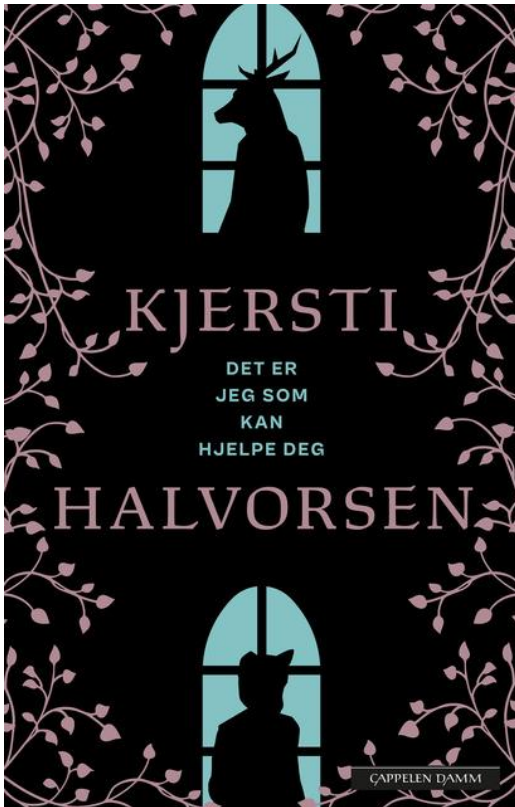


Cappelen Damm Agency *Spring 2022*



Psychologist Edvin works at the Kvervel Manor. He is engaged and soon to be a father for the first time. One day, he gets a new patient, André. Edvin knows him from his childhood but hesitates to tell his boss about their relationship. He is ashamed and unable to say more than 'we went to school together', which really doesn't cover it. Edvin was bullied, and André was the bully. Now they have to deal with each other on a daily basis.

Why did André start taking drugs? Did Edvin have anything to do with what happened? Why was life so cruel to André but kind to Edvin? Or *has* life been kind to him?

Kjersti Halvorsen writes about complicated topics – power, addiction, revenge and reconciliation – in a smart, entertaining and original way, with psychological insight to match.

I'm the One Who Can
Help You

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CAPPELEN DAMM AGENCY

I'm the One Who Can Help You
Kjersti Halvorsen

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b. 1993

Kjersti Halvorsen (b. 1993) grew up in Lier.

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Synopsis
I'm the One Who Can Help You
by Kjersti Halvorsen

Sample translation © Megan Turney

After some years in the city, Edvin and his wife Therese have recently moved to her hometown. They have a dog, a house, and a baby on the way. Edvin has taken a job as a psychologist at the run-down Kvervel Manor: an old country estate converted into a rehabilitation centre for substance abuse. The ivy grows wild along the outer walls of the building, with its endless hallways, a tower, and an old, locked ballroom.

One day, André arrives at Kvervel Manor. He is to receive treatment as part of a prison sentence. Edvin recognises him immediately: His childhood bully. Now they have to put up with each other on a daily basis. In André's presence, Edvin feels like a defenceless 12-year-old again. All Edvin can bring himself to tell his boss, is that he and André grew up in the same place. Responsibility for André's treatment is transferred to Signe, the centre's newly hired psychologist. Edvin becomes increasingly drawn to Signe. What does she know about his relationship with André? Edvin feels exposed, in a way he finds both terrifying and tantalising. Can Signe see something in Edvin that no one else knows about?

Bound by his duty of confidentiality while trying to convince himself that he has, in fact, put his childhood behind him, Edvin fluctuates between wanting to avoid André entirely, and an intense desire for revenge. The two men keep a close watch on each other throughout the Manor's nooks and crannies, each using their own form of power to their advantage. André is brusque and unpredictable, Edvin is one of the healthcare professionals. André works on trying to stay sober. He starts a project restoring the manor's dilapidated greenhouse, used for storing fertiliser and gardening tools. Edvin is neither willing nor able to talk to anyone about the situation, least of all Therese, who notices that something's going on with him.

Edvin has to take a trip back to his own hometown, Kleiver, to clear out his childhood home – finally having bought out of his share of the ownership after his mother's death a few years back. While there, he pays a visit to his mother's former dental clinic, and takes home a ring he finds there, of the sort dentists give to young children in Norway after they've been for a check-up, the very ones he remembered his own mother giving out. Edvin has mixed memories of the clinic. Especially given the fact his mother let André work there, to help him out of a difficult situation.

Back at the Manor, Edvin makes several attempts to talk to André, all of which fail. He believes André's attempts at reconciliation are insincere, and the tension between them escalates. By influencing the inexperienced Signe, Edvin denies André's request for a leave of absence to meet his son. Overwhelmed with a feeling of powerlessness, André threatens Edvin, before taking off and drinking himself into a stupor. When inexplicable things start happening around Edvin's own home, he starts to fear what an intoxicated and vindictive André might do. To

secure the house, Edvin sets up a fox trap in the forest at the back of their garden, to Therese's horror. André returns to the centre, and continues his treatment. Edvin pays his GP a visit to request sick leave, so he can take a few days to compose himself, but instead, he is given a prescription for sleeping pills.

In one of the staff meetings, Edvin is excluded when André is brought up. Sometime later, Edvin hits a deer with his car, which Signe ends up having to shoot in front of the patients and other members of staff. In the aftermath of the deer incident, André humiliates Edvin in front of Signe. Edvin devises a plan to plant the sleeping pills in André's greenhouse, something he knows would result in André's immediate expulsion. In a conversation between Signe and Edvin, she tells him how she hates people who abuse positions of power. Edvin is filled with shame for having planted the pills in the greenhouse.

Therese reaches the end of her tether with Edvin's plotting and secrecy, and leaves to stay with her brother for a few days. Edvin sends her a text, accidentally writing 'Loved you' – in the past tense. He doesn't want to go back to an empty house, so he stays overnight at the Manor. Signe informs Edvin that André has told her about their shared history. She understands, empathizes, and accepts him. Edvin tries to kiss her. It is not reciprocated.

Edvin receives a phone call from Therese's brother, telling him that she has trodden on the fox trap behind the house. Both she and their unborn baby survive, but she's furious. Edvin has to search the forest for their dog, who ran off in the commotion. He finds the exhausted dog, and carries him home to nurse him back to health. He realises that he has to be honest with Therese now, no matter how uncomfortable, and that he will have to put things straight with André once and for all.

Edvin and André talk, and decide to finally bring an end to their feud. Later that evening, Edvin goes down to the greenhouse to retrieve the sleeping pills. But it's too late. The pills are gone, confiscated by one of the other members of staff, and André is discharged from the centre. Signe asks Edvin for advice, telling him that she needs him. André accuses Edvin of framing him, but no one believes him. Edvin considers confessing, but he thinks Therese will despise him if she finds out what he did, and he also doesn't want to lose face in front of Signe. She asks Edvin directly whether he planted the pills. Edvin answers no, and they reconcile. He gives her the ring he found at his mother's dental clinic, and she puts it on her finger.

The fire alarm goes off. The greenhouse is on fire. In his desperation following his expulsion from the centre, André has set it alight. Signe runs down to extinguish the fire, and Edvin tries to stop her. The fertiliser explodes, and they are both thrown backward from the force of the blast. Edvin loses his hearing.

The rehabilitation centre shuts down, everyone leaves, and nature slowly takes over the manor.

Sample translation
I'm the One Who Can Help You
by Kjersti Halvorsen

Translation © Megan Turney

About half an hour's drive from Dølgvold, there was a building with such distinctive architecture that it set itself apart from the rest of the town. Referred to as Kvervel Manor, the building was part of a country estate designed in a neogothic style by Gustav Kvervel – an eccentric rich guy with such paranoid tendencies that he chose to live a life of solitude there, on the shaded side of Dølgvold Valley. A place in which he sought peace and privacy. Following Kvervel's death in 1953, the Manor stood empty for quite some time – until the local council, in cooperation with Kvervel's heirs, decided that it was to be used to treat the mentally ill. It was thus bestowed upon Dølgvold Municipality as a gift from Gustav Kvervel's closest relative: a nephew in Sweden. He was well aware of the dilapidated state of the manor, knowing that next to no work had been done on it towards the end of Kvervel's difficult life, so he helped finance a share of the renovation work.

It was expected that the Manor's new treatment centre would cover the municipality's own requirements and then some – the intention being that they would sell a number of the surplus places to neighbouring municipalities, as a way to boost the town's economy a bit. New jobs were created, both at the Manor and elsewhere; those moving to the area to work there would naturally need somewhere to get their hair cut, somewhere to buy food, and, of course, somewhere to live. Dark windows were lit up. The centre was long run as a kind of collective, with patients expected to contribute to the upkeep of the manor's extensive land and gardens, to help out with building maintenance and its daily operations. This unique building continued treating patients suffering from various mental illnesses for the entire region right up until 1990. That is, until the centre was forced to adapt as a result of the increased demand for substance abuse treatment.

Many years and many patients later, it was in this regard that psychologist Edvin set foot in Kvervel Manor. A permanent position was offered, the contract signed. His wife, Therese, was originally from Dølgvold and had been itching to move back home to be closer to her family,

especially with their then unspoken plans to extend their household, beyond the two of them and Zorro, their dog. It certainly wasn't a disadvantage that house prices were far more affordable here than they were back in Oslo either, where Edvin and Therese had both studied and ended up living for a while, until everything about the city had awoken this restlessness, this feeling of suffocating – specifically in Therese. She longed to return to the rippling fields and cool, dense forests.

The house they landed on was solid, a classic. A deceased's estate, sure enough, but a great house in every other respect, Edvin told himself. Considerably better than the basement flat they were staying in at Therese's parents' house anyway, which had reeked of soup. The new house had its own smell, he thought, a responsible, warm, homely smell of wood and fabric softener. Like the home of people who have boundaries, yet still regularly say 'I love you' to each other. It smelled clean, but like someone lived there, from the moment they moved in. And that was the most important thing. Houses should be like the people who live in them, Edvin thought. He'd liked how the stairs creaked and groaned, and the sound of the howling wind outside, and the fact that there was a hidden cavity in the wall behind the bookcase. Maybe their kid would use the space to hide their little secrets back there one day. During the summer months, it would be an endless battle fighting back against the weeds that would creep into the garden from the forest, devouring the plants and reclaiming the lawn, but he wasn't bothered about that, really. They were going to plant various berry bushes and grapevines there in the spring. Therese was convinced that it'd be hot enough here in the summer that they would be able to make wine from the grapes and serve it on the deck they were planning on building. He'd promised to construct the deck himself, and he would. Just not right now, not tonight – he had to get some sleep and make sure he was well-rested for a lecture the next day.

Edvin must've been tossing and turning, as Therese asked him what was on his mind. Edvin answered, telling her the truth: that he missed snus. She was proud of him. Quitting those little bags of tobacco was something they'd done together, it had been a milestone for them both, something that proved they were ready. Therese had stopped using snus around the same time she'd had her IUD removed.

She hadn't begun to show yet. They wanted to keep it to themselves for a while anyway. Therese couldn't think of anything worse than going to the shop and bumping into some distant acquaintance who would ask how she was doing, if he'd started kicking yet, and she would have to tell them the bad news and listen to their condolences.

He envisioned the baby growing out of Therese and into her arms, pictured it getting up and walking off into one of the many rooms of the house. It wouldn't be long until the child would be alone in there. Closing the door behind them, so their secrets wouldn't escape through the crack in the door.

'I wonder which one of us he'll take after most,' he said.

'I think he'll be smart,' Therese said. 'Like you.'

'Like me?'

'Yeah. And a little absent-minded, perhaps?'

'Absent-minded? Unlike you then?'

'Correct. But there's not much we can do about that. We'll just have to keep him away from car doors and other potential dangers.'

Therese lay her hand on top of Edvin's.

'Poor hand,' she said.

Once she'd fallen asleep, Edvin eased his hand out from under hers. They somehow looked worse when he was alone, worse in the dark: those two disfigured fingers on his left hand. He hid them beneath the duvet. Whenever his hand got cold, he'd get this hollow sensation like his fingers were being bent backwards, as if the nerve were reliving its trauma. Edvin was over what had happened, but his fingers weren't. He had come to terms with that the fact that this was his hand, and that two of his fingers would always be twelve years old. The first time it had come up in conversation, he hadn't felt ready to explain. That had nothing to do with Therese, mind – she was perfect. It was just too early to bring it all up, and after he had somewhat spontaneously told her he had accidentally got them trapped in a car door, he'd gradually started to feel like that was genuinely what had happened. It was a lie Edvin was comfortable living with.

When he lay in bed like this, listening to her breathing, he would feel this sudden sense of relief, a crystal-clear calm: everything important in his life, that which others blundered around trying to find, was already his. He just had to make sure he managed it correctly.

The wind made joints of the house whine. Edvin could sense this pull toward the forest, through the trees, to the river and its music. Somewhere deep within it, there was a place, dark and cold. A river like that rarely ever froze, Edvin thought. It just keeps flowing.

(...)

The sun rose over Dølgvold. The windows of Kvervel Manor cast the sunlight down into the valley. The dark green vines snaking up the outer wall of the building drank in the sunlight, stretched up toward it. Edvin passed the smoking shelter and nodded good morning to Radovan. He said hi, raising his coffee cup to greet him. Siggen, who had been patrolling the grassy hill, lay on its back in front of Edvin on the path to the entrance. He stroked the cat, until it decided it was done and settled down beside Radovan instead.

Edvin grabbed a cup of coffee and quickly replied to a few emails before heading into the first meeting of the day. Gerd, alongside another woman, shorter and with sharp shoulders, entered the staff room ahead of him. It took him a second before he recognised her from her Teams interview. It was today she was starting. Signe Ljoså. The new psychologist. She stood there, looking for a place to sit. Her gaze swept from one person to the next, greeting his colleagues one by one. She was well-dressed, as you tend to be on your first day at a new job, for those first few weeks even: a white shirt and gold hoop earrings. Hair pulled back in a neat ponytail. Her hands were slender, like the rest of her body. Some people are so transparent, the first time you meet them. Signe was one of those people, Edvin thought. She was new to Dølgvold, just as Edvin had been once. When they eventually greeted each other, it struck Edvin that she looked like a young child on her first day at a new school. Something about the new psychologist's presence in the room reminded him of his mother. The only thing he could put his finger on was that she had a dark mole on her cheek, under her left eye. His mother had had one just like it. She'd occasionally talked about having it removed. But it was pretty, it made her unique. Don't you agree, Edvin? Don't you think it makes Mum pretty unique, too?

'This is Signe,' Gerd said. 'We're so pleased to have another psychologist joining us here. Even though we're very happy with the first one, of course.'

Gerd winked. The others around the table chuckled. Edvin included. Signe smiled knowingly. Perhaps she had realised how difficult it had been to fill the vacancy, and that was why Edvin had been the centre's only psychologist for so long.

He nodded at her, said welcome.

'Thank you,' she replied, and looked around the table again for a seat.

They were all taken. Yngve got up and headed out into the corridor, only to walk back in a moment later with an extra chair. He put it down, pulled it out from the table slightly and gestured to it, as if inviting Signe to sit. She laughed and did so. Edvin thought Yngve was a small clown of

a man, but he wouldn't like to think of himself as someone who thought about people like that. He leant forward to grab the coffee thermos and poured himself a cup.

'You've had a postcard,' Reidar said.

Edvin took the postcard, which had an image of a puppy and a duckling on the front. It was from Leila – admitted to Kvervel last year, she was one of his first patients to complete their treatment. Her handwriting was as messy as always, the style somewhat formal: *I passed my qualification. Thank you for all the help, I couldn't have done it without you. Hope you're doing well, please give my regards to everyone. Best, Leila.*

Edvin put it on the table, writing-side down. He would hang it up on his pinboard after the meeting.

Reidar took over and outlined the day's plans and meetings. Edvin took notes. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Signe open her brand-new planner, probably one bought specially for the occasion. A fresh start.

'And we have a new patient being transferred to us today,' Reidar said. 'So that'll be exciting. He should be arriving around 2 o'clock, Veronica will bring him in.'

Veronica nodded knowingly.

'It *will* be exciting,' she said. 'He's here on court orders.'

'He was approved by the skin of his teeth, apparently,' Reidar said. 'It sounds like he's tried various different kinds of treatment, but nothing's worked. He'll be given one chance here. But the threshold is low, if he doesn't comply, he'll be discharged and sent back to prison. So he'll have to cooperate. But he's well aware of that.'

Reidar glanced down at the day's agenda, he never forgot anything.

'Meeting adjourned,' he concluded.

Signe closed her planner and stood up. Edvin also stood up and made a gesture toward the door, as if to say: after you. He really wasn't himself today.

Back in his office, Edvin hung Leila's card up. There were now two cards up there, next to his list of phone numbers and brochures for the patients' relatives: the other card being one he had received from his colleagues on his birthday. He cracked his neck and logged onto the journal system, studying the list of their current patients.

Everyone was present after the weekend, which wasn't always the case. But he felt like there had been a good atmosphere at the centre recently, that they were really making a

difference. Like with the postcard from Leila. People were able to get on with their lives. Some of them inevitably came back, ending up in the treatment system again, but some were able to put their addictions behind them. Move forward, do something else, something that gave their lives meaning. Some of them turned to Christianity. Some went on to study. Some had children, became adults – perhaps a little late but, at the same time, right on time. But those were just the ones who reached out, of course. At the start of summer, Edvin had come across the obituary of a former patient. Reidar had told him that while it didn't happen often, it was just part of the job.

He read over the weekend report. It had been calm few days. The centre had organised an outing into town on Sunday night to watch a film at the community centre. Three patients had attended. A lot of them had had a bad night's sleep, but that wasn't unusual.

Edvin noticed that the list of incoming patients had increased by one. He skimmed over the names. And then he saw it:

Vestre, Sjur André.

Edvin's whole body turned cold, down to his very core. Sjur André Vestre. To his friends and family: André. The name was a slippery stone at the back of his oral cavity. What were the odds of someone else having the exact same combination of those three names? Sjur, André, Vestre. It had to be him.

Edvin rubbed his face in his hands.

André.

Not him.

Anyone but him.

There was a faint thundering in his ears. He moved the cursor over his name, felt tempted to open the referral and read it. Should he? He resisted the urge – it felt wrong. And wouldn't Edvin's name then be listed on André's journal log? Out of the question. He closed the programme and logged out instead. Keep your distance, he thought. He would follow the guidelines, that was the kind of person Edvin was. For a moment he could hear his own breathing. When he opened the window, he startled two birds perched on the ivy. They set off towards forest and disappeared.

(...)

The clock had just struck two, but patient transfers are always subject to change: there is always a delay, or traffic, or the person starts hesitating. Edvin paced the room, unable to sit still. He couldn't work, but he couldn't just leave either. He couldn't do anything, for all the waiting. He walked in and out of the office, keeping an eye on everything and everyone.

Through the window in the foyer, he watched Veronica make her way to the front doors. Phone in hand. It was happening, now. Soon, He would be here, on the driveway, then in the Manor, in its hallways, its rooms, on the Wi-Fi. Eating a jam sandwich at the lunch table, lifting weights in the gym, smoking in the designated smoking area, shitting the toilet, shaving over the sink. Edvin slipped into the staff kitchen, his hands shaking. He could hear his own helper voice reciting a friendly, evidence-based piece of advice: 'Don't drink coffee when you're fired up and anxious.' He needed something though, especially now that snus was out of the picture. His movements were jerky and clumsy, making him spill coffee all over the counter. He wiped it up, threw the rest down the sink, and put a fresh pot on.

Whenever he'd thought of André, he had pictured him as he was when they were twelve and thirteen years old: that long fringe falling low over his face, the cut above his eye, always an ugly drawing in ballpoint pen, right in the palm of his teenage hand. Either a star or a large swastika outlined in such a way that it looked three-dimensional. As a child, you never had to fully commit to anything, so you could adorn yourself with Nazi symbols for the sake of shock value. You could jump between one and the other, be good one day and cruel the next.

Gravel crunched beneath tires outside. The car rolled onto the driveway and came to a stop.

Out of the car stepped André. He unfolded himself to his full height, and brushed off some crumbs. Perhaps they had stopped at a petrol station somewhere, bought a bun to eat on the way. He stood there, looking around, tilting his head back slightly to fully take in the sight of the Manor towering over him. The flabby skin of his arms and neck was covered in tattoos. He looked older than Edvin knew he was. The helper who had driven him there waved to Veronica, who smiled broadly at André, welcoming him with friendly phrases that Edvin couldn't hear. André took two suitcases out from the boot of the car, as well as a particularly full backpack and some kind of shoebox. Veronica and the helper exchanged a few papers, she signed for something or

other, probably for the pill dispenser and medicines – everything was in order, and so he was now officially enrolled as a patient of Kvervel Manor. André got his e-cigarette out while he waited. He took a few drags and looked around again, at the forest, at the ivy twisting up and across the wall of the manor, at Veronica's body. He could not, under any circumstances, look in Edvin's direction.

Siggen wandered over the grass toward them. André crouched down, his belly sticking out as he did, and stroked the cat, sinking his rough hands into the nape of its neck. It looked like it took a fair deal of effort getting back up, as if he wasn't feeling all that well. Maybe the winding road up to the Manor had made him car sick.

Edvin realised that he was holding onto the counter to support himself. It was quarter-past-two – he glanced over at the calendar on the wall, September 1st, as expected, and he could feel the smooth counter surface against the skin of his palms, his feet inside his shoes, the smell of the staff kitchen – coffee and predictable cleaning. He was thirty-two years old and lived with Therese, whom he loved, in a house he was currently renovating. He was safe. Edvin, you are safe, everything's okay. As he stood there, trying to regulate his breathing, the door opened behind him.

Signe looked at him in astonishment, and Edvin jolted. He spilled coffee over the counter and splashed some on his crotch. Signe apologised.

'No, no, it's not your fault,' Edvin said, reaching for a napkin.

'Everything okay?' she asked. Must've noticed something was up.

In Edvin's opinion, it was always so much worse when someone asked if everything was okay, as if he were being exposed. They must've caught a glimpse that something was off.

'Just in dire need of coffee,' Edvin replied.

'Dependence? Or harmful use?' Signe asked, half-seriously. 'Should I get my diagnosis manual out?'

'Both,' he said.

He poured coffee into the cup with the Dølgvold Municipality logo on it – the best cup to drink from.

'Both,' he repeated, but she didn't hear him.

Signe threw a cleaning cloth over the spot where the coffee had dripped onto the floor. She poured herself a glass of water, slowly, and drank it while she watched Edvin clean up. If she could just leave.

'How would you describe the current group of patients?' she asked.

'A mixture of illegal drug use and alcohol addiction. Both men and women. Often with comorbid mental health conditions, a lot of psychiatric assessments involved,' Edvin said as he continued to clean up and she just stood there. For a psychologist, she had terrible timing.

'It looks like I'll be taking on that new patient, André,' Signe said. 'Would you say he's a typical case?'

'I don't think that's something I'm able to comment on, really,' Edvin said.

'Okay.'

She put the glass in the dishwasher.

'Later then,' she said.

Yeah, *later*, Edvin thought.

Once she had left the room, he moved back to the window. The car was still there, but empty. They must have come in for a tour and to put his things in the right room. They'd probably be telling him things like: It'll be good here, André. Good luck. Take care, now.

And then the helper would get back in the car and drive away, this time without André. If only they could take him with them instead, ask him to get back in the car: André, this isn't right, you have to come back. There's been a mistake. Sorry for being a pain, but we should never have taken that exit on the motorway, we shouldn't have ended up here. And then Edvin could go to the morning meeting tomorrow, and the others would ask: What's going on with that patient, the one that was meant to arrive yesterday? And Gerd would have to answer: The patient isn't coming after all.

And then the problem would be elsewhere. André would be elsewhere, not here, in Edvin's world. And even in dark moments, when he had acknowledged that André did, obviously, exist out there, in the world somewhere, it had felt so unlikely that their two, separate worlds would ever collide. Edvin had been so content living with this arrangement. At times, he felt like he had put all that happened behind him, while at other times, it seemed to seep in through the cracks like some sort of foul-smelling mist. In his early twenties, he'd decided to search for his name on funeral-notices.no – and immediately regretted it. The only result that came up was for an André Vestre, an old captain and humanistic ethicist. This André, André whose first name was actually Sjur, was certainly no humanistic ethicist.

How unpleasant to be the kind of person who stands at kitchen windows spying on people, someone who let themselves search for people on funeral-notices.no. Edvin was someone who

paid attention to what others revealed, without revealing himself. It bothered him: I didn't think you were like that, Edvin. I thought you were better than that.

And yet, he could've gone out there, extended his hand and said: Hello, remember me? No? What about this? Then he could've held those two disfigured fingers of his in André's face, force him to acknowledge them.

But what kind of way would that have been to start someone's treatment? It would've been doomed before he'd even begun. And completely unethical, of course. André would've left immediately, probably, thinking: I can't be here. Wasn't that what Edvin wanted though, really? No – above all, he was a professional, a healthcare professional. He had integrity. It was in both of their best interests that André's treatment went well, that André was able to confront his problem head-on and leave that part of himself in the past.

But Edvin could still remember the caustic stench of the cola, the boy pinned down to the ground. He could remember his own clothes: the charcoal grey hoodie, a pair of shorts and dark trainers, the pine needles clinging to his ankles. The boy, resigned to what was happening, enduring it. His body like coiled rope – the dark spot soaking through his shorts, spreading out, much to the delight of those around him.

But Edvin couldn't think of the coiled rope now, or the stench of cola mingling with urine, pine needles. He had to shake it off, force himself to be in the here and now, at the Manor, in his adult body, safe, over all of that.

There was no one in the hallway. Gustav Kvervel peered down at him from the portrait hanging above the casket. A piercing gaze. Edvin hurried through to the cloakroom and toilets. He switched the light on and caught sight of his own face, pallid beneath the fluorescent light, his own eyes staring back at him in the mirror. His temples glistened with sweat. The water he splashed on his face turned him into a young boy in a cold creek. He could feel those heavy hands on his shoulders, that suffocating sensation as they crept closer to his neck, and the shock of the ice-cold water as it washed over a face held completely still. The paper towel chafed the skin of his face. He said the date and time aloud one more time. He looked down at the porcelain sink, over at the cupboard with the paper towels and soap, up at the flickering ceiling light. It was autumn, he was thirty-two, and he had things in his life that meant something to him.

(...)

Edvin left home earlier than was strictly necessary, both to keep himself busy, and to avoid being at home any longer than he had to be. He parked up. The Manor turrets resembled the fingers of a crippled hand. Like a raised index finger saying: Watch yourself. Think about what you're doing.

The snow had already started to settle on the car park and on Reidar's car, which had been parked there a while. On the gravel path, Edvin caught sight of Signe with her packed lunch in hand. She was standing on the edge of a ditch over by the forest. Realising he was there, she quietly shushed him. There was a fox in the ditch, dishevelled and confused. It was squinting up at them. Signe peeled a slice of brown cheese from one of her sandwiches and rolled it into smaller chunks. With a Snow White hand, she offered one to the fox, who licked at it with its pink tongue. The bush rustled as he darted back to wherever he had emerged from.

'How kind of you, feeding the fox,' Edvin said.

Signe brushed off her hands, rubbing them together to warm them up. He imagined her red-painted nails scratching the letters off his door. It would have to be her or André.

'It looks quite unwell. And thin.'

Edvin waited to gauge her reaction. Signe just snorted. 'I thought it looked pretty lively actually. But I'm no veterinarian.'

'Has André come back?' Edvin asked.

She shook her head.

'Why do you ask?'

'I was wondering if he was mad at me,' Edvin said. 'What with his request for leave being denied.'

'I think it's about something else entirely,' Signe said. 'Why he left, I mean. Shall we go in?'

She shoved her hands in her pockets and started walking. Edvin hurried after, and by the time they were both inside, she'd already started talking to Veronica about the agenda for the day.

He could just check of course. In theory, all members of staff had access to each patient's journal. It was really just Edvin's own integrity stopping him from having a look. Anyway, it'd take a good deal of searching for someone to actually find out. And if, against all odds, they did call him out on it, he could simply say it was a mistake. He hadn't noticed when he clicked on the name, and only realised what had happened when he opened the note in question. Regardless, he was a colleague, a member of the clinical team, he would need a general overview of André's

treatment to be able to give Signe the appropriate advice. He opened the journal, not knowing what would be relevant, and clicked at random, loading one of Signe's André-notes from a few days ago.

The patient spoke of his previous affiliation with a criminal environment. He describes acts of violence as a part of this. He wants to detach himself from said environment, but admits that it has its advantages. When asked what these advantages are, he answers evasively.

Edvin read the passage twice. Criminal environment. Violence. André had talked about interacting with, and being exposed to, a number of sinister characters over the years. People far worse than himself. And that was what Veronica had disclosed too. Edvin pictured André's neck, thick like a bull's, and the tattoo. Maybe he liked the tattoo, liked to display it as a warning. Maybe, when he had the money, he'd try to get it removed. Maybe his social worker was already on it.

Either way, it wouldn't have been a surprise if André had owed someone a favour, or vice versa. He could've taken responsibility for something, for example, said that whatever it was the police had found, was his and his alone, letting his friend walk free while he just added the crime to the concurrent sentence he was now serving. What if he had an outstanding favour he could call in when needed. He could say something like: The only thing standing between me and my son is an old enemy. I need him out of the picture. He has a dog and a wife. Give them a scare.

Edvin was already scared. You only had to do a quick google search to find his address. And he was Dølgvold Municipality's only Edvin. Stop it, he whispered to himself through clenched teeth. You're getting carried away here, stop winding yourself up. He was safe at the centre. He wasn't alone, there were people there, people with him. They were more or less competent people who were capable of thinking clearly and could handle things when the situation required.

What if André was intoxicated when he came back? What if, as a change, he had taken some amphetamine he'd come across? Edvin couldn't be certain. He pictured it. André, on foot, in a fit of rage. Storming through the forest towards them, like a hungry bear, trampling the plants beneath his feet, charging in a direct line towards the house with no need for an actual path.

Edvin drove home early. He parked in the garage and walked back out to the post box at the end of the driveway. Therese's monthly nursing newsletter was in there, alongside a single envelope. Edvin turned it over several times, like you do with a USB stick that just won't go in, but he couldn't

find an address or a stamp. No sender. The envelope was white, with a little plastic window, but that was blank too. He moved his finger along the flap, opening it. Empty.

He had been here. Here, at Edvin's post box. The message was that there was no message, other than: I've been here, and there's nothing you can do about it.

He couldn't relax at home, not even after having taken Zorro on a walk for several kilometres in the cold and sleet. Their house was positioned in such a way that they had a pretty good view of everything going on out front. It was easy to see who was on the road, whether walking or driving. The forest behind them, however – that was another story. The trees all seemed intertwined with one another, like a towering fortress.

Edvin had an idea. He grabbed the baby monitor from its box in the bedroom, put his wellies on and headed out into the garage, to the pile of junk left behind by the previous owner. There were a pair of rusty old skates, chairs with the foam seating falling out. A pair of skis. A hand-plough. And at the back: the fox trap. Edvin tugged it out. The mechanism seemed easy enough to understand, even for Edvin. The teeth were still sharp, had maybe been shiny at one point in time. With a metallic bite, the jaws snapped shut. It wasn't perfect, but at least he was doing something. How good it felt to be dealing with it. If he could just pull himself together, he was the very picture of efficiency.

A short distance into the forest at the back of the house, he found a space that might look like an opening, like an obvious choice for a path through the trees down to their plot. He placed the fox trap on the ground and piled dead leaves and branches over it. He tied the baby monitor to one of the nearby trees. That way, he would hear the moment something or someone walked into the trap.

Is that what he hoped would happen? Was there a part of Edvin that seriously did want to harm André, like André had once harmed him?

Schnitzel with mash and peas, a heavily diluted glass of squash. Edvin sliced and chewed, sliced and chewed. He wolfed his dinner down, not really noticing what it tasted like. Fine, probably.

'What're you thinking about?' Therese asked. 'You're so quiet these days.'

'Patients,' Edvin answered.

'They're lucky,' Therese said, 'to have a psychologist who thinks of them even when they're not at work.'

There was something about the expression on her face that he couldn't quite read – it hadn't been a direct accusation, more like a subtle plea.

While they were both still sitting at the table, a rustling sound came through on the baby monitor. He had put the parent unit on the dresser. Uneasiness clouded Therese's face. She walked into the hallway as if to check for an intruder. Edvin continued eating.

Therese put the baby monitor on the table. It crackled, the display lighting up.

'I can only find this one,' she said. 'Where's the other one? And why is it on?'

Edvin told her about the contraption he'd set up in the forest.

'What for?'

'I just wanted to test it out,' he said. 'Maybe catch the confused fox that's been rummaging around in the bin. It's been getting into the garden from the forest, I've seen it disappear in there.'

'But that's abhorrent,' Therese said. 'That's animal cruelty.'

'We still eat meat, don't we.'

'Yes? All the more reason to think of animals like that differently.'

'Just don't touch it,' Edvin said sternly.

(...)

You're allowed to fantasize. Thoughts don't mean anything, they are what they are. And these were Edvin's thoughts, at night:

It was a fair distance from the bus stop up to Kvervel Manor. If it was late at night and none of the buses were running, the road up from the town felt particularly long. It could get deadly cold out there in the winter too, especially if you'd never been out on a night like that before.

In this particular train of thought, there were no cars on the road, just silence, manifesting as a kind of drunken ringing in André's ears. His heart continued to hurl the blood around his body, with each beat becoming shorter and shorter, his fingers turning white. If a car drove by, he would try to hitch a ride. And maybe someone would drive into the valley and notice an

intoxicated alcoholic. Maybe they would see the tattoo climbing up his neck, that intense gaze. They wouldn't want a person like that in their car. Yes, obviously it was important to help people, but at what cost? No, not someone like that. André knew what he was. But he still felt warm. It was okay, he just needed to take a quick break to gather his strength. He would get to the top, to Kvervel Manor. Awaiting him there would be a hot bowl of broth, a warm shower and a bed, a health check. And how are you feeling? What have you taken? We're so glad you came back. We'll have someone keeping an eye on you overnight, André, so we don't lose you again. Someone who'll make sure you're safe and well, under the circumstances.

All of this was only a few hundred metres away, just under a thousand steps uphill. One at a time. At the top of the hill, he saw the Manor waiting for him. Like a black crown looming over the surrounding hills. The illuminated windows like jewels, a billow of white smoke rising out of the chimneys.

He was close now. The reddish ghost of Gustav Kvervel himself suddenly appeared before him. André started to tremble in disbelief as the Lord of the Manor held out his hand and said: Come, my child. Change *is* possible. Everything will be different.

And then: André collapsed, drunk and exhausted. Just a little rest. Just a little rest right here, on the soft, freshly fallen snow of this surprisingly mild night. He could endure plenty of things. He'd done so many times.

The next day, someone driving a snow-plough discovers a stiff body on the side of the road, half hidden by the snow.

Later that evening, the public authorities leave Kvervel Manor. They do it slowly, without haste. A lantern on the roadside. A flower, a few thoughtful words. By the end of the day, everything out there would be coloured white. It would be as if he had never been here.

(...)

He was awoken by the metallic sound of a baby's cry. He couldn't comprehend what it was at first, just understood that a sharp noise had woken him up. The red light on the baby monitor was flashing. Was it really a baby crying? It had to have been something else. A bird or an animal. But it wasn't crying he could hear now. It was laughter. A child laughing as if they were being tickled, squealing with delight. He turned the machine off, couldn't bear to listen to any more. When he did finally shake the grogginess off, he realised something must be caught in the trap.

He pictured André tossing and turning in his single bed up at the Manor, opening the window, letting the cold air in. He would grab his chair and lower it onto the ground outside, easing himself out, climbing safely down onto it. He had to talk to Edvin, or he'd never get any sleep. A proper talk, just the two of them, no structures, no limits. Just face to face, human to human. That was all. A little, clarifying chat. He would bulldoze his way through the forest, crushing the undergrowth, snapping small twigs beneath his feet, and when the forest did finally open out, he would catch a glimpse of the light coming from Edvin's house. But what he wouldn't have anticipated, was the fact that there would be obstacles along the way. That there were, in fact, still structures in place – even here, in the forest.

Edvin put his all-weather jacket on, slipped his feet into his boots. If he wore his headlamp, he'd be able to see more of the forest, and the reflection in the screen of the baby monitor from a distance. His hands were shaking. He grabbed a bottle of vodka from their globe bar cart and took a swig, to compose himself. Zorro glanced up at him from his bed. Edvin gently ruffled the fur on his neck.

The forest was pitch-black. He swept over the area with the headlight. He had placed the trap somewhere over there. Not all that long ago, but perhaps just in time. The closer he got, the clearer it was that the trap was empty. He brushed a few leaves away. Fingers like frozen chicken wings. The trap was intact, it had not been activated. He tried to recall the sound he had heard: that combination of laughing and wailing. Could the baby monitor pick up signals from another unit's frequency?

He turned back to look at the house. The only light coming from the one above the front door. Therese was in there, sleeping, alone.

(...)

This must be what people meant when they talked about 'a moment of clarity'. Those few seconds like a soothing solar eclipse. Fleeting, but enough. It would be uncomfortable, but that didn't matter – it was already uncomfortable. I'll talk to him tomorrow, Edvin thought. Properly.