Extraordinary Edgar

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1

A stone in the hand and a few good friends

‘You *can* throw, can’t you Edgar?’

Of course I can. But I could just as well choose not to. Lise says that a lot: *If there’s something you don’t want to do, you can choose not to do it.* She says I should always remember that. But right now, that’s a little difficult.

 ‘You *say* you can do everything, Edgar. All you have to do now is throw that little stone.’

 That was pretty much true, what Sverre said. I have gotten better at doing things recently. And I’ve thrown plenty of stones in the forest before. In there, I can throw them in any direction, without hitting anything other than the moss or trees. But even if I’d been the world throwing champion, I wouldn’t have been able to hit any moss or trees today. The only thing in front of us now was the wall of the big school, and quite a few windows.

 ‘I’ll aim for a window as well,’ he explains, opening his fist to reveal another stone. ‘We can throw them at the same time, and then we’ll run. It’s important that we get our own back.’

 ‘Get our own back?’

 I don’t get what he means.

 ‘Yeah, because if we don’t, then the school controls us. But if we throw these, then we’ll have control over the school.’

 It’s not just me and Sverre standing here – Hektor, Abid, Peter, Midas and Truls are with us too. But none of them are holding stones. I don’t know why they don’t need to get their own back on the school. I don’t really mind if the school has a little bit of control over me.

 But I can’t let go of the stone.

 ‘You said you could run fast, didn’t you?’ Sverre says.

 ‘I can run fast,’ I say.

 ‘And when we were throwing the ball around in P.E., you kept throwing it short because you weren’t feeling well.’

I don’t say anything.

‘Are you feeling better now?’ Sverre asks.

I don’t say anything. Sometimes, when I throw the ball in P.E., it lands very quickly. As if it would much rather lie down on the floor than soar through the air. But now I have a chance. I can prove that I am good at throwing. And that I can run fast.

‘Are you ready?’ Sverre asks.

‘I don’t know,’ I say.

‘I think you’re either ready, or you’re not. And if you’re not ready, then you’re not ready to hang out with us afterwards either. Because that’s what you want, isn’t it? To hang out with us afterwards?’

 I know I should say something. I should say that I don’t want to break any windows, but I do want to hang out with them. There’s a lot you can do together with your friends without having to break anything.

 ‘No one’s looking. We have do it before someone comes,’ Sverre says.

 ‘Can’t we do something else, before someone comes?’ I ask.

 ‘We can do something else after. We only do this on very special days.’

 ‘Can’t it be a special day another day?’

 Sverre glances back at the others and they laugh. Not one of those loud laughs, but one of the laughs they do when I’m nearby. A kind of inward laugh, one that doesn’t quite come all the way out, but you can still hear it.

 ‘You know that the universe decides which days are special though, right?’

 I’m not sure I did know that. But I do now, I guess. So I nod.

 ‘Ready?’ Sverre asks.

 I close my eyes. It would’ve been so much better if I was in a car. Because then I’d be somewhere else when I open my eyes again.

 ‘You have to open your eyes if you’re going to hit the window,’ Sverre says, and the others do that half-laugh again.

 When I open my eyes, I’m in the exact same place. I let go of the stone. Next thing I know, it’s on the ground.

 ‘Is that as far as you can throw it, Edgar? You’re weaker than I thought.’

 I think the stone prefers it on the ground. I’ll leave it there.

 ‘We’re your friends, Edgar. Don’t you want to be our friend? We’ll be sad if you don’t. Isn’t that right boys?’

 ‘I’ll cry if you don’t,’ Midas says.

 I’m looking down at the ground, so I can’t see whether he does actually have tears in his eyes. My head is full of dumb thoughts. I’m very glad I’m not thinking out loud.

 ‘What’s the plan then, Edgar?’

 My plan is to eat some chocolate. Or drink some squash. But not to throw stones.

 ‘Fine then. You can use my stone.’

 Sverre holds it out on the palm of his hand. It’s the same size as mine. I don’t take it.

 ‘Something got your tongue, Edgar? I mean, it’s usually poking out a bit, but I can’t see it at all now. Have you swallowed it or something?’

 Imagine if I had swallowed my tongue. That might’ve been pretty handy now, actually. Then no one would expect me to say anything. I could just stand here, with everyone patting me on the back, asking me if I was okay. And I could just nod. Or shake my head. Maybe smile at them all, to lighten the mood a bit.

 I try the latter, in any case.

 ‘What’re you smiling at now?’

 I stop smiling.

 ‘So, do you not want to be one of us then, Edgar?’

 I wish Sverre would stop with all the questions. He could’ve told a funny joke that wasn’t difficult to understand instead.

 ‘Whatever. I guess I’ll do it then,’ Sverre says, stretching his arm back.

 He hurls the stone into the air, hard. It hits the window, right in the centre, and there’s an almighty crash as the glass shatters. Everyone turns and runs at the same time.

 Except me. I start a little later than the rest of them.

 But I run too. Just not as fast as the others. And I get tired much quicker than they do too. Way more tired than I was that time in P.E. When I can no longer see the others ahead of me, I sit down to catch my breath. After a while, I lie flat on the grass and stare up at the sky. The clouds look like wild horses. I even think I can see a boy up there with them, riding one of the horses.

 I really hope no one thinks that I threw the stone.

2

A long hug and a difficult phone call

There aren’t many people who know this. But occasionally, I’m a secret agent. I might even be the only secret agent in the whole world who has Down’s syndrome. But it might also be the case that there are lots of us. Because secret agents are, of course, secret. So people don’t know about them.

 I’m currently lying under the bed, on a secret mission. And there are the legs I’m meant to be spying on. It looks like the legs are looking for me.

 It would’ve probably gone well too, had there not been so much dust under the bed. Sometimes, I sneeze so loud that it feels like my head is going to explode.

 Luckily, it never does actually explode. That would be really gross.

 ‘What are you doing under there, Edgar?’ Lise asks, now crouching down on all fours.

 ‘I’m Agent 1001,’ I announce, wiping away a bit of snot.

 ‘I see, so you’re on a mission?’

 ‘A secret mission.’

 ‘Right then. In that case, you can stay down there.’

 ‘No, it’s too late. I’ve been exposed.’

 I crawl out from under the bed and stand up.

 ‘Sorry,’ Lise says.

 ‘It’s fine,’ I say and give her a hug.

 I think Lise’s the best to hug. But I can’t say that out loud. Because then Wenche might get sad. Or it might upset one of the other mumdads I live with. Except Kurt. He never hugs anyone. Ahmed does, but rarely. Malin hugs every now and then.

 Some of my classmates at school seem to think I live in some sort of home. But that’s not true. Because I actually live by myself. And there aren’t many people who are nearly 13 years old who could do that. I can’t live with my family anyhow, seeing as they think I’m *something you would scrape off the bottom of your shoe*. I don’t think I was meant to hear that though, what Mum said about the shoes. But it’s probably true, what with her not wanting to live with me. So I got my own place instead, my own joint. I think it’s fine, saying joint. It’s not a swear word. Because I never swear. There are two other empty rooms here, so maybe someone else with Down’s syndrome might move in one day. Luckily, *one day* is a long way away. So, I get to live here by myself for the time being, with a bunch of very nice adults who take it in turns being the mumdad. It’s Lise’s turn today. And Lise is in the *super nice* category. If I were interested in football, we could’ve said she was *premier league.*

‘This is a very long hug, Edgar.’

 ‘It just happened,’ I say, letting go.

 ‘At least it’s a real hug when you do it. It’s a shame you don’t have anyone your own age here at the moment.’

 ‘Lots of homework,’ I say.

 ‘Well, I’m here anyway. Is there anything you’d like to do?’

 ‘Not break anything.’

 ‘Alright, we won’t do that.’

 Lise’s very good at saying the right thing. Sverre might be better at saying the wrong thing. People are different. Just like how those of us with Down’s syndrome are different to everyone else. It’s almost as if we’re a different kind of human. But just think how boring everything would be if we were all the same. Then humanity would end up bored to death and die out. I’d much rather have Down’s syndrome than go extinct.

 There’s quite a lot I can decide for myself. I’ve just made the decision to have strawberry flavoured squash, for example. I’m sitting at the kitchen table with Lise when her phone starts ringing. It’s a shame mine’s not the one ringing, as my ringtone cheers. As if it’s the best thing in the world that someone’s calling, and everyone’s celebrating. That way, the ringtone will put you in a good mood, even if the caller has something sad to say.

 ‘What are you saying? When was this?’

 I’ve tried hugging her when she’s been on the phone before. It didn’t go very well. Especially when she’s getting bad news, like now.

 ‘Wait a moment, I just need to move outside,’ she says down the phone before she turns to me and continues: ‘Edgar, I’ve got to take this call in the garden.’

 ‘I can sing a song while I wait for you.’

 ‘Great. And you can make yourself some squash.’

 ‘But I’d rather a sing.’

 ‘You can do both.’

 ‘Have you ever tried singing under water?’

 ‘Do as you please, Edgar,’ Lise says, and leaves the kitchen.

 She opens the doors to the patio and steps out into the little garden, even though she’s not wearing any shoes or a jacket, and it’s not quite summer yet.

 I think it might be possible, actually. Singing under water, I mean. You just need really strong lungs. Strong enough to push the water away. But I think the problem would be hearing the song under water.

 *I stand in the dark and glimpse the light in the distance, it’s so cold, I seek the warmth from a star,* I sing while I turn the tap on and fetch the bottle of squash out of the cupboard. I finish both the song and the squash by the time Lise comes back. She looks as if someone died.

 ‘Did you smash one of the windows at school?’ she asks.

 I look down into the empty glass. It works well that, singing into a glass. The sound becomes hollow, like it’s trapped in there.

 ‘Edgar, you’re going to have to answer me,’ Lise says.

 But it’s very difficult singing into it if the glass is full of squash. I’m actually still a little bit thirsty. It feels like I’ve got sand in my mouth, even though I haven’t been to the beach.

 ‘You know you’re not supposed to do things like that, Edgar,’ Lise says sternly.

 I like Lise. She’s nice. But I don’t like her as much when she’s disappointed in me.

 ‘Tell me, did you throw that stone?’

 ‘I let go of it,’ I say.

 ‘You let go of the stone, and it hit the window?’

 Whatever I say will be wrong. So it’s probably best I don’t say anything at all, and think about something nice instead. Like how birds can talk to each other in a language no one else understands. And how they can say kind things about us, and we have no idea what they’re saying. *Look at that cool boy down there, I hope his pockets are full of birdseed.*

 ‘You know how disappointed I am when you do things like this.’

 ‘Do we have any birdseed?’ I ask.

 ‘No, we don’t have any birdseed,’ she says, her voice firm, and walks out of the kitchen.

 I hurry over to the sink and make more squash before I’m told not to. I sit at the table and drink it by myself. I wish I still wanted to sing.

3

A brother in need and secret secrets

He’s suddenly standing there. I’ve not long since come out into the garden, and no one had been standing there earlier. But now *he’s* there. Between the trees, over by the road. My own brother. The very brother who said I wouldn’t be seeing much of him in the future, when he came to visit that time, ages ago.

 ‘Stay where you are,’ Markus says.

 ‘I can come over to you,’ I say.

 ‘No, no, I don’t want anyone in there to see me. They’d make such a fuss that I’d have to visit all the time.’

 ‘I don’t like fuss either.’

 If I’d been something stuck to the bottom of someone’s shoe, it wasn’t on Markus’ Adidas trainers. I was more like dirt or bits of gravel stuck to Mum’s shoe. I don’t know much about Dad’s shoes, seeing as no one really knows where he walks. Markus just has lots of other things to do. But now he’s here, and now we’re both kind of like secret agents.

 ‘I was wondering if you could help me with something?’

 ‘Are we going to build that treehouse you spoke about?’

 ‘No, I don’t do that kind of thing anymore.’

 I sometimes forget that Markus is five years older than me.

 ‘It’s not much, really. I just want you to come down to the café with me tomorrow.’

 ‘Do you need help going to the café?’

 ‘Not exactly. There’s a girl I’m interested in, if you catch my drift. And I think you might be able to make Rita more interested in me.’

 ‘Rita. That’s a nice name. But, you think that’s something I can do?’

 ‘Of course. But you have to do exactly what I say tomorrow. Can you do that?’

 ‘Yes. Is she pretty?’

 ‘Very pretty.’

 ‘Do you have a photo?’

 ‘Edgar, you’ll see her tomorrow. You just need to find a way to get out without anyone finding out about it. Can you do that?’

 I turn back to look at the terraced house. Lise is nowhere to be seen. Secret agents have to be good at sneaking out. And now it’s *Markus* asking me to do it. There wasn’t anything in the world more important than this, not even if the King himself had asked me to help him. So there’s only one answer in my head.

 ‘Yes.’

 ‘Then I’ll see you outside the supermarket at six o’clock tomorrow evening. And remember,’ he says, and presses a finger against his lips.

 And then he was gone. All secret agents recognise the sign for very secret secrets, of course. A finger to the lips. I was going to help Markus get a girlfriend – a pretty girl called Rita. It sounds like the best job in the world. I’m so proud and happy that I run inside to tell Lise straight away. Luckily, I remember what Markus said first. Secrets make my brain a little scrambled sometimes. Especially when it’s something as wonderful as this, and I want to tell the whole world. But if you reveal a secret, then it’s no longer a secret.

 ‘I’m not doing anything tomorrow, by the way,’ I say to Lise.

 ‘Okay then. And now I know,’ Lise responds as she folds the freshly washed clothes.

 ‘I’m going to go and play Yatzy with myself.’

 ‘You do that.’

 The good thing about playing Yatzy with myself is that I always win. But I always lose as well. Because I come both first and last. But, above all, it’s boring. Maybe I’ll take it with me tomorrow, so Markus, Rita and I can play Yatzy at the café. If I win, he’ll have to buy me an extra cinnamon roll. I think I can almost picture Rita. She has dark hair, large eyes and a smooth nose.

 After casting the dice several times, I win. And lose. But mainly win.

4

A chromosome in the pinkie and a tennis ball in the pocket

At school, I have some of my lessons with the rest of the class, and a few lessons with Roy. I think I learn the most when it’s just me and Roy, because he doesn’t go too fast, and he says there’s no such thing as a stupid question. The rest of the class are a kind of like uncles and aunts. A sort of family that I don’t hug goodnight or eat dinner with, but who make me laugh and who say nice things, mostly. If there was a prize for being the coolest people at school, Sverre and his friends would win it. Even though I’d never win any cool prizes are anything, I occasionally get to hang out with them during the breaks. As long as they’re laughing a lot and normally, I laugh too.

 But I don’t feel like laughing right now. Because we’ve got maths. And as I’m busy thinking about Rita, I find it difficult getting my head around all the numbers. So I end up thinking of a kind of middle ground instead: chromosomes. That’s a number I can understand. Not that I know what they look like or where abouts in my body they actually live. But sometimes I can picture them – I have lots in my legs, a handful in my stomach and just one or two in my fingers. And that extra one I have, that lives in the tip of my pinkie. Because I’ve got a bonus chromosome. Most people have 46 chromosomes floating around their body. But seeing as I have 47, it *should* feel like winning the raffle at the cake sale. But it doesn’t always feel like that. To be perfectly honest, I sometimes daydream about returning the extra chromosome. Or just misplacing it one day. Or giving it to a fruit fly even, seeing as they only have eight chromosomes. But then the fruit fly might have Down’s syndrome, and I’m not sure I’d want to do that to a fruit fly.

 Anyway, the body decides what it wants for itself, in a way. So that means it’s not really mine. It almost feels like I’m borrowing it sometimes. *Look, here’s your body, you can have it for a few years and then the next person gets it.* But that’s not entirely true. After all, it decomposes when you die. Sometimes I think that I’m already decomposing a little myself, even though I’m not dead.

 Luckily, breaktime comes around quickly, and I can check to make sure the others aren’t playing football. Or, rather, *friend with the ball*, as they call it*.* In which case you could say that I’m usually the enemy. The mortal enemy, even. The ball always ends up going the wrong way. So I like it best when there aren’t any balls nearby.

 ‘Hi, Edgar,’ Sverre says as I walk out onto the playground and see that no one’s playing football. ‘Good job not snitching on us. Is it weird that I quite like you?’

 He puts an arm around my neck. I’m not sure if I like it, and I tell him so.

 ‘I’m so glad you go to this school,’ Sverre says.

 ‘Okay.’

 ‘Is that all you have to say?’

 I don’t respond.

 ‘You don’t need to say any more, actually,’ he continues. ‘Good friends don’t have to say everything. You just know it, in your heart.’

 He pounds his fist hard against his chest.

 ‘On that note, is it true that your heard is bigger than ours?’

 That is exactly true. And it’s one of things I am quite proud of. Like there’s more room in my heart than in everyone else’s.

 ‘I… think so,’ I answer.

 ‘Well, you’ve certainly got a body that can hold a whole lot of weird,’ Sverre says, patting me on the stomach. ‘Do you want to hang out with us today, or what?’

 ‘Yes,’ I say, even though the way Sverre was talking to me made me wonder whether *no* would’ve been the right answer.

 ‘Right then, I think we should practise throwing.’

 ‘Sure,’ I say.

 ‘You’re so cool, Edgar. Seriously cool,’ Sverre says, and pulls a tennis ball out of his pocket.

5

Chocolate spread on the toes and a waterfall of soda

I’m not the type to run away. People in prison run away. Those who have been kidnapped by bad people run away. I’m just going to the shop. The kind of thing people who are almost 13 years old do. There’s nothing odd about that.

 But the thing that is maybe a bit odd, is that I’m not really going to the shop. I’m actually on a secret mission. So I packed my card and wrote a shopping list that just has *butter* written over and over again. Not that I think we need any butter. But it was all I could think of.

 Markus is waiting for me at the entrance to the supermarket. My own brother. Who can drive a car. If he’d got his driver’s license. He’s much taller than I am and has dark hair that he always tucks behind his ear. I don’t know why he doesn’t do it on the other side too.

 ‘Good to see you,’ Markus says.

 ‘Okay,’ I say.

 We hug this time. It’s not exactly a Lise hug, but we move close to each other for a moment. He smells like home. Not like my home now, but like the place that used to be home. I think that’s what it smells like there anyway.

 ‘We should hang out more,’ he says when we start walking.

 ‘I like hanging out.’

 ‘We could go to the cinema.’

 ‘I like films as long as they’re not horror.’

 ‘We could watch a rom-com,’ he says and grins.

 I laugh a little too. Mostly because I think romance is nice and gross at the same time. But I have to decide whether I think it’s more nice than gross before I get my own girlfriend.

 ‘Edgar, when we meet Rita, there’s something I want you to do,’ Markus says.

 ‘Yes.’

 ‘Can you say things that are like, a bit… dumb?’

 It would be easier if he explained more. I’m not exactly an expert on what’s smart and what isn’t. For example, occasionally I’ll say something that I think is a bit dumb but others think is smart. Which means that it wasn’t actually dumb. But, most of all, I need an explanation as to why I should say something dumb.

 ‘I mean, you say quite a lot of weird things anyway. But I want you to be even weirder. As if you’re a much younger child.’

 I don’t like that he called me a child. Because I’m nearly a teenager, and very few teenagers go round saying childish things.

 ‘Can you do that for me?’ he asks.

 ‘Why?’

 ‘Because… okay, well… I’m not sure that Rita does actually believe I’m a protective older brother. And she’s the kind of girl that likes people who have… she calls it empathy… people who care about others. And it’ll look like I do care more if you’re a little… um, more Down’s-like, and that I hang out with you despite the fact you’re like that.’

 ‘It’s easier if I’m me.’

 ‘But you won’t have to stop being you. You just have to be a bit of a weirder version of you. For example, if I say: *If Edgar doesn’t have any bread, he’ll smear the chocolate spread on his hands and lick it off his fingers.* And then you can say: *Sometimes I lick it off my feet as well.*’

 ‘I don’t do that.’

 ‘I know you don’t. And you know you don’t. But Rita doesn’t. But I’d get a gold star for hanging out with someone who licks chocolate spread off their feet, and for taking them out to the café anyway. You know what I mean, girls are hard to understand. But that’s just how they are.’

 ‘I don’t really like chocolate spread.’

 ‘But that’s not the point, Edgar. The point is that you just need to *say* a few things like that. Can you do that for me? I mean, I am your brother after all.’

 He is my brother, after all. Without him, I wouldn’t have a brother.

 ‘Okay,’ I say.

 ‘I knew I could count on you,’ Markus says, putting an arm round my neck, just like Sverre did.

 For the rest of the walk, Markus talks about how he’s started skateboarding. I’ve never stood on a skateboard because my balance isn’t very good. That might be why I don’t say much while he talks.

 Rita is already sitting in the café by the time we get there, and she looks nothing like I’d imagined. She’s blonde with quite small eyes, or at least they’re not as big and thoughtful as I’d pictured. But it was true, she was pretty. She notices Markus and smiles with one of the biggest smiles I’ve ever seen, and I think some of the smile is for me too. We wave, and Markus tells her my name. I try to say as little as possible so I don’t accidentally say something smart.

 We go to the counter first, and Markus says I can order whatever I want, just nothing with chocolate spread on it. It doesn’t even look like they’ve got anything with chocolate spread on it, so I suggest cinnamon rolls.

 ‘Is that it?’ Markus says.

 ‘I could take two,’ I say.

 ‘Is that it?’ Markus repeats.

 ‘I’m fine with one, actually,’ I say.

 Markus buys one for himself, one for Rita and two for me. We sit down at one of the round tables and Rita starts talking about someone I don’t know. When I look at Rita, I think that Markus would be lucky to be her boyfriend, and that maybe girlfriends aren’t as gross as I thought. It’s as if the cinnamon roll tastes even better when she speaks.

 ‘Do you spend a lot of time together then?’ Rita asks, looking at us.

 ‘I mean, we *are* brothers. And brothers hang out, don’t they?’ Markus says while I nod.

 ‘You live separately though, right?’

 ‘Well, our mum got a bit more than she bargained for. But I think Edgar’s actually mad lucky to live by himself. I’d chop my own arm off to get my own flat.’

 ‘Lise is like my mum and my dad, in a way,’ I explain. ‘And Ahmed. And Kurt. And Malin. And Wenche. But mainly Lise.’

 ‘She sounds lovely,’ Rita says.

 ‘Yes, she’s like a reserve who’s been made a permanent member of the team. That’s what she likes to say. I like to call them the mumdads.’

 ‘Yeah, but Edgar can be a bit of a challenge sometimes as well,’ Markus chimes in. ‘Like, if he doesn’t have any bread, he’ll smear the chocolate spread on his hands and lick it off, won’t you Edgar?’

 I eat my cinnamon roll in silence. Rita watches me.

 ‘There are plenty of ways to eat chocolate spread though, of course,’ Rita says and smiles.

 ‘Edgar loves rolling around in the snow in his underwear too. What is it you like to shout again, when you do that?’

 Markus stares at me. It sounds cold, rolling around in the snow in just your underwear. I stick my tongue out at him.

 ‘Yeah, that’s it. Sticks his tongue out while he rolls around. He licks the lampposts every winter as well and always gets stuck. And, he likes showering in cold water for a quarter of an hour while singing songs about Jesus. Isn’t that right, Edgar?’

 I’ve finished eating the first cinnamon roll. Would it be dumb if I took the other one, after saying I was fine with just the one? Markus’s foot hits my leg under the table. It hurt a bit, but he probably didn’t mean it.

 ‘Edgar often takes part in singing competitions about Jesus. Will you sing us something?’

 Yes, actually, I will take the other cinnamon roll. Markus hits my leg again, and this time I am a little more suspicious that it might not have been an accident. Seeing as it hurt more this time, I put the cinnamon roll down and go to check whether the leg was bruised. But as I bend down, I collide with Markus’s drink, and it spills all over the table.

 ‘Oops,’ I say.

 Rita shoves her chair back to avoid the waterfall of soda.

 ‘You have to look where you’re going,’ Markus says, annoyed. ‘He always does this.’

 Markus gets up to fetch some napkins. That wasn’t true though, I don’t always knock things over.

 ‘Are you okay?’ Rita asks once Markus has walked away.

 ‘Yes.’

 My foot doesn’t actually hurt that much. Using my hand, I try wiping the puddle of soda off the table and onto the floor.

 ‘You don’t need to do that. Your brother will be back soon with some napkins,’ Rita explains.

 ‘He’s not my brother,’ I say.

 ‘He’s not?’

 I don’t know why I lied about Markus being my brother, so I raise a finger to my lips. Everyone knows the sign for keeping a secret. Markus arrives back a moment later with a handful of napkins and starts wiping off the table. One of the café workers walks over and joins the clean-up effort.

 ‘He had a bit of an accident,’ Markus says, pointing at me.

 I pop the rest of the cinnamon roll in my mouth, even though there’s not really enough room. I get up and bow to Rita.

 ‘Thank you,’ I say with far too much food in my mouth.

 ‘Where are you going?’ Markus asks. ‘Hello? Hey, don’t leave.’

 I’m glad I didn’t eat any more cinnamon rolls. Otherwise I’d have ended up with a stomach ache. Outside, the sun is shining.

6

The shoes behind the window and a strange woman

It’s important to always have a wish list. You never know when someone might want to give you a present. And you can’t just stand there trying to think of something, and then end up saying you want a hat or something else you don’t really want. That’s why I always keep a list in my pocket. It’s not particularly long, and I don’t need to look at it to know what’s first on the list. A pair of Nike Air Max 95 Essential trainers. They’re not rare or impossible to find in the shops, but they are expensive. I know that no one’s going to buy them for me. But that doesn’t mean I’m going to stop asking for them. I could ask for a secret agent car with rocket launchers if I wanted to, but it doesn’t mean I’ll get one. Air Max trainers are cheaper than a car with rocket launchers at least. That, I can swear on. Even though I never swear.

 I’m currently standing outside a shoe shop that I think might have them. I don’t know though, seeing as I’ve never been inside. If I do go in, then one of the shop assistants will come over and ask me if I want to try them on, and suddenly I’m trying them on and they fit my feet perfectly and I’m super happy, up until I have to tell them that I don’t have enough money. That’s what Lise likes to call *a bit of an uncomfortable situation.* Just like when her partner broke up with her. Or when she gets those little pieces of gravel stuck in her sock.

 I move a little closer to the window to see if I can see further in. The problem is that the shoes are black and the walls of the shop are dark. But I don’t want the white ones. They kind of look like they flash when you walk. I press myself right up against the window and cup my hands either side of my face. Standing there like that, it’s as if I’m actually inside the shop. Imagine if I lived in a shoe shop. Then I could try on all the shoes I want, and no one would think that I wanted to buy them.

 ‘Are you okay?’

 I take my hands away from the window and look up to see a woman standing next to me, smiling. She looks a bit like Lise, but I can guarantee that it’s not. I try not to be rude, but it’s none of her business whether I’m okay.

 ‘Have you wandered off, little one?’ the woman asks with the kind of voice you use when talking to a child.

 It would take quite a lot to somehow manage to get lost on a street I walk down almost every day. I shake my head, so maybe she’ll stop talking.

 ‘If you need help, you can just ask, I hope you know,’ she says, still talking in that strange voice.

 Lise has said that if I do ever need help, then I should ask someone who looks nice. But not the people who say that they want to help, because they might sometimes want to help in a bad way. I’m not sure I understand why that is, but I listen to Lise. Anyway, it’s just plain weird that the woman is offering to help me when I don’t need help. And she’s standing in the way as well, seeing as I want to walk in that direction.

 I hope she’s not upset when I step round her and quickly walk away. Everything is fine as long as I don’t think about her, as long as I just keep thinking about the Air Max trainers. I saw a show on TV once about someone who had an entire wardrobe full of expensive shoes. All I need is one pair of Air Max trainers. I would walk so carefully in them that it’d take years to wear them out.

 When I get home, I see that Malin is the mumdad today, and she’s making waffles. I hug her from behind, round her middle. After that, I eat waffles with jam and a slice of brown cheese. She asks if I’d like one with chocolate spread on it, but I say no thank you to that.

 A little later, Lise turns up, and Malin stops being the mumdad and Lise begins. For a brief moment, when they’re both standing in the hallway, both of them are the mumdad. Had I thought fast enough, I could’ve taken a good photo of them.

7

Bananas in the basket and diseases in the body

Sverre is standing there, holding a shopping basket full of bananas. That’s not entirely true, actually, because when I get closer, I see that the bananas are just lying on top. There’s more food in the red basket, underneath the bananas. Lise once said that you shouldn’t put bananas at the bottom of the basket, because then they’d get squashed and go brown much quicker.

 ‘Smart,’ I say.

 Sverre looks surprised, like he hadn’t noticed me.

 ‘Oh, hi. What’s smart?’

 ‘Putting the bananas on top.’

 ‘Oh… yeah. What’re you doing here?’

 That’s a weird question.

 ‘Buying food,’ I say. ‘Are you having a party?’

 ‘A party?’

 ‘You’re buying soda.’

 ‘My mum likes soda.’

 ‘Okay.’

 ‘Don’t you believe me? I’m shopping for my mum, actually.’

 ‘You’re nice.’

 ‘Well, someone has to do it,’ Sverre says. I wait for him to walk away. But he stays put. And then adds: ‘You know, my mum has ME… it’s a kind of disease that means she has to stay in bed a lot, or lie on the sofa. She won’t… like… get better.’

 I think Sverre needs a hug. But I don’t really know when it’s appropriate to hug people from class, so I don’t. I have a few questions for him about the disease, but I don’t ask them. It’s so easy to ask something wrong, and then he might get sad and regret having told me.

 ‘I didn’t mean to tell you all that, Edgar. It’s just… I don’t know… it feels like, wrong, if I say it to anyone else.’

 ‘I’m glad.’

 ‘You’re glad?’

 ‘That you said it.’

 ‘Oh… yeah, that was good… so I kind of like, I have to do all the shopping and make dinner and everything, and I’ve gotten pretty good at making food… I like it a lot, cooking, but I’m not as good as Mum was before she got sick. She was the best.’

 ‘I’m sure your food is very good.’

 ‘Yeah, thanks. Anyway, Edgar, do you mind not talking about this, about my mum, to anyone else?’

 I raise a finger to my lips to show that it’s a secret.

 ‘Exactly. And I’ll tell everyone that all that with the window was a mistake. Because I’d heard that someone had seen you afterwards. Did you get in a lot of trouble for it?’

 ‘It’s fine.’

 ‘Great… it wasn’t too bad then. But, anyway… it was good seeing you.’

 ‘See you at school.’

 ‘Er, yeah, see you there.’

 I leave the shop without buying a single thing. I can’t remember what I went in for anyway.