to the end: "...and that's how I found out about ...” Maybe I should write for theatre or something.

“You know, the first thing you said that they call you childish, but that you actually are still a child: That was very nicely said,” Pat says after a while.

“Was it?” I say.

“Yes, I would say. It's not often that you hear children talk about their own childhood. Childhood is almost a philosophical entity in itself, if you understand what I mean?”

I have no idea what Pat means. Philosophical entity? What is he blabbering on about? Doesn't he realise that I am about to lose my best friend? That I don't have someone to be a regular kid with anymore.

“Do you want another biscuit?” asks Pat.

“Yes, thank you,” I say and munch down two more.

I wait to open the mailbox until Pat's gone. I know there's a note in there. When it started, I couldn't figure out where they came from. I thought it was a fairy or something, who came fluttering in with notes for me. “I think they're from Pat,” mum said one day.

So I stayed home from school for a whole Friday, just to sit on the stairs and wait for Pat.

“Are you putting notes in our mailbox?” I asked. Pat just smiled. “Notes?” he said, “No, I don't know anything about it.” But I had figured that out. And it was a wonder that I didn't catch on right away. It's not exactly normal to have a postman who writes notes.

But since then, there has been a note in the mailbox every Friday. Today, too:

"All adults have been children once.

(But many have forgotten.)”

Hello? Is Pat psychic, or what? I just told him I'm afraid of growing up, and for exactly that reason: I will forget everything that's fun!

2

It seems now she can talk as well

“Hi, Unicorn!” Stina shouts.

I pretend not to hear.

“TRINE? I SAID HI!

I turn around and try to look surprised. “Oh, hey. Sorry, I didn't hear you.”

“Yeah right. Did you get mad that I shouted unicorn? I was just joking.”

“No, seriously, I didn't hear you!”

Stina catches me all the time. I don't like being found out, lying is much easier.

I hear someone behind us.

“Haha! Unicorn, is that her name now?”

It's Amina's voice.

Stina grins.

“Yeah, and you know what? I told Trine about the seventh grade ball and asked what she was going to wear!”

“And she said...?”

“That she was going to go as a UNICORN!”

“Huh? Trine are you a complete dork or what?”

“My words exactly,” says Stina. “Are you a COMPLETE dork. Hahaha.”

They stare at me waiting for an answer, but I am totally speechless. Amina's words echo in my brain: “Unicorn, is that her name now?”

Why did she say it like that?

“Unicorn, is that her name is NOW?!”

Have they given me nicknames before too? I wasn't even aware that they hung out. When did they start doing that?

"Have you done the math homework?" I ask.

It's great getting back at them in a way that seems completely normal. If Stina is going to keep calling me a unicorn, then I will continue to ask if she's done her homework.

"I have," says Amina.

"Uh, math homework?" says Stina. "I thought it was due on Friday."

We arrive late for class. Noah looks at us like a big question mark. It's not so strange, because Stina and I are never late for class. Stina, Noah and I have been friends ever since Noah joined our class two years ago. But since Stina thinks playing is childish and Noah thinks playing is the most important thing on earth, we don't hang out together that often anymore.

"Sorry, my bike chain jumped off," Stina says to the teacher. "Trine and Amina had to help me. You should be glad we're here at all, because honestly it looked pretty grim there for a while."

"Really?" says the teacher. "Well, since you have already managed to solve the practical problem of getting a bicycle chain back on the sprocket, you can most likely entertain the class by solving some theoretical problems as well. Go to page forty-nine in Mathmagic."

"Imagine that our math book is called MathMAGIC" says Stina half aloud out into the room. "It's just logic! Tell me ONE thing that is magical about math? Math is LOGIC! They have written the wrong "GIC". The book should be called MathLOgic!"

"Not so dumb, Lillevik," says the teacher. "I've actually had the same thought myself, but then I understand the humour in the pun. Yes, we have to take it with a sense of humour. By the way, did you know that Mathmagic is an award-winning teaching aid?"

I can guarantee that there was not one single kid in 6B who knew that, but it doesn't matter anyway because now someone is clapping. It's Amina. She has gotten up from her seat and is standing alone, clapping for Stina.

I shudder. Amina has always been quiet. But when she started with makeup, she kind of got a new purple mouth that could actually talk. And now it turns out that she can also clap.

"Super, Stina! Brilliant!" she shouts, and everyone laughs.

Stina happily takes her seat, giving Amina a high-five on the way. My stomach turns. Is it going to be the two of them from now on? Is there anyone at all who bothers to play anymore, or will I have to do it in secret for the rest of my life?

*

I go to the loo during the break. I should have dropped that, because when I come out into schoolyard, Stina is hanging around Amina. I don't like this at all. I want Stina to wait for me when I go to the loo, like she always does.

“Is that a new hijab?” Stina asks.

“Yes, the old one was pretty shabby,” says Amina.

“It's really super nice! Such a GORGEOUS blue color!”

Stina is sucking up.

I have no choice. I simply have to join this weird act. Stina and I have been together a lifetime. I CANNOT lose her.

“Do you think Stina and I would look good in a hijab?” I ask.

Amina eyes narrow as she measure me up.

“Not to be rude,” Trine, “but wearing a hijab requires quite a lot of face.”

“What?” I say.

“Yes, when the hair is covered, all the focus is on the face. That's why I'm a quite exact when I apply makeup. Stina could probably wear one. But you haven't even started with makeup!”

“Uh, no, but but we're still kids!” It just blurted out of me.

Amina laughs. Stina too.

“I see, my dear child,” says Amina in an icy voice. “I would like to inform you that you are about to become a teenager. Look at you, you have boobs and everything!”

I get embarrassed.

“Trine was actually the first to have boobs,” says Stina.

“Stina! Cut it out!”

“Trine, you just have to put up with us talking about your boobs. They are totally fine!”

Stina's voice is condescending.

“I’ll put up with what I WANT TO PUT UP WITH!”

I say this a little too loudly, because now people have turned around to see what’s going on.

“GREAT!” shouts Stina, “but then you must also put up with the fact that people can’t bear to be friends with you, when you are so SICKLY CHILDISH and get PISSED OFF at NOTHING!

Now everyone is looking at me. Absolutely everyone.

I try to say something clever, but my crying holds back my voice.

I hide my face and walk away.
