

KEEN

By Ragnhild Eskeland

Sample translation by Nancy Langfeldt

It's the first of the year's dog days. The summer is waning and the nights are drawing in. On the radio they are reporting record temperatures. Rebekka's forehead is sweating. All her pores are open. She closes the door and puts on her hiking backpack. It's heavier than she expects. It must be all the alcohol.

Beate is in the square, resting on her bike's handlebars. Her forehead shines but she has no sweat marks, and her pale eye-shadow is still intact.

"Did you remember the shells?" asks Beate.

"Of course," says Rebekka.

"Well good," says Beate. "Because last time you forgot your bit of the meal. And it was, like, the entire taco."

"I have remembered them," says Rebekka. "And you can eat tacos without mince. It's still a taco."

Beate doesn't answer, just raises her eyebrows. She is unconvinced. Rebekka's bike is leaning, unlocked, up against the house. It doesn't have a kickstand but does have seven speeds. Enough to have some choice when she's riding, but not so many that they all seem the same. Beate has just got a new bike. It's purple and has 21 speeds, but that just means she changes gear all the time. Rebekka gets on her bike, and looks up at the kitchen window. Her mother is there. They wave to each other. Then she and Beate cycle off to the road and down the hill. When she pedals, the weight of her backpack shifts from side to side and makes her unsteady, but when they go down the hill it makes her go faster. She whizzes past Beate. They cycle past the town centre and across the mire to the terraces where Live lives. Live is already waiting for them by the side of the road when they arrive. She has her Dad's old DBS bike, but with a new basket on the front. Inside the basket she has a bag of plums.

"You're late," says Live.

Beate looks at her watch and shrugs her shoulders.

"Only ten minutes," she says.

Live gets on her bike and together they ride through the estate and past the campsite, stopping at the edge of the forest. The path onwards is no good for cycling, so they lock their bikes to a tree and then walk up into the woods.

Beate starts complaining at the first long hill. Her leg hurts, she says. She wants a break. She is hungry. She has a blister. Rebekka tries to encourage her by talking about all the things they will do when they get there. They're going to crack open a beer and enjoy the view. They will eat their treats and sit in the shade. They will put up the hammocks.

"Can't we take a break?" asks Beate.

"No," says Live. "Let's get up there."

"What about by the lake then," says Beate.

"Then we can swim," says Rebekka.

"Okay then," says Live. "But no stopping before the lake."

It's not that Rebekka isn't fond of Live, but something about Live irritates her. Like how she never complains and always does the right thing. She is sprightly and well behaved. She does as her parents say. She always points it out when some one does something wrong. She is quick to become morally indignant. She can't help it. Her dad is a priest. They were supposed to live up by the church in the vicarage, next door to Rebekka, but her dad didn't want to. He said that the Christian church's greatest quality was its adaptability, that's how it had always survived, and that the days of the clergy living up in the heights while the people lived down in the valley below were over. No, he wanted to live in the new terraces on the flats, where, at any given moment, the mire could get wetter and sink the foundations several centimetres, that's where he wanted to live. Live's father is strict and mild at the same time. He never raises his voice, but when he says something, even Beate

obeys him. Beate always tidies her plate into the dishwasher at Live's house, she never does at Rebekka's. Live's dad has that effect on people. Even Rebekka's mother listens to him, and she generally doesn't listen to anyone except herself.

They reach the top of the first hill and the path eases off a bit before the next climb. They don't speak. The hills aren't too steep yet, but they are long, and their energy dwindles quickly in the heat. It's hot even in the shade cast by the large pine trees. Rebekka takes a sip from her water bottle.

"Can I have some," says Beate.

"Have you not brought any water?" asks Live.

"It's so heavy," says Beate.

"Have you got a bottle then?"

Beate looks down.

"Can I borrow your water, or not?" she asks.

"It's not exactly something you can give back," says Live.

"It's okay," says Rebekka and gives her bottle to Beate.

"Thank you," says Beate. "So there."

"So there what?" says Live.

Beate doesn't answer. She drinks and returns the bottle to Rebekka. No one is as close to Rebekka as Beate. Even though Rebekka has known Live for longer, it's like she and Beate were made for each other. Beate has a naturalness as she moves through the world. She enters a room like she belongs there, even though she doesn't really belong here at all. Really, Beate should live somewhere completely different, in a city apartment with high ceilings and big windows. Beate would be at home there. Rebekka loves to lie close to her and listen to her talk about nothing, and she loves it when they don't talk and are just together for hours without anyone saying a word. They have their own rhythm. They are hungry at the same time and they are tired at the same time and even though they can argue about every little thing they are really, deep down, aligned. That's what Rebekka likes to think, at least. Sometimes she is jealous of Beate. Beate's dad owns several factories and properties, he spoils her all the time. They live up in the hills behind the grange, with the town's best views. Beate gets everything she asks for. She always has new clothes. She has the most expensive phone. As soon as she turns sixteen she's getting a Vespa. And she has no manners. This makes Rebekka angry. She gets whatever she wants but doesn't have to follow the rules. She doesn't have to do chores at home, either. She doesn't have to tidy or pull weeds or cook. And if she leaves her plate on the table after she has eaten, it gets tidied away. Rebekka has lots of chores every week, she has to follow all the rules and still gets nothing.

"It's not far to the lake," says Rebekka. "We can share, then fill the bottle there."

They walk on in silence again until they reach the last hill before the lake, which is also the steepest and longest. Beate comes to a halt. The other two walk on a little.

"I can't do it," says Beate.

Rebekka and Live stop and look down at her.

"Come on Beate," says Rebekka. "It's not far now."

"It's really far," says Beate. "And you don't know what it's like."

Beate snuffles and looks away.

"What don't I know?" asks Rebekka.

"Well," says Beate. "You don't have blisters."

She throws off her backpack and sits on it. For a few seconds, no one says anything, and now that she's not walking, Rebekka notices the birds chirping and that she can hear the waterfall, which is by the dam that runs along one side of the lake. The sound of the waterfall means you know you're getting close.

"I can hear the waterfall," she says to Beate. "When we get up there we can have a long rest."

“No,” says Beate. “I don’t want to.”

“What do you mean,” says Live. “Do you want to go home?”

“Yes,” says Beate. “Maybe I do.”

“Oh come on,” says Rebekka. “We’ve been planning this for ages.”

“Well,” says Beate. “I don’t give a shit.”

She puts her foot in her lap and takes off her shoe. There is blood on her white sock.

“Let me have a look,” says Rebekka.

“No,” says Beate. “Leave me alone. You two just go.”

“Are you really going to go home?” asks Rebekka.

“Can’t you just get some proper walking boots,” says Live.

Beate groans and sulks even more. Rebekka motions to Live to shut up.

“Fine,” says Live. “You deal with it then.”

Live starts walking again.

“Live,” says Rebekka. “Don’t go.”

“As far as I’m concerned she can just sit there,” says Live.

Beate’s lower lip wobbles like a little baby’s. Rebekka takes off her backpack. She has antiseptic and some blister plasters which have been sitting in the top pocket for ages. The plasters have yellowed and the text on the bottle label has almost disappeared. She opens the bottle and sniffs it. The liquid still smells sterile. The smell reminds her of when her father was in the hospital and for a moment she thinks about how small he looked in the big, white hospital bed, but she pulls herself together. She can’t see the use-by date any more, she will have to rely on the smell. She walks down to Beate and squats in front of her. Then she pulls Beate’s sock over her heel. It has stuck to the wound, so she tries to be gentle.

“Ouch,” says Beate.

“Sorry,” says Rebekka. “But I have to.”

She gets the sock off. The wound is superficial. She pours the antiseptic over it and waits. She fans it with her hand until it dries off, then applies the blister plaster.

“Hold this,” she says.

Beate puts her hand over the plaster.

“You have to press it on for at least thirty seconds,” says Rebekka.

Beate presses.

“Is it helping?” asks Rebekka.

“Yes,” says Beate. “A little.”

She is still sulking. Rebekka packs away the equipment and sits on her backpack too. They wait without saying anything.

“Can I let go now?” asks Beate.

“Wait a little longer,” says Rebekka. “I don’t know how long they’ve been in my backpack for.”

Beate grimaces. She doesn’t like old things, but she waits all the same. They don’t say anything, until Beate says she can’t be bothered any more. She lets go and puts her socks and shoes back on. Then she picks up her backpack.

“Let’s go,” she says.

Suddenly she is happy again.

“Okay,” says Rebekka.

They walk up the hill. Both of them walk slowly and breathe heavily. But Beate doesn’t complain any more. She just walks. Rebekka gives her the water bottle again. Beate takes a sip.

“Thank you,” she says.

Suddenly they reach the top.

“That wasn’t so bad after all,” says Beate.

There is a big market on the edge of the town today, and a circus too, no one is in the woods. You can barely hear the waterfall up here. The lake is big and dead calm. A dragonfly flies across the water, just touching the surface. Rebekka sees the midges buzzing right above the surface, wherever the sun is shining. Live is sitting with her legs outstretched on a stone. She is sunbathing, which is unlike her. She tends to prefer the shade.

“So you didn’t leave,” says Live to Beate.

Beate mumbles something sullen.

“Shall we go swimming?” asks Rebekka.

Beate throws off her backpack and gets undressed. She is already wearing her bikini underneath her clothes. Live is too. This hadn’t occurred to Rebekka. She has to change. She can’t be bothered to cover herself up. Besides, there’s no one around. She just takes off her clothes and puts on her bikini. If the others hadn’t been wearing bikinis, she would have swum naked. Beate walks up a little track and climbs up onto the rock which is sticking out over the water. Live follows her. At the top they hold hands. The water sparkles. They jump. Beate lets out a little shriek in the air. They hit the water with a splash. Rebekka has got up onto the top of the rock too. She jumps after them. She cannonballs right next to Beate’s head. Beate screams again when Rebekka hits the water. Rebekka sees the water spray over Beate and Live as she plunges underwater. Noise is muffled down there. She opens her eyes and sees some pale legs thrashing about, then she kicks back up to the surface again. The others laugh. Together they swim in to shore and go back up onto the rock again where they sit in the sun. The stone is baking hot, Rebekka has to sit on her towel. Beate rubs in sun-cream, even though she is still wet, and lies down right on the warm rock. Soon the water dries and her skin gleams, golden. The water on Rebekka’s skin also dries quickly, but then the sun begins to burn. She puts on sun-cream too, but it doesn’t rub in as nicely as on Beate, as if something on her skin is rejecting the cream. White patches form in the texture of her skin. Live sits on the stone for a while, with her hands round her knees, then she goes to get changed and sits in the shade.

Rebekka looks across the water. It’s calm again now. The fat dragonfly is back. From over by the river mouth, where the river meets the lake, she can hear trickling and sees the water spraying a little. On the other side though, sheltered by the little promontory, the water is mostly still. Frogs breed there in the spring. The frogspawn clusters together, waiting to hatch. If you go right up close, you can see the eggs bobbing on the surface the frogs popping up for air. This time of the summer is a tadpole’s paradise. Most of them have both front and back legs by now and are just waiting to outgrow their tails before they can call themselves frog. Rebekka looks over to see if there is any sign of them, but she is too far away. There are no fish feeding today either. She lies down on her back. The sky above her is totally blue, not a cloud in sight. She closes her eyes for a moment, the waterfall rumbles weakly in the background, the birds twitter, the insects hum, the river trickles, a frog croaks, Beate breathes deeply, in and out.

Suddenly she hears a roar of laughter from the other side of the lake. She sits up. There is someone there. You can hardly see it, but in among the trees on the promontory there is a tent, green as the forest. She hadn’t spotted it earlier. Then she sees a man walking towards the lake. He emerges from the trees and stops at the water’s edge, looking at them. He is wearing a white vest and green shorts. Even from this distance, Rebekka can tell his calves are thin but muscular, his arms too. Their eyes meet, and she looks away.

“There’s someone there,” she whispers to Beate.

Beate sits up and Live comes over to them.

All three of them look out across the lake.

“That’s Eilif’s brother,” says Live, and waves.

“Don’t wave,” says Beate.

“Why not?” says Live.
Beate smiles over at him.
“Hi,” he shouts across the lake.
“Hi,” Live shouts back.
“Where are you headed?” he shouts.
“To the hunter’s cabin,” says Live.
“You can camp here,” he shouts.
“No,” shouts Live. “The cabin.”
“Don’t tell him,” says Rebekka.
“You’ll have to come by later,” shouts Beate.
“No,” Rebekka says to Beate.
“Don’t be so annoying,” says Beate.
Rebekka looks at him. Their eyes meet again.

He’s good-looking.

“You’ll have to come by later,” repeats Beate and points towards the track up to the cabin.
It seems like he understands. He copies Beate’s pointing. Then he looks at Rebekka again and smiles a final time before he heads back into the woods.

“Do you think there’s a group of them?” asks Beate.

“I don’t know,” says Rebekka. “But I heard someone laugh. I mean, you don’t laugh alone.”

“Some people do,” says Live.

“But there’re probably more of them, not just him,” says Beate and smiles.

They get dressed and pick up their backpacks, then they rejoin the track. It’s not much further. The track struggles through the woods. The forest is dense here, even though the track is well used. The undergrowth, bushes and trees are covered with thick moss. The woods always feel humid here. The ferns grow tall, and long, shaggy lichen hangs from the pine trees’ branches.

They walk in silence until they reach the clearing outside the cabin. Behind it is a little yard with a wood store, outdoor toilet and a well. In the middle of the yard is a tree-stump with an axe and some logs of firewood. Someone hasn’t put the axe away, thinks Rebekka. Could be someone has been up here and stolen some wood. The wood store is always unlocked. Beate throws off her backpack, groaning, and sits down, leaning against the cabin wall. You can see the forest, the mire, all the way to the sea from here, you can see Live’s house and the rest of the terraces. Rebekka keeps her backpack on while she finds the key in its hiding place. She unlocks the cabin, goes in and puts her backpack in the bedroom. She takes out the beer and finds a bag and some rope. In the hallway she picks up an enamel bucket and then goes outside again.

“What are you doing?” asks Beate.

“Cooling down the beer,” says Rebekka.

She puts down the bucket and puts the beer into the bag and ties it up tight, then she ties the rope around one of the bag’s handles and goes over to the well with the bag and the bucket. Beate follows her. A cold gust comes up from the well when she pulls off the cover. You can only feel it if you’re up close.

“What if you lose it?” asks Beate.

Rebekka ties the other end of the rope to a handle on the inside of the well.

“Why is there even a handle there?” asks Beate.

“So you can get out,” says Rebekka.

Beate looks pale.

“Is there someone down there?”

Rebekka laughs.

“I’m teasing you,” she says. “There’s a handle so you can do this. Cool things down.”

“Why is it so cold down there?” asks Beate.

“It’s underground,” says Rebekka.

“Is it cold underground?” asks Beate.

“Yes,” says Rebekka. “If you dig deep enough.”

“But it’s so hot here,” says Beate.

“Yes,” says Rebekka. “But there’s no sun underground.”

Rebekka lowers the beer into the well. She hears the bag hit the water then covers the well over again. Then she puts the bucket under the tap and pumps. Drops of cold water spray her hands and face with each pump. When the bucket is full she stops and lifts it up. The water very nearly sloshes out. She carries it back to the cabin. Beate follows her. Live has moved the other backpacks inside and is sitting in the shade under a tree with her eyes closed.

“What did you do with the food?” asks Rebekka.

“In the pantry,” says Live.

Beate and Rebekka take off their t-shirts and sit against the cabin wall in their bras. Rebekka feels drowsy but she doesn’t fall asleep. She feels the sun on her face and hears the birdsong. Could that have been a thrush? She is so bad at bird calls. The air is saturated with flowers and straw and fir-tree branches and maple leaves and hazel bushes and oak trees.

“I’m hungry,” Beate says.

“And we should make dinner before it gets dark,” says Live.

“It’s not getting dark,” says Rebekka.

“But I’m hungry,” says Beate.

“It’s four o’clock already,” Live says.

“Isn’t it a bit early?” says Rebekka.

“Not for Live,” says Beate.

Live’s family always eat dinner at five o’clock. With no exceptions. Live always has to leave everything at half past four to get home in time for dinner.

“But you don’t usually eat this early,” Rebekka says to Beate.

“No,” says Beate. “I’m just hungry. It doesn’t matter what time it is.”

“Okay then,” says Rebekka. “Let’s eat. It’ll take a bit of time to make it, anyway.”

They go into the cabin. Live fetches up the food from the hatch under the floor in the kitchen. She turns on the gas which goes to the hobs and shares the ingredients out between them. Rebekka chops vegetables while Live lights the hob and fries mince. Beate dithers about a bit then puts the taco shells on a plate and lays out sauces and sour cream. All the windows are open. The door is too. But soon the mosquitoes will arrive. They don’t talk much, working efficiently. They need to eat while they can still keep the windows open.

“It said in the paper that it’s the hottest summer since 1955,” Live says.

Live has put the plums in a bowl. Two flies are buzzing around them. They smell sweet, and the skins are a bit sticky. They are already over ripe, even though it’s only July. The smell mixes with the odours from the frying pan. Sweet meat. Rebekka is nauseous.

“We should have gone to my house,” Beate says.

Beate has an ice machine at home that she goes on about all the time. Live and Rebekka don’t answer. They were the ones who wanted to go on a hike. When the food is ready they sit at the table. They have ten beers all together. Three beers each and an extra one for Beate because she got hold of most of them. Rebekka has also brought a bottle of sherry that she stole from her mother. She fills three small wineglasses that she finds in a cupboard. You’re supposed to have wine with dinner. To her surprise the sherry is white. It’s not as sweet as she had feared, either.

“It doesn’t exactly go with tacos,” says Live

She pulls a face.

“Personally, I think it tastes nice,” says Beate.

By the time dinner is over, the sun has dropped down behind the tree-tops and the mosquitoes buzz in the air even though the sky is still light. Despite the heat the girls close the windows and the door. Then Beate and Live clear the table while Rebekka warms up water for the washing up. She pours the water into a bowl and adds soap. She washes and Live dries. When the washing up is finished they go into the living room, where Beate has lit some candles. Live quickly puts them out.

"It's too hot," she says.

They play cards while they drink beer, but after a few rounds of Casino, Beate has had enough. She keeps losing.

"It's because you're not counting cards," Live says.

"I want some snacks," Beate says.

"There are crisps and dips in the kitchen," Rebekka says.

Beate leaves the living room. It's Live's turn to deal. She gives two cards to Rebekka and two to herself.

"No," says Rebekka. "You have to give me two, two for the table and then two for yourself."

"Why?" asks Live.

"I don't know," says Rebekka.

Live puts the two cards she has dealt herself face up on the table. One is the ten of diamonds so she puts it back in the middle of the pack and turns another over. Then she deals two cards for herself, puts two new cards in front of Rebekka and two on the table, before she again deals two to herself.

"Like that?" she asks.

"Yes," says Rebekka.

They start playing. Rebekka captures two cards with her first trick but then her luck fails. Live clears the board and declares a sweep. She wins one point. Live deals new cards. This time there are no cards for the table and Rebekka can't play anything except a three. Live takes it and gets another sweep.

"Damn," says Rebekka.

She hates losing at Casino. It's her game. She has to discard another card. She picks up a Jack because she has one in her hand. She hopes Live doesn't have one too, but that's unlikely. There are only two more Jacks and lots of cards left in the pack. Beate comes back from the kitchen with a plate of chopped up vegetables, crisps and dip. She puts it on the table.

"I thought we were finished," she says, when she sees the cards.

"Well we haven't dealt you in," says Live.

"What am I supposed to do then?" asks Beate.

"Read?" says Live, quizzically.

"I didn't bring a book," says Beate. "Did you guys?"

The other two nod.

"I don't want to read," says Beate. "Can't we at least play something else?"

"What do you want to play then?" asks Rebekka.

"I don't know," says Beate. "Something simple."

"President?" asks Live.

"No," says Beate. "Simple."

"Crazy Eights then," says Rebekka.

"Yes," says Beate. "Crazy Eights."

Live gathers up the cards again.

"I need to go to the toilet first," says Beate, "Will you come with me?"

"But it's not even dark," says Rebekka.

"Come on, come with me," Beate says.

"Okay then," Rebekka says.

In a way she likes Beate being so dependent on her. When they are in the woods, it's not like at school. At school it's Rebekka who wants Beate to come with her to the toilets and sit with her at lunch, while Beate is free to sit with whoever she wants. Beate jokes and laughs while they put on their shoes and go out into the yard and Rebekka feels a warmth in a belly and laughs with her. Outside there is still some sun on the bare yard and on the mire, but when they look into the woods they can see that it's dark beneath the trees; even so they can still hear the birds in the tree tops. It's close and hot. Above the hills to the north you can see the air flickering.

The outdoor toilet stinks. They pee with the door open. Beate goes first, reading aloud from the postcards which are stuck on the wall.

"Dear Helfred," she reads. "Who is Helfred?"

"That's my grandfather," says Rebekka.

"Is that a name?" asks Beate.

"Yes, Hel fred – complete peace. They used to say he had complete peace of mind."

Rebekka says.

Beate looks doubtful.

"The weather is good and spirits are too," Beate reads on. She makes her voice sound like somebody in a radio drama.

Rebekka laughs.

"Hurry up," she says. "I need to go too."

"Well good thing you did come with me," says Beate.

She wipes herself and pulls up her underwear and trousers. She gives up her place to Rebekka who sits down on the toilet. She looks at the postcards. Some have been hung up with writing facing out, some with pictures. One of the postcards has a picture of the leaning tower of Pisa on it, on another there is a picture of a large square. On that card it says Madrid in cursive script.

"Read one then," says Beate. "What does Helfred say?"

"It's to Helfred," Rebekka corrects her.

"What does who write to Helfred then?" asks Beate.

"I think it's Grandma," says Rebekka. "She went to a hotel management college in Switzerland."

"Did she work in a hotel?" asks Beate.

"No," says Rebekka. "But she dreamt about it."

"Why didn't she do it then?"

"It never happened," says Rebekka. "I think maybe they got married."

She has finished going to the toilet. She wipes herself and puts her clothes back on. She fastens the hasp on the door and they walk back to the cabin together.

Live is crunching on carrots when they come in. She has already dealt the cards. Eight cards each. Rebekka and Beate sit down and look at their cards. Rebekka has a good hand, she even has an eight. They chat while they play. Beate tells them about a boy in the year above who she likes, but she won't say who he is. Live wins the round and Beate says it's because she dealt the cards while they were in the toilet.

"You must have looked at all the cards," she says.

"Of course I didn't," says Live.

"That's enough," says Rebekka. "I'm dealing now."

She deals the cards. Eight each. This time she doesn't get an eight to start with, but it's not long before she picks one up from the pile. While they play it gradually gets darker inside. The light doesn't reach in through the small windows. Rebekka plays the eight of spades to switch suits.

"Switch to hearts," she says.

In the end she wins the round.

"I don't want to play any more," says Beate.

"Why not?" asks Live.

"Because," she says.

"Because you're a bad loser," says Live.

Beate snorts and goes over to fetch the radio from the windowsill.

"We only have one set of batteries, remember," says Rebekka.

"What are we saving them for?" asks Beate.

"I'm just saying," Rebekka says.

Live lights a candle and picks up her book. Beate tries to tune in to NRJ on the radio, but she can only get P1.

"It's just old man music," she complains.

"Better than white noise," Rebekka says.

She gets up and finds her book too. Beate takes the deck of cards and lays out a game of patience. Rebekka immediately sees how she could make space for a King and clear the end pile, but she doesn't say anything. She sits down and reads.

After a while she becomes restless. She gets up and looks out the window. She sees a torch pointing at the cabin. The light is bright. It dazzles her. Surely it's only just about dark enough to need a torch, she thinks. The light lowers. Rebekka can still see a figure walking on the path. A large frame. It seems to cover the whole yard.

"They're outside," says Rebekka.

Beate hurries to the window and presses her face against the pane.

"He's good looking," she says.

Rebekka sees his face. A light complexion, somewhat narrow eyes, plump lips, scruffy hair. His walk is self assured. He waves at them. Rebekka jumps. Beate laughs. Rebekka's heart beats faster. He turns off his torch. Rebekka moves away from the window. There is a knock at the door. The girls look at each other and Rebekka gets up and walks over to the door. Beate follows her, peering over her shoulder. Rebekka opens the door and it's only then that she sees his face clearly. It's the guy from the lake. Eilif's brother. He is even more handsome than she had thought. He smiles knowingly and she can't do anything but blush.

"Hi," he says.

"Hi," she says.

He asks if they want to come and sit by the fire.

"Okay," says Rebekka hesitantly. "Sure we can but ..."

"But what?" he asks.

"We just have to get dressed," she says. "It got so hot that we took off everything we could."

He smiles knowingly again.

"From what I can see there's more you could take off," he says.

She looks at him crossly and slams the door shut. When she turns around Beate is up on her feet.

"Let's go," she says.

"No," says Live. "It was supposed to just be us."

"Okay," says Rebekka. "Not if Live doesn't want to."

"Typical," says Beate. "Come on, Live."

Live is standing the doorway to the kitchen. She looks down and gently kicks at the threshold several times.

"Okay then," she says.

She looks at Rebekka.

"But don't leave me alone," says Live.

"I promise," says Rebekka.

They get ready to go out but take their time.

“You’ve got to keep them guessing,” says Beate.

She smacks her lips and unpacks her make up bag.

“You’ve brought make up with you?” asks Live. “You’re not suppose to wear make up in the woods.”

Rebekka agrees with Live but even so she changes into her red bra and white singlet. She makes sure that the bra is just about visible at the edges of the singlet. She puts her flannel shirt over the top and buttons it up to just below her breasts. They are her best feature. She considers taking a jumper but it's so hot, just carrying it around feels hot. On her bottom half she is wearing hiking trousers and boots. It mustn't seem like she's trying too hard and she can't bare the thought of getting mosquito bites on her calves. She is even wearing long socks, which reach higher up her calves than the ends of her trouser legs. She turns around to get a look at her behind over her shoulder, to check if it looks good in the trousers, but she can't see. Beate is sitting on a chair next to her. She doesn't need a mirror to do her make up. She lines her waterline. It's a miracle she doesn't miss, Rebekka thinks. But she uses the little mirror in her eye shadow compact to add a smoky eye, keeping it open to see what she's doing as she curls her lashes and applies mascara.

“How do I look?” asks Beate.

She smiles. She has back-combed her hair and tied it up to give it more volume on top. Live just shakes her head.

“I can't be bothered to change,” says Live.

She puts a thin jumper over her t-shirt and pulls on her hiking trousers.

“It's like forty degrees out there,” says Beate. “You're going to be boiling.”

“I'm always cold,” says Live.

“Those trousers are going to be clammy,” says Beate.

Beate is wearing short denim cut-offs with the kind of frayed edge that makes it look like the trouser legs have been ripped off. She ties a thin jumper around her shoulders so that it displays a rhinestone star on her back. She is wearing a light red t-shirt that shows her flat stomach. Rebekka is already sweating, but she doesn't want to change into shorts. Beate puts on the white trainers she arrived in. They have a little mud on the heel but apart from that they are still box-fresh white. Only Beate can walk through the mire and still end up with white trainers. She's like a sprite. Barely touches the ground.

Outside the cabin the air is thick with buzzing mosquitoes and midges. Live sprays them all with insect repellent, especially Beate's raggedy trousers. It helps. The insects disappear for a while. They walk down the path to the lake. It's quite dark in among the conifer trees on the narrow track. They walk one after the other. Rebekka stretches her hand out behind her and Beate takes it. They can hear the boys laughing before they see the tent down by the water's edge. A green lavvu. It's still light out, but the fire is lit.

“Hi,” he says, when he sees them. “Sit down. Welcome.”

He points out places on some logs around the fire, then gets up to fetch them each a beer. Three boys remain sitting around the fire. They are all quite a lot older. Maybe twenty, Rebekka thinks. They introduce themselves. Lars Martin, Robert, Pål. They don't get introduced to him. He's bent over a cool bag. Rebekka sits down next to where he was sitting. She is hot and takes off her shirt and ties it around her waist.

“Here,” Jørgen says.

He passes them each a beer. Beate sits next to the one called Lars Martin. She's a sucker for tall men and he must be at least 6'3". She's already giggling at everything he says; fluttering her heavy eyelids. Soon, she puts her hand on his knee. Beate believes, in earnest, that the way to a man's heart is through incidental physical contact. And that's how she makes it look – entirely incidental. Live, on the other hand, is tiptoeing about, unsure of where to sit.

“You can sit here,” says the one called Pål.

He gestures at the space next to him, between him and Robert. Robert appears to be of average height but it's hard to tell when he's sitting down because he is also quite thin. He has dark hair. Long legs. Maybe good-looking in his own way. He nods politely at Live. He seems reserved, perhaps a little indifferent. Live sits in between them.

After a while, Rebekka needs to pee. She walks away from the fire and feels the heat ebb. Ahead of her the night is closing in. The big trees are bent over her. The forest is as dense as in a fairytale but further up she can see a clearing. She walks towards it. The ground shifts, from hard earth to softer moss. It smells different. The clearing has its own scent. She can't smell the woods any more, but mire and earth, without it being wet. She squats behind a tree and pees. The urine mixes with the moss and smells like sweet boiled broccoli and forest and river and body. Part of her would like to stay there, squatting in the mire, and not go back to the unbearable noise and excitement. It's a balloon that she doesn't want to burst. When she stands up, the moon is bobbing in the lake. It's so full that for a moment Rebekka confuses it with the sun. But it doesn't give off enough light. She walks right down to the lake. She can see the tent pitch to her left from here. She sees the light from the fire shining at the water's edge and hears the sounds. The lake is still and the bright moon makes the water surrounding its mirror image even blacker. She wants to dip her hands in, generate some movement, but she changes her mind. The usually clear and fresh water looks like oil. Suddenly he's standing behind her. He puts his hand around her waist.

"Do you want to go for a swim?" he asks.

"Maybe," she says.

"They say it's a heatwave," he says.

She feels how clammy she is under his hand. She takes hold of it instead. He laces his fingers into hers.

"We could go for a walk," she says.

He nods and walks into the woods. She walks behind him on the path, but they don't let go of each other's hands. She should say something, she thinks. What should she say? But she doesn't manage to say anything before he draws her against him and kisses her. She jumps and wants to pull away but he holds her back. He places her hand, interlocked with his, on her own back so he can press her body into his even further. They are standing in the clearing, where she peed. She thinks she can still smell the wee; she must just be imagining it but even so it stresses her out. Can he smell it? But then the smell of cigarettes and forest berries takes over. It's his breath. Can he have been eating yoghurt? He is strong. The kiss is warm and wet. Soft and hard at the same time. She can't catch her breath. It hurts. It's a solace. She wants to escape. She wants more. He lays her down on the ground and lies on top of her. He kisses her and she fights and he fights back. Then she expels air with her mouth open and kisses him hard. He gets hold of both her hands and holds them fast with one of his, which means he presses against her even more firmly. She laughs; at the same time the pace of her breathing increases and her heart beats faster. Is she afraid? She stops laughing and looks straight up at the pine tree above her. She takes a break. She lets him put his hand up under her shirt. She can feel how soft her own skin is against his hand. Then, she gathers herself and tries to wriggle away again. She is stronger than he expected. He struggles to maintain his grip. She frees one of her hands. She tickles him. He laughs. She can feel his muscles relaxing and it makes him weak. He lets go of her. He rolls over onto his back with his arms outstretched. She can see his belly button and the trail of hair leading down past the waistband of his trousers. She jumps up, pretending she is cross. She brushes off the pine needles.

"What's your name?" he asks.

"Rebekka," she says.

"Jørgen," he says.

As they walk back to the tent he takes her hand. Live is the only one sitting by the fire. She sees them and Rebekka quickly lets go of his hand.

“Where is Beate?” she asks.

Live nods towards the tent. Rebekka can hear Beate giggling. A male voice says something she can’t quite make out.

“What about Robert and Pål?” asks Jørgen.

Live doesn’t know. She is fed up. She wants to go back to the cabin. Rebekka can see it in her whole body. It’s as if she has sunk down into the log she is sitting on. Jørgen goes over to the cool bag and Rebekka sits down next to Live.

“One of them was cute, though, right?” whispers Rebekka.

“Sure,” says Live. “He’s just wasn’t...”

But she doesn’t finish as Jørgen is back. He sits down on the other side of Live and gives her a beer. He is sympathetic.

“Sorry, for all just disappearing.”

Live says it’s fine. She takes the beer and opens it with the lighter. Jørgen nods approvingly.

“I’m impressed,” he says.

“What?” says Live. “That a girl can open a beer?”

Jørgen laughs. His laugh is loud and rough. It fills Rebekka’s head. It fills her chest and lungs. His name rings in her ears: Jørgen, Jørgen. Jørgen from the earth, soil and dirt. He is wearing a grey t-shirt and she can see part of a tattoo poking out from his sleeve. Maybe a wolf or some other animal. His trousers and boots are standard issue from basic training. She recognises them. The green trousers are covered in dust and the dust lays itself over her mouth like a membrane. Jørgen. It’s an old name. And how old is he, you have to wonder. His hands are rough, his voice is rough. His boots are covered in wet earth from the mire. She can smell him across Live’s lap. His smell envelops them both. It’s like the fog that settles over the mire at dusk. He is earth and air at the same time and she can’t breathe.

Live finishes her beer.

“That was quick,” says Rebekka.

“I think I’m going to go back,” says Live. “You guys don’t want me here.”

“Of course we do,” says Rebekka.

“I’m tired,” says Live. “I want to go to sleep.”

“Shall I walk with you?” asks Rebekka.

Live nods. She doesn’t like the woods at night.

“We’ll all go”, says Jørgen.

Rebekka wishes he hadn’t said that. That he’d just let her go, then she could later said that she fell asleep up there, but now it’s too late. She just nods. She wants him to come. She wants him to always be there. She wants him to disappear.

The track is narrow and shaded by the trees. Rebekka can only see a strip of sky above them. A few stars shine. It’s dark and light at the same time. Live walks in front of her and Jørgen walks behind. She can hear him breathing. He breathes on her back. The trees are so dense at the edges of the path that she can’t stray from it. Live walks with broad shoulders. She can’t get past her. They are guards, leading her to her arrest. She is so clammy. Her clothes are sticking to her. Live looks so stupid, wearing a wool jumper in this heat. Rebekka trips on a root, but Jørgen takes her arm and supports her so she doesn’t fall. They pause in the gesture, look at each other. Live has ended up a little ahead. She stops.

“I thought you were supposed to be walking with me,” says Live.

Rebekka half jogs over to her and takes her hand. They walk two abreast even though the path is too narrow. He is right behind them.

When they get to the cabin, Jørgen goes to the outdoor toilet while the girls go inside. Rebekka is starving. Bread and a box of soft cheese are out on the table. Rebekka makes a sandwich.

“Can’t you just stay here?” asks Live.

She speaks quietly, up close to Rebekka. She is almost whispering.

“Yes, maybe,” says Rebekka.

“You know you can,” says Live.

“Of course I know that,” says Rebekka.

“You don’t know him,” says Live.

“Yes I do,” says Rebekka. “I know who he is.”

“What, that he’s Eilif’s brother you mean?” asks Live.

Rebekka nods.

“Well I mean it’s actually me who knows Eilif,” says Live.

“Yeah,” says Rebekka. “Exactly, you know Eilif. It will be fine.”

Live takes Rebekka’s free hand and hugs it but Rebekka draws back. She doesn’t want to hear Live’s concern and pragmatism. If she doesn’t go now, she won’t get another chance. She takes the last bite of her sandwich.

“Do you like him?” asks Live.

Rebekka hears a noise from outside.

“Shh,” she says. “Not now.”

“At least put a jumper on,” says Live.

Rebekka looks down at her breasts. At her bra, which is visible, and her singlet which is brown from the dirt and almost wet from the heat. She must have left her shirt by the fire. She goes into the bedroom and changes. She puts on a black, crew-neck t-shirt but leaves the jumper behind.

Outside, Jørgen is waiting by the door.

“You okay?” he asks.

She nods. The spreadable cheese has caught in her throat. She goes over to the water pump and pumps up some water while she leans over to drink. The water is fresh and cold. Then they walk down the path. He goes first and she walks behind him. He stretches his hand out to her. She takes it with the wet hand she used to drink. He doesn’t react, doesn’t let her go, holds her hand with a tight grip. They walk down to the tent again. They can’t see anyone, but hear someone snoring from inside the tent. Jørgen puts his finger to his lips to show her that she needs to be quiet then lets her hand go. Quickly, he gathers up what they need. He puts some beers and food in a bag and then he slips into the tent and comes out with a blanket and a jumper. His jumper is almost identical to hers. They walk along the water to where she was earlier. He puts the stuff on the ground.

“I just need to piss,” he says and walks into the woods.

She stares out at the lake. There is still no movement. She thinks about the pikes, as big as saltwater fish and about the leeches in the pool on the way up to the peak, which she and Live used to fish out as children to watch them sucking the blood from their calves.

Then she hears him approaching behind her. The trees bow over them. Suddenly she sees herself as a deer at the water’s edge. She turns abruptly.

“Is something wrong?” he asks.

“I just jumped,” she says.

He smiles. He spreads the blanket out and sits on it, inviting her to sit beside him. She does so. He puts his arm around her and for a while they just sit there and look at the lake. Then he lies down on his back, and she lies down next to him. They look up and the tree tops, but it’s like she can’t see properly. She is dizzy and nauseous. He takes off his t-shirt and leans over her, puts his hand under her top while he kisses her. Her stomach flips. She kisses him back, but does nothing else. She needs to do something, she thinks. She can’t just lie there like a log, so she lifts one knee up. Then

he leans further into her knee, so that he's practically on top of her. He undoes her trousers while they are kissing, then he gets up onto one knee to take them off completely. It's a bit awkward. One leg gets stuck in her trouser leg. In the end he has to turn it inside out to get them off. She is embarrassed. He just smiles. He's done this before. Probably a thousand times. Nothing embarrasses him. She just needs to breathe. Remember to breathe. There is no wind. She doesn't get cold. Rather the opposite. She gets hotter and hotter. He takes her hand and pulls her up so she's sitting, then he takes off her t-shirt. It feels like her red bra lights up the forest. She wants to take it off, but can't manage to do anything. Her body trembles. Soon it will be over, she thinks. He takes her hand and puts it on the fly front of his trousers. She almost panics. Her hands shake. How is she going to do this. But then she pushes the top button through the buttonhole. Now she just needs to put down the zipper. Her head reaches boiling point. She lies down. He takes off his trousers and lies on top of her.

"You've done this before?" he whispers in her ear.

"Of course," she lies.

Afterwards he rolls over to one side and they lie there like that, naked on their backs, both of them. The air has cooled a little, but it is still too hot. Everything is the same temperature, she thinks. The air, sweat, the blood in her veins, the condensation on the maple leaves, the earth under her back, the saliva in her mouth, the fluid between her legs – and him. She stands up and walks straight out into the lake. The water has a skin, and the moment she hits it she can feel that the water is colder than she is. It divides them. She is not the water and it's a relief. She goes all the way in, swims a few strokes until she reaches more or less the centre of the lake, then she turns around. From here, she can only see one of his knees, sticking up. He almost doesn't exist. But she is no longer separated from the lake. They are the same temperature now, and her body slowly dissolves beneath the surface. She swims back to land and checks all her limbs are still there, and still there in their entirety. Here is an arm with a hand with fingers with nails. Here is a leg with a thigh and a calf and a foot and the foot has five toes and each toe has a nail. She points her toes. She regrets the swim. Now there is nothing here which is not a part of her. As by osmosis, everything presses through the membrane, one to the other, and they become more and more the same. They are all the same temperature, same consistency, same viscosity. They are the same indistinct entity. They share a circulatory system, exchange bodily fluids, they are not just part of the same ecosystem, they are a single organ. Forest, mire, water, man, woman are all mire now, and the mire is wet and shrewd and warm. The mire is a stomach which chews and spits and churns. The mire has tree trunks in storage, for decomposition later. Peat carbonises under peat. If she stays here she will end up buried beneath it, because she is the peat and the water and the earth. She begins getting dressed. He asks if she is cold and she communicates no with her head and face but her voice doesn't make it out. He asks if she doesn't want to dry herself off first and she notices that the underwear she has put on is completely wet, but it's so hot, it doesn't matter.

"It's okay," she pushes the words out.

"Are you alright?" he asks again.

"Yes," she says. "Of course."

Then she smiles. He can't see any of what's going on behind the smile. She wants to smile. She wants to be happy. This is a happy moment. Something that you write about in your diary or tell your girlfriends about. This happy moment in the forest. She says she has to go. She needs to get back. They are probably starting to get worried. He gets up. He is still naked and it's as if he's always naked. He doesn't appear to care at all about it. She likes that. That he can talk to her, though she is fully clothed, as if they both could be dressed or undressed. He kisses her and she lets him, and when she eventually leans into the kiss it's as if the kiss is the only thing that exists, they are all that exists, he is all that exists and she is just an extension of him. Then the kiss relents. She gathers her things.

“See you around,” she says.

He takes her hand. Kisses her lightly on more time with a closed mouth. He says nothing. She moves away from him and lets go of his hand, then joins the path that leads up to the cabin.

The cabin is shaded but the air inside is even warmer than outdoors. She sweats while she packs her bag.

“Where are you going?” asks Beate.

“Home,” says Rebekka.

Live wakes up too.

“Has something happened?” she asks.

“No, no,” says Rebekka. “I just can’t sleep. I think I’ll just head home.”

Beate is tired. She stretches out her hand and Rebekka takes it and Beate pulls her in close. She is warm and smells of sleep and perfume and vanilla scented make up remover. Rebekka kisses her on the cheek and for a moment would just like to lay down with her, inside her sleeping bag and let her hold her, let her stroke her arm and neck, be the little spoon.

“Did you sleep with him?” asks Beate.

“No,” Rebekka lies.

“Are you sure you don’t want to get some sleep?”

Beate moves further over on the bed and holds her sleeping bag open, showing Rebekka the space beside her.

“No,” says Rebekka. “I’m going to walk. Will you take my bike?”

“Course,” says Beate.

Rebekka sits down on Live’s bed and gives her a hug.

“Sorry,” she says.

Live smiles. Her eyes are closed but she is awake.

“It’s okay,” she answers. “What shall we do with the key?”

“Just hang it on the hook in the shed,” says Rebekka before she leaves.

She opens the cabin door and is blinded by the sun. It’s high above the trees again. Another hot day. The marshy patch behind the cabin is almost dry. The cotton-grass is grey and wilted. It hasn’t rained for a long time but the air is humid and heavy and she sees a low flying swallow. Perhaps it will rain soon. The sun lights up the cabin and the little yard, making it clear how worn the house is. The roofing felt is dotted with white by all the people who’ve climbed out the window from the loft to sit on the roof and take in the view, have a beer. The weatherboards are different colours, replaced as they have rotted away. Between them the cracks are filled with moss to stop the rain getting in in the autumn and the wind blowing through in the winter. The paint on the windows is flaking. One of the panes has a crack straight down the middle. The cabin is small. It’s a hunter’s hut that her mother used to rent out to tourists, which is mostly left empty now. People would rather rent the bigger cabins with indoor plumbing. From time to time the local hunters’ association use it despite the fact that they have their own cabin nowadays. They are allowed to use it for free in return for shooting the Canada geese and mink down by the lake and along the beach during the season. Otherwise, it only gets hired by teenagers. Rebekka used to come here with her father. He was the one who used to do repairs, stain the wood, replenish the firewood and tidy up after tourists and drunken youth. The wood store is almost empty now. Two empty beer cans are lying by the fire pit behind the cabin. Rebekka picks them up and puts them in her backpack. She must remember to make sure the wood store is refilled. But who will carry the wood up here now, she thinks. She may have to do it herself.

She puts her backpack on again, properly this time, with the hip belt and strap across her chest. It’s a little heavier than she would like. She hadn’t planned to walk home, but she now wants to take the

route she used to walk with her father, and not for all the world will she go near the tent down by the lake. She breathes in deeply. When she thinks about yesterday her skin crawls. She would not be able to encounter Jørgen without giving herself away. Her cheeks feel red at the thought of seeing him again so soon. Close to the cabin the forest is airy, but then it closes in to a dense thicket. She takes the path into the woods where it smells of fir trees and pine needles and leaves and moss and ferns, dropping their spores too late. She is almost dizzy. Luckily her water bottle is hanging on the outside of her backpack. She reaches for it while she walks. She unclips it and drinks. The water is lukewarm. She pours a little over her head. It helps a bit but she is still hungover. She is hoping to walk it off. She remembers how she felt at one with the forest yesterday.

The feeling is gone now. Her body is separate from the forest, and everything in the forest feels separate from every other thing. Nothing fits together any more, everything is fragmented, like the veil has been lifted and she can see everything for what it is. She sees each pine needle, each leaf, each ant. She sees every blade of grass, every clump of moss, every pine cone. She sees each heather shrub, each branch, every berry. Each beetle, each larvae, each fly. She sees every stone and they stand alone, and do not join together to create a greater entity, not at all. Each man for himself. Her dad used to point out different things. He would stop abruptly while they were walking and put his arm around her shoulders and say: That's a polypody, the root is edible, or, that there is a sundew, you can use it to treat whooping cough. Now and again he would pick a plant and show her how the underside of the leaves or the consistency of the stalk revealed which family it belonged to and what properties it concealed. He towers over her. He is the trees which sway slowly in the breeze, high in the air, and as she walks the path, stooped, her backpack on her shoulders, they crowd together and look down at her and everything alive in the forest and distinguish each thing from the other. That's a long beech fern growing in the shade, they say. That's a stag beetle, breaking down debris. There you are Rebekka, they say and stare at her with his eyes and sigh, loudly, as only trees can. Because they have seen her and felt the weight of her and Jørgen on the earth where their roots lie.

Thanks to her father, Rebekka knows the forest. Because of him it's just as much her home as the grange. She grew up here. This is where he raised her. Here, she learned to tell poisonous mushrooms from edible ones and how to survive if she gets lost. Here, she picked pine cones and berries. Here, she slept under the open sky and mapped the constellations. Here, she learned to recognise animal tracks and breathe in before shooting a hare. Here, she learned to ski. Here, she learned to light a fire. Here, she learned to put out fires and to splint a bone, to build a stretcher and re-start a heart. He taught her all of this. Without him she wouldn't know about all the different species of trees and how they communicate through a network of fungi under the ground to warn each other of imminent danger and of changes that are taking place.

She is ashamed. Her father walked here day after day. She forgot herself for a moment yesterday. She thought it was hers. That it was her forest. That it was her night. But he was here all the time. Her mother owns the forest but it still belongs to her father. These are his trees, his paths, his earth, his beetles. His absence makes him more present than ever. She has a knot in her stomach. For a moment, she hadn't thought about it, that he was never coming back. But when she now remembers, everything changes, and once again things lose their distinctions. They are nothing other than not him. He is nothing and so he is in everything. He is in everything he ever interacted with. The trees are his, but not him and the bushes are his, but not him and the lake is his, but not him and the beetle is his, but not him. Most people want to reach a peak, but Rebekka wants to get inside the forest where he is. You mustn't miss the forest for the trees.

This town is built on the forest. This town is built out of the forest. The forest is the landscape. The forest is its livelihood. The forest is its building material. The forest nourishes it. The forest sustains it. And for generations, Rebekka's family have been the forest's stewards. But the timber no longer

floats down the river. There are no longer fifty, a hundred, two hundred men in the forest, sawing and lifting and sweating and dying. Horses no longer drag the timber out from the deepest thickets. To the north they are clear felling and creating a timber plantation. Lorry loads of timber are hauled out daily as the dark fields of pine are cut down by the decare, by a big machine. Even the selective cutting to the east is somewhat automated. Each tree counts, counts in kroner and øre. In the western forest, where the cabin is, the woods are protected. No one counts trees here, all the trees are woven together by a network of organisms. A network of roots, which take care of the distribution of water and nutrition. Infinite fractals of ferns and branches and forks of the river which are a home for fish and fowl, insects, hares and foxes. There has never really been proper logging in this part of the forest. First and foremost because the river has sharp bends and large waterfalls and can become really fast flowing after rainfall, and then there is the fact that there wasn't really anywhere to put a sawmill. The forest is on rugged terrain and at the bottom of the flats is the mire. The river flows through the mire over the grassland before it empties out into the sea. They had to drain parts of the mire to build the terraces, and that's when they built the road too, but it was too late and too far away for them to ever build a sawmill. In tough times there had been some selective cutting, but then the timber had to be dragged out by horses along the old road on the moraine and the road out of the forest could be hard. The river that runs from the north and through the town centre was always better suited for floating timber. In that river, timber from further north was already transported. That's why the sawmill was built in what's now the town centre and the houses followed around it. Now the sawmill has moved further out and the town has expanded.

Over here in the west, the woods are old and the forest floor is dense. Moss grows on fallen trees and you can hear the stock doves cooing as you walk. The path up from the mire to the lake and over the moraine is not too bad, but there are few who venture into the deep forest where the mounds, tree trunks and deep undergrowth lay in a jumbled mass and make it impossible to pick out a path. You can easily end up following the patterns that nature itself has made and walk in circles and never find your way out again. People have disappeared here before. Myths abound about men, wandering restless for centuries, seeking the way out. When Rebekka's father was a child, a little boy who was on a fishing trip with his grandfather disappeared. The whole town searched from the sea mouth to the hill crest but they lost each other in the forest and then they lost themselves; they were gone for days and no man was the same again on their return. The boy remained lost. She has heard stories about a couple who disappeared in the seventies. They had broken in to Sørensen's cabin and started living there. But when old Sørensen turned up, they ran off into the forest. Sørensen alerted the police but it was too late. They vanished without a trace. Some say they still live in the forest, somewhere no one can find them, while others claim they went so far in they made it to the big wetlands up high. You can see the river over on the other side from up there, and the salt road that runs from the coast all the way up to Trondheim. If you manage to cross in one piece, you can reach it and follow it until you find the old escape routes from the war and then make it to Sweden undetected. The couple live in Sweden now, as different people with new names. Rebekka imagines them living by a lake, maybe, like the one her family used to go to when she was a child. Where all rivers seemed to meet in one big pool. A place where you couldn't see the sea, surrounded by the interior. A place with softer moss and gentler eyes when you, rarely, happened upon somebody. She imagines that they perhaps live in a cabin, or a summerhouse down by the water like the one her family rented, where the birds sat and waited for them on the lawn in the mornings. Live says it's just a story. That everyone who has disappeared in the forest is dead. They are dead and will never be found.

Rebekka looks through the big pine trees to little clearing. It's like looking down a green tunnel. The sun shines down on the clearing, onto a little tarn. Rebekka can see it glittering far over there and thinks she hears a strange noise, as if a child is lying there, blowing bubbles in the water. When

they were little, their parents had told them stories about trolls and witches who lived in the thickest part of the woods, where orchids grew and animal fossils were moulded into the rocks like mosaics. In there, the bark sang mournfully with the black grouse and the conifers towered like heavy, sombre pagodas. For the most part only hunters, during the season, or kids whose fathers were foresters walked here. They were so familiar with the forest, they knew where it was safe. And then there was Rebekka, although neither of her parents had ever felled a tree, it was, after all, her mother's forest. Her parents met at a protest. He had taken the bus from Oslo to protest against the felling of this same old forest, a calcareous pine forest. Technology and tools had improved over time. It was no longer a problem that the sawmill couldn't be built by the river, or that the forest was old and unpredictable, and it was really a miracle it hadn't been cleared a long time ago, not least after the war, when everyone needed money. Rebekka's grandfather had decided it was time. It would be cleared and planted and incorporated into the timber plantation. But then Rebekka's father and all his friends came along on the 205 bus with red placards. He wore a grey jumper and corduroy trousers. Unkempt hair. He was a sorry sight, her mother says. Even so, they got married two years later. The botanist and the landowner's daughter. Grandad shook his head and Granny refused to come to the church because Rebekka's mother got pregnant before the wedding. But she had hosted the reception at the grange afterwards. It was the least I could do, you can always straighten things out even when you disagree, Granny said later.

Rebekka walks further into the forest and stops under a large pine. She can smell the scent of bark and spruce and moss and water. She hears a little brook trickling, follows the noise up to the brow of a slope. Water is running under the moss. She bends down and fills her water-bottle. All running water is fit to drink. The water is cold, though the air is warm. That could point to ground water. Bent over like this she can smell her own body odour. She smells of drink and the woods and flesh. She lifts her head and breathes in the warm air. She takes a sip of the water, which tastes fresh and muddy at the same time. She fills her hands with water and rinses her face. She looks up at the treetops. The forest is dizzying in this heat. The air stands still. There are no birds to be seen. All the animals in the forest are sleeping. Humans are not born to survive. Only they wander around in the heat voluntarily, whether on the prowl or fleeing. She and her father used to wander far into the forest looking for orchids. They could often be gone for a whole weekend without seeing any in flower. If they were lucky, they might find some lady's slippers.

Lady's slippers are a species under threat, but one you still can find. People used to pick them, likely because they were known as an aphrodisiac, used in love potions. In her father's herbal she had looked them up and read: *When a young, desirous and lustful woman has an old, lazy and slow man, she should prepare this herb and give it to him, because the elderly don't have the same vigour in bed as the young do.* It had made her embarrassed when she read it and she hadn't mentioned it to her father. But the next time he wanted her to come with him and look for lady's slippers, she had lied and said that she had plans with Beate. And so he had gone on his final hike alone.

Soon afterwards he died, and she was full of regret, and when she looked further into the forest, she thought of the flower that perhaps grew there, alone with its feet down with the soil fungus and its yellow head, with its red, flapping hat, swaying so proudly in the air. She was finally nearing the age at which lady's slippers bloom, and who knew, maybe they were in there just waiting for her to turn sixteen. Maybe she and the flowers had been born in the same year and maybe they were of the same last, she was a lady's slipper too, a rare flower. Or perhaps they were a little ahead of her, a warning of what lay ahead, and maybe they would all bloom this year. It's said that they can flower for over fourteen days so they could be there now, a whole meadow full, perhaps. If she just went looking she would find them. They would be there, blooming, and next to them would be her father, smiling. At last she would be able to say sorry for letting something as stupid as a herbal keep her away from the lady's slippers and from wanting to join him on his hike.

Of course she wanted to go with him. Then they would walk together through the field and up on the ridge that led to the mountains. From there they could walk further and further, until the world no longer existed.

The path curves around the town and she will soon be able to see the tractor road coming down from the other hillside on the upper side of her house, where Beate lives. Once she and her father drove down that road. She sat on his lap. She steered while he managed the pedals. Up in the tractor cabin they towered over the landscape. The road was theirs and the forest was mum's and at some point, Grandad had built all the houses. Her father sang The Crow Song about the man who shot a crow with just a bow. The crow was so big that the man made the hide into twelve pairs of shoes, the intestines into twelve ropes, the eyes into two large windows, the claws into two pitchforks, the beak into a boat. And was there something about the backbone? Or was it the lungs? You weren't worthy of the crow if you couldn't find a use for the whole animal. What did he do with the feathers again? In another memory, which might be her first, they are standing on the beach and she is sitting on her father's arm. They have their backs to the ocean. Perhaps she hears it roar. They see her mother approaching, her hair in the wind. Now she is up close and Rebekka stretches towards her. Her mother opens her arms and her father passes her over. She doesn't remember her father's smell, but she remembers that as she arrived in her mother's arms she was engulfed by the smell of butter and sugar, beaten white. She told her mother about this memory but her mother said that Rebekka was so little then that she couldn't possibly remember it. It must be from a photograph.

Rebekka can follow the moraine all the way home. At some point in time this was the road, a gorge whose formation is unknown and since it's so old it won't ever heal over. It's said that there was a pilgrim's route here, leading out of the forest to where the church now lies, and that there once was a huge graveyard of which there is now no trace, because the earth here is so fertile and damp that everything has disappeared.

From this height Rebekka can see the grange in the north, where she lives, and the town's centre. On the edge of town are the detached houses that her great grandfather built and sold to the workers at the porcelain factory. Her grandfather used to tell them off for not taking the road round, and walking straight through the fields to get to the factory, but Rebekka can see from here how much longer the road around the fields is. She can see the large new villas in the fields behind the grange where Beate lives, and as she walks on she can also look back at the plain where the Selvaag designed terraces are, row after row, which her grandfather helped to develop. They used to all be black but now they are painted yellow, green, red and white. That's where Live lives, in one of the yellow ones, nearest the town.

The cabin, church and the grange are on on the moraine, and at this level Rebekka can see how the town has grown from the church to the centre and down onto the plain. There are clusters of houses and blocks of flats and a big arts centre with a cinema next to the old library. The river runs down from the north and splits in two, long before it reaches the county border. One river then runs over the fields to the left of the grange and through the centre, then across the plains. It gets broader there before the mouth meets the sea in the south. That's the horizon. A line drawn across the sky in the distance. The end of the world. Of her world. It extends no further.

The other river runs down through the big forest, past the cabin and to the lake. Then it flows through the marshes in the woods, past the terraced houses and out onto the Sorrow Mire where it meets the other river on the plain. That's how the river meets the sea, as one, as the one it, perhaps, always was, as the union of the two it got to be for just a moment.

There are two main roads. The old road which leads over the moraine from the grange to the old church. The built-up area used to end here, at the grange, with the church at its summit, but later big villas were built up the hill, where Beate lives. The new main road goes from the top of the hill, past the church, through the town centre and out to the sea. And there is a smaller road down to the terraces which ends at a car park by a little copse. Behind the copse is the campsite before the mire, before the lake, before the forest, before the cabin.

The closer she gets to the grange, the more of the mire and plain she can see, and soon the sea reveals itself to the south. At the highest point, before she leaves the forest and joins the gravel road towards the church, she can see all the way to Lime island out in the fjord. Limestone has been quarried in the area since the middle ages, but it wasn't until the 1700s that a lime kiln was built at the grange. They produced the lime for the improvements to the church. They also produced the lime used to build The Royal Palace in Oslo, something her grandfather was always very proud of. His grandfather, her great great grandfather, established the quarry on Lime island and set up the lime works. Then, the cement factory was built down at the harbour on the mainland and they sent all the lime there. Those in the town who didn't work with timber, worked there. The family has long since sold the lime works to the factory and they don't have anything to do with it any more. Beate's father owns it now. He bought it and moved his whole family here. He lives in the tallest house on the highest peak and is one of a few who look down at the grange.

There is soil and mire. There is water and soil and mire. There is water and soil and mire and timber. And there is lime and there is money. There is timber and lime and money and there are pigs. There are pigs and cattle and silt and soil and there is manure. There are pigs and silt and lime and timber and manure. And there is money. There's always money. Her mother has it and Beate's father has more of it and Live's father has less of it, but Live's mother inherited some, so they manage fine. Then there are those who don't have it. Who fell the timber and mix the cement and manage the mire and build the roads. They work in the drone of the debarking machine as the timber is rotated in, between the knives. They sweat in the cellulose steam. They work metres below sea level, blasting out limestone. They monitor the cement mill and store the finished products responsibly in silos. They plough the fields and feed the livestock. They build and repair and paint. They work behind the counters at the shopping centre. They work in the kiosk at the campsite. They look after the garden where Rebekka lives. There are no longer any fields or animals there, just land. Land filled with timber and trees. Spruce, pine and oak and elm. Maple and lime and hazel and beech. There are four hundred cherry trees in the garden. In the spring they are in full bloom. Now they sell them by the bucket, red and sour, half price if you pick them yourself and full price for ready-picked, ten percent extra if you want them packed in baskets and the baskets in a crate. The pig house is rented out short term to German tourists. The cowshed is used for storage. The barn is used for storage. The storehouse is a playhouse and storage for outdated pastoral furniture.

Her backpack is rubbing her hipbones and it stings between her legs, but, when the path crosses the road towards the grange, she leaves the forest and can see the green fields bleeding into the horizon in the piercing light. She senses how moving she can find the landscape she would so like to escape from. There is a warmth in her chest and she feels tears pricking behind her eyeballs.

She walks past the church, into the churchyard. A lazy adder topples out of its hiding place in the stone wall and goes down the path, sun-seeking. Its zigzag pattern shines blue in the sun and Rebekka stops to watch how its supple body moves in the grass, gliding along seamlessly, then over onto the asphalt to bask in the heat. It pays her no heed. She takes a step off the path so as not to disturb it and then takes the next gravel path to the left and pauses in front of her father's grave. There you are, she thinks, wondering if he can see her. She can't walk past the churchyard without

going in. It's not that she thinks he can see her, but if he does see her, then she doesn't want him to think she's not thinking about him. I think about you all the time, she says to herself, hoping that he can hear her. She crouches down on her knees and gets rid of some rotten leaves that have blown onto the grave, and then rights a candle that has fallen over. It looks better now. She closes her eyes and breathes in deeply through her nose. It smells of dry earth with a hint of sweetness in the close summer air. The graveside is almost bare, but there is no point in laying flowers. Everything wilts within a day in this drought. Even on her father's grave, which is lucky enough to be shaded by an oak tree. Without water, nothing lasts, and there is a watering ban until the end of the month. She walks back through the churchyard. Her mother doesn't like her walking through the fields. She says it both ruins the soil and erases the divide between them and the churchyard. Rebekka also uses the kitchen entrance, as her mother prefers, but she quickly understands she hadn't needed to. No one is home. She can tell as soon as she gets inside, her mother is out. Rebekka is tired and considers throwing off her backpack in the hallway, but she takes it into the laundry room instead. Her mother could come home at any time. She sorts through the dirty clothes. Even the unworn ones smell of fire and forest. They have seven different laundry baskets: wool, silk, forty degrees whites, forty degrees coloureds, sixty degrees white, sixty degrees coloureds, synthetic. Not that they own anything synthetic. Rebekka has some polyester tops and a dress but she doesn't put them in the laundry basket. Then they would get given away to the Salvation Army. She washes them by hand.

She puts her torch, knife and other hiking equipment on the designated shelf in the closet. There is a pole in there for airing out her sleeping bag. She opens the closet window. She sees a dog run through the yard outside. She notes that it is brown, like Herbert's. Then she takes the bag of leftover food out of her backpack, which she hangs on a hook in the closet.

She closes the closet door and opens the pantry. She would like to just put the bag of food down, sort it out later, but she changes her mind and tidies all the food away into the correct places. She ate almost nothing on the trip. She's brought most of the food home again. She hides some of the vegetables under some other vegetables so they are out of sight.

Even though she knows her mother is not there, she goes looking for her. She walks from room to room shouting, hello Mamma, hello, are you there. No one answers. When she has passed through the entire house, she goes to the living room and watches TV. She holds the remote in her hand so she can quickly switch it off if someone comes in.

*

"Rebekka," hears Rebekka. "Rebekka."

It smells like coriander. Rebekka opens her eyes. Her mother is standing over her.

"So is this where you are, Rebekka?"

She must have fallen asleep.

"What are you watching?" asks her mother. "You can't just lie there lazing about."

For a moment it feels like she might cry, like a little baby who has woken up and wants comforting.

"What's up with you," says her mother. "Come on, up you get."

She sits up and turns off the TV. Her mother has already left the room. The smell of coriander lingers after her, and something else. Coconut?

"What are you making?" she asks.

"It's not for you," her mother shouts from the kitchen. "It's a new recipe."

Rebekka can hear her mother clattering about while she's talking. The volume of her voice varies depending on where she is.

“They wanted something exotic at this pot-luck, so I thought I would test this on them. Maybe you can have a taste. If you turn off that TV. We should never have bought a TV. You lie there all the time. No, you’ll have to make your own dinner. Then you won’t lie in front of the TV at least. I’m going to give it to that Polish guy. Or to Herbert. He’s always so pleased.” Rebekka goes into the kitchen and the smell of coconut overcomes the coriander. There is a large pot on the stove. She looks inside. It’s a curry. It smells so good. Her mouth waters. She is about to dip her finger in but her mother bats her hand away.

“Use a spoon,” she says, sternly. “Think of the others.”

“I think I saw his dog,” says Rebekka.

“His dog,” replies her mother, “Herbert’s? No, it can’t have been his. If it is you have to catch it. Were you just lying there while Herbert’s dog was on the loose? He loves that dog, Rebekka. You know that. You have to ring him right away. Or, even better, go down there. Make dinner and go and see Herbert. Eat with him and see if his dog is there. I have to go. Don’t disturb me now. I have to leave in thirteen minutes. But I will see you tonight. And you must say hi to Herbert, give him a sherry from me. It’s in the top cupboard.”

Her mother doesn’t look at her. She has found a polystyrene cooler box to transport the soup in, but she can’t get the lid off. Rebekka would like to help her, but her mother waves her away.

“Go and have a shower Rebekka,” she says. “You smell like the woods.”

Rebekka leaves the kitchen, goes through the living room and up the stairs. All the way up she hears her mother’s noises from the floor below. In the bathroom, however, it’s quiet. The light floods in through the window as if the sun would like to fill the room. Where it hits the white tiles it dazzles Rebekka. She takes off her clothes, turns them out and fold them up and puts them in the laundry basket. She can see her whole body in the mirror. Around her ankles, the skin is brown with dirt, which makes her calves look even paler. Her breasts have grown over the summer, even without the padding of her bra they look okay. She lifts each of them. How old might you think she is? Eighteen? Nineteen? If she was somewhere nobody knew her and wore make up?

The water is too warm but that’s how she likes it. The steam rises as in a sauna. She can feel her skin reddening. She’s going to boil like a lobster. She lathers the soap over her skin. It smells of almond and vanilla. She thinks it smells so good that she washes her hair with it too. The soap runs into her eyes. She closes them. Behind her eyelids she sees Jørgen. She moves out of the spraying water and hears it gushing. Then she washes herself once more with the soap from her hair. She touches her breasts and in-between her legs. She strokes her thighs and across her stomach where he stroked her. Then she opens her eyes again. The steam is thick and oily. She goes back under the shower and rinses the soap off. She watches it run down the plughole. Now she is new. She turns down the temperature so the water gets cold. It’s important to close your pores when it’s hot outside. She gets under the jet and nearly goes into shock over how cold it is. She gasps for air but the room is still full of steam. Suddenly she feels very dizzy. She sits down in the bath. The steam rises around her. She slowly adjusts to the water. She lets the cold water run down over her face while she leans against the wall. Her stomach rolls up into little folds. Her breasts no longer look beautiful. No, it’s time to get out. She turns off the tap and gets out of the shower. The room is still thick with steam. She wraps her towel around herself but water still drips onto the floor. She opens the door. The steam slowly abates. She dries herself and blow dries her hair, then she wipes up the water she has sloshed about so that her mother can’t say that she’s made a swimming pool of the bathroom like she usually does. She even wipes down the shower cubicle with a wash-cloth.

There, now everything looks good. She spreads her towel out on the floor and sits on it and applies moisturiser. Beate says you have to moisturise everyday to avoid wrinkles, preferably morning and night, but Rebekka can’t manage that. She can just about be bothered to do it after she showers. But then Beate showers a lot more often than she does. Sometimes twice a day. Rebekka can’t be bothered to do that. Beate always smells of soap and perfume and lotion and sun cream.

Her hair is always clean and airy and her skin is so soft and smooth and brown. When they sunbathe, she constantly tops up her sunscreen with a low factor lotion. She says that's how you get an even tan and don't peel. No matter how much lotion Rebekka uses she goes red and peels, but then, she has probably never used as much as Beate does. She has never been able to tan like her either. An entirely warm brown colour, like the inside of a walnut shell.

When Rebekka gets out of the shower, her mother has left again. The food is gone and the kitchen is clean. It's as if she was never there. Rebekka is about to sit down in front of the TV again when the front door bell rings. It must be Beate. She is the only one who uses the front door. Rebekka opens up. Beate is standing there with her bike.

"Where do you want it?" she asks.

"You're not supposed to use the front door," says Rebekka.

She takes the bike off her and carries it back down the steps. She leaves it at the entrance to the root cellar.

"Aren't you going to lock it up?" asks Beate.

"No one's going to steal it here." says Rebekka.

"Alright then," says Beate. "Is your mum home?"

"No."

"So what does it matter about the door then?"

"Well you can't have known that she wasn't home?"

"She's never home," says Beate.

They go inside. The air is close.

"Is Live coming?" asks Rebekka.

"Was she going to?"

"You could have invited her."

"But she keeps going on and on about those roller skis," says Beate. "She's manic."

"Don't call her that," says Rebekka. "I'll ring her."

Rebekka dials her number and Live picks up straight away. At Live's house, the phone is right next to the TV. Live loves skiing, but she loves watching TV even more. Best of all is when skiing is on TV.

"Hi," says Rebekka.

"Hi," answers Live.

"Are you coming?"

"To yours?"

"Yes."

"Is Beate there?"

"Yes."

"What are you doing?"

"Don't know. She just got here. But why does that matter?"

"No, well, it's just because..."

"What are you watching?" asks Rebekka.

Live often drops out in the middle of a conversation when there is something on TV.

"Well that's the thing you see," says Live. "They're showing reruns. It's a new channel."

"Reruns of a series?"

"No Rebekka. Of skiing! It's on all day, today and tomorrow."

"But it's summertime," says Rebekka.

"Exactly," says Live. "It's only on this weekend."

"So you're not coming?"

"No, not today."

"Okay," says Rebekka.

“Okay,” says Live.

They hang up.

“What did she say?” asks Beate.

“She’s watching the skiing,” says Rebekka.

Beate laughs and only then does Rebekka notice her outfit.

“What are you wearing?” asks Rebekka.

“What do you mean?” says Beate.

“You look ridiculous.”

“What,” says Beate. “They’re just sweatpants.”

“You can’t walk around like that,” says Rebekka. “Sweatpants are for exercising in.”

“Is this something else your mum has come up with?” says Beate.

Rebekka doesn’t answer, she just turns and starts towards the kitchen.

“You know,” Beate says behind her, “you are totally deranged.”

Rebekka turns on the oven and finds some small rounds in the freezer.

“What are they?” asks Beate.

“Pizzas,” says Rebekka.

“But they’re so small,” says Beate. “And they don’t have any toppings.”

“They are just cheese,” says Rebekka. “Four types of cheese.”

“Can’t we at least add tomatoes?” asks Beate.

“Yes, but then they should go under the cheese really,” says Rebekka.

“Is it such a big deal?”

“No, maybe not.”

“Just add some sliced tomatoes and then a little cheese on top of that.”

“No, that won’t work.”

“Yes it will, look, here.”

Beate takes a tomato and slices it on the chopping board. Then she opens up one of the zip lock bags, takes out one of the little pizzas and adds sliced tomato.

“Now we just need some cheese,” she says.

“Can’t we try one without tomatoes first?” says Rebekka. “They’re pretty nice.”

“No,” says Beate. “I want tomatoes on them.”

“I’ll make it as a side – a tomato salad.”

“Why?” says Beate. “This will be fine.”

“Okay,” says Rebekka.

She goes to the fridge. They have lots of different types of cheese. Sometimes Beate makes her angry and insecure. She doesn’t know which cheese to choose.

“Do you like Gouda?” she asks.

“No,” says Beate. “Just use Jarlsberg. Don’t make it so complicated.”

“But I don’t know if it will go with the rest of them,” says Rebekka.

“Does Gouda?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then just use Jarlsberg. It’s not a big deal.”

Rebekka takes out the Jarlsberg cheese and gives it to Beate. Beate cuts some with a cheese slice and places it over the tomatoes on the pizzas.

“Have you put tomato on all of them?”

“Yes,” says Beate.

They wait at the kitchen counter until the oven timer goes off. Then Rebekka places the pizzas on a big board and puts it on the kitchen table. Beate cuts the pizzas into little triangles.

“You don’t need to do that,” says Rebekka. “That’s why they are small, so that you can just eat them.”

“Oh right,” says Beate.
 Rebekka sees that Beate is a little embarrassed.
 “It doesn’t matter” says Rebekka. “Maybe they’re better in smaller pieces.”
 “Shall I cut them all up then?” asks Beate.
 “Yes,” says Rebekka. “Go for it.”
 “And then you have to tell,” says Beate.
 “Tell what?”
 “What happened with Jørgen.”
 “Nothing.”
 “Do you think I’m stupid, or what?”
 “We just made out.”
 “Are you keen?”
 “I don’t know.”
 “Who is he, anyway?”
 “He’s Eilif’s big brother. Live knows him.”
 “How do they know each other?”
 “I’m not exactly sure,” says Rebekka. “But Eilif is our age.”
 “Jørgen isn’t.”
 “What do you mean by that?”
 “That he’s old.”
 “Not old,” says Rebekka. “Older.”
 “Yes, older.”
 “You’re just jealous.”
 “No. I’m not. I’m just looking out for you.”
 “What do you mean looking out for me? You’re the one who was inside the tent.”
 “Yes, but that’s me. You’re not like that.”
 “What am I like, then?”
 “I don’t know. I mean, what is it that you want?”
 “Do I have to want something?”
 “No, but I’m just saying that he is old. It could be that he wants something different.”
 “But he’s not that old.”
 “What if there’s something wrong with him?”
 “What do you mean, wrong?”
 “No, I just mean. Why isn’t he with someone already?”
 “Maybe he hasn’t met anyone?”
 “His own age, no.”
 “I don’t want to talk about it any more. Besides, nothing happened.”
 “Okay, okay, I’m just saying...”
 “I hear what you’re saying.”
 “Why don’t we know Eilif?” asks Beate.
 “What do you mean?”
 “If he’s our age?”
 “Because he doesn’t go to our school.”
 “Where does he go then?”
 “I think he might go to a Steiner school, or something like that.”
 “Are they poor?” asks Beate.
 “No,” says Rebekka. “Well, I don’t know. But you don’t need to be poor to go to a Steiner school. I think he’s really creative or something. He used to make these drawings for Live.”
 “Was he keen?”
 “On Live?” asks Rebekka. “I don’t think so. They just hung out a lot when they were little.”

“Without you?”

“Yes,” says Rebekka.

“I thought you were always two peas in a pod before me,” says Beate.

“We didn’t do everything together,” says Rebekka.

“That could be fun though,” says Beate.

“What?” asks Rebekka.

“If you get together with Jørgen and she gets with his little brother.”

“No,” says Rebekka. “That would be so weird.”

“You would almost be sisters,” says Beate.

Beate laughs but Rebekka doesn’t answer. She likes the thought of being Live’s sister. She’s probably the closest thing to a sister that Rebekka will ever have.

“Imagine the family dinners,” says Beate.

“Would it really be that bad?” says Rebekka. “It would be worst for you, I guess.”

“What do you mean?” asks Beate.

“What would you do with yourself?” asks Rebekka. “You’d be a loner.”

Beate stops laughing and they say nothing more about it. Rebekka is still annoyed about the tomatoes. Beate has ruined the pizzas. Jarlsberg doesn’t go with the other cheeses. What does Beate know about it? She doesn’t know anything. She doesn’t know Jørgen. She can’t even make pizza. She doesn’t know how Jørgen looked at Rebekka. Or how it felt when he held her close. She hasn’t heard him breathing in her ear and felt his thighs between her thighs.

They finish eating in silence before they go and sit in the living room. While they watch TV the evening arrives, but not darkness. Around midnight, the heat finally relinquishes its hold and they sit on the veranda in the light breeze. Beate lights a cigarette.

“Can I have one?” asks Rebekka.

“Only if you inhale,” says Beate.

“What do you mean?”

“You didn’t inhale yesterday. Everyone could tell.”

“I did too.”

“No,” says Beate. “You have to breathe it into your lungs.”

Beate passes Rebekka a cigarette and Rebekka lights it.

“Now,” says Beate.

Rebekka breathes in deeply. She expects to cough, but she doesn’t.

“There we go,” says Beate. “Then you just carry on.”

Rebekka is a little dizzy but doesn’t want it to show. She takes another drag.

“Do you think he could tell?”

“No,” says Beate. “I was just kidding. No one could tell.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure. Just say you had a sore throat.”

“So you think he could tell?”

“No, no, I don’t think so.”

Without the breeze the air is creamy. The cigarette is sweet and rich. Rebekka wonders if this is what whisky tastes like. Or if cigars taste better. Beate’s legs are outstretched and she is resting her feet on a little wooden stool that her father made. It has his initials on the front, H.F.S. She doesn’t have a middle name like him and she doesn’t bear any of his names. Only her mother’s. She could take the S as her middle name. Then it would be in her passport and maybe on her bank card. Eventually it would be on her driver’s licence and membership cards for various clubs and organisations. If she ever had a house it would be on the doorbell.

“Do you want a house?” she asks.

“I have a house,” says Beate.

“I mean when you grow up.”

“Oh, no. You have to do so much weeding. Mamma weeds and weeds all the time. I think that’s why grown ups are so depressed.”

“Don’t you have a gardener?”

“Yes, but I think she enjoys it.”

“Some say it’s therapeutic.”

“They say that about everything that’s boring. What about you?”

“No, I think I want a flat.”

“We could get a flat together in town.”

“Yes!”

“Somewhere really central.”

“No, not here.”

“You’re thinking in Oslo? I can’t be bothered to live there.”

“What about London?”

“I don’t like redheads.”

“Not all Brits have red hair.”

“Actually, Rebekka. they do.”

“Okay then, what about Paris? Or Rome?”

“They’re so old. How about LA?”

“No, not LA.”

“San Francisco?”

“Yes, okay then, San Francisco.”

Beate claps her hands,

“We’ll buy it tomorrow,” she says. “An apartment in San Francisco.”

Rebekka laughs.

“You know,” says Beate, “there are only two ways to get out of this place.”

“What are they?” asks Rebekka.

Beate stubs out her cigarette.

“You can either move while you’re young,” she says.

She pauses.

“Or?” asks Rebekka.

“Or die when you’re old.”

Beate smiles, broadly.

Rebekka puts her cigarette out too, then she picks up the stubs and gives them both to Beate.

“We have to throw them away,” she says.

“Course,” says Beate, about to head for the front of the house where the bins are.

“Not in our bins,” says Rebekka. “Use someone else’s.”

“Like, over there?”

Beate points down to the neighbours’ bins.

“No, not there. They’ll tell my mum if they see them. There.”

Rebekka points to the next house along.

“It’s really far,” says Beate. “I might as well go home. Can’t we just chuck them into the forest?”

“No,” says Rebekka. “She’ll see.”

“What? The whole forest?”

“No, I don’t know. Just go down there.”

“Okay, okay. I’ll do it.”

Beate walks through the garden and across the field, past the pigsty and out onto the road. Then she walks down the hill. Rebekka’s eyes follow her grey shirt until she can’t see her any more. The town looks small and far away over there, while the forest to her right seems big and powerful.

Some trees rustle and then all the trees rustle, like they're trying to say something. She shivers despite the heat and feels goosebumps on her arms. She's only wearing a t-shirt and shorts. She rubs her hands over her arms. Then she stacks their glasses inside each other, picks up the bowl of crisps they have been eating and goes inside.

In the kitchen the plates and baking sheet are still on the table. She tidies up and washes the baking sheet, wipes the table and puts the dishwasher on. When she is finished she lets her eyes run over the room, checking that everything is in its proper place. Beate comes in through the kitchen door. She takes a glass from the cupboard and fills it with water. There is sweat on her top lip and forehead. She drinks the water and Rebekka sees her throat moving as she swallows. Beate fills the glass again, and then they go up to Rebekka's room.

Beate falls asleep straight away, but Rebekka lies there, listening out for her mother coming home. The house creaks and cracks. Outside the trees are rustling again, and the sound of the grasshoppers reaches all the way to her. She can't remember hearing them when they were outside. Then, she falls asleep too.