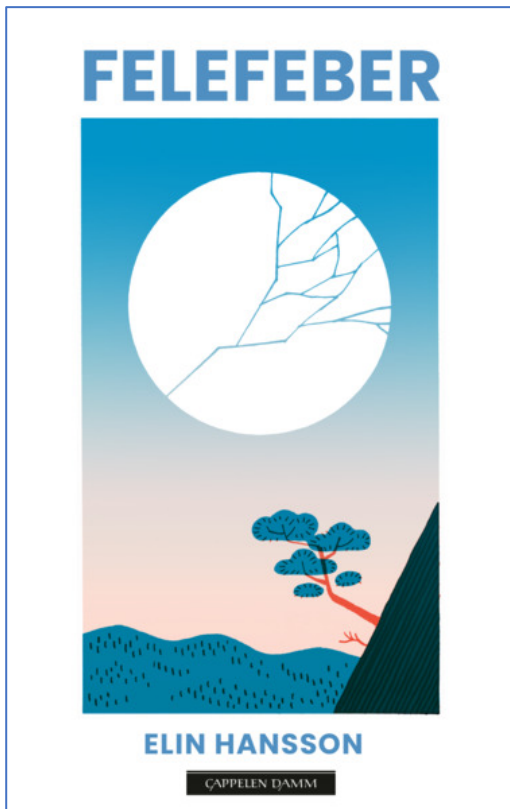


Cappelen Damm Agency *Spring 2023*



Torleif plays the harding fiddle, goes to high school and lives at a boarding school. He's not been to his home village since his mother died two years ago. He's found new friends at school and made his own family. Then his grandfather suffers a stroke, and Torleif has to go home for autumn break to help him.

His father and brother are quiet men who are mainly interested in hunting. Torleif has never told them that he is gay. He's not told anyone else in the village either, and he particularly doesn't want the old gang of friends, led by Stig-Rune, to know. But then Torleif meets fellow harding fiddle player Horimyo, and all the unsaid things begin to bubble up to the surface.

Fiddle Fever is a story of music and love. About family, and daring to be oneself.

NORLA SELECTED TITLE SPRING 2023

Fiddle Fever

foreignrights@cappelendamm.no
www.cappelendammagency.no

Fiddle Fever
Elin Hansson

CAPPELEN DAMM AGENCY

Elin Hansson

b. 1985

Elin Hansson (b. 1985) made her debut in 2019 with the children's book *Pencil Heart*, which was nominated for ARK Children's Book Prize and Bokslukerprisen (Middle grade award). Elin lives at a small farm in the Norwegian countryside, and has previously worked as a photographer. She's played the harding fiddle since she was ten years old.



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Synopsis

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Torleif left his home village (Fittlausbygdi aka Cunnigone Valley) after his mother died of cancer two years ago. Since then, he's been studying folk music at a college in a larger town, where he has made new friends (Kim and Rada) and has dared to come out as gay. His great goal in life is to win a place at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo. But when his grandfather (Grandad) has a stroke Torleif is the only person who can help him, so he has to go home for the autumn break.

Back home, things are pretty much the same as ever. The first person Torleif meets when he gets off the bus is the homophobic father of his schoolmate, Stig-Rune. Torleif's father (the old man) and big brother (Tallak) are silent men. All they're interested in is elk-hunting and keeping themselves to themselves. But Grandad is pleased to see Torleif. Grandad is a Hardanger fiddle-maker, which is a family tradition, and now that Torleif has come home again at last, Grandad presents him with the Best Fiddle – a really special fiddle that his great-grandfather made and won a prize for.

The first day Torleif is back home, his Grandad sends him to the Folk High School (the Academy) to deliver a Hardanger fiddle to a guest teacher at the school. Torleif's old teacher Anne is working at the Academy and introduces Torleif to the Japanese guest teacher, Horimyo. Torleif falls head over heels in love with him, but when Horimyo plays a tune called Fiddle Fever on the fiddle, Torleif starts to cry. He hasn't heard it since his mother's funeral – and in his desperation he runs down to the river. It becomes clear to the reader that this place is very significant for Torleif, but not why.

Tallak calls: Grandad has fallen over in the bathroom and Torleif has to come home. Back at the farm, Torleif can't stop thinking about Horimyo. The next day, he meets one of his old childhood friends at the shop and is invited out to the local pub, Stabburet, where the rest of their old gang will be meeting up. Torleif is dubious because Stig-Rune is part of that gang and he's mean. And what if Horimyo suddenly turned up? None of Torleif's old friends know he's gay. But he feels a tremendous need to explain his behaviour to Horimyo and, after talking things over properly with Kim and Rada, he ends up going to Stabburet.

When he meets his old friends at the pub, it turns out they think he's got himself a girlfriend because his father has lied about why his son wasn't home for Christmas. Instead of telling the truth, Torleif gets blind drunk and before he knows it, he finds himself at an afterparty in the basement den at

Stig Rune's house. There he saves two young girls from a situation he thinks might end in them being assaulted by Stig-Rune by offering to share his taxi home with them.

The next day, Anne calls Torleif. She has broken her wrist and wonders if he can stand in as her replacement until she finds a permanent solution. Torleif is dreading it. His main job will be to arrange a folk music evening at Stabburet the following Friday, but because he doesn't feel he can say no to Anne and because he wants to see Horimyo again, he says yes.

On Monday, Torleif turns up at the Academy and starts teaching. In the lunch break he meets Horimyo, who asks if Torleif can take him to visit Grandad because he wants to ask him something about the Hardanger fiddle he has borrowed. As they walk together through the woods to Grandad's, Horimyo talks about the kintsugi course he is teaching at the Academy, and Torleif falls for him even more. It doesn't help that Grandad thinks Horimyo is "a splendid chap."

The more time Torleif spends with Horimyo, the more in love he becomes. When he and Horimyo are setting up for the folk music evening on Thursday, Torleif tells Horimyo his whole story, about the death of his mother, and reveals to both Horimyo and the reader that he tried to take his own life on the rock in the river that same spring. Horimyo listens to Torleif and then kisses him. But their joy is short-lived, because just then, they hear a clattering out in the car park and Torleif isn't sure whether anyone saw them. But he soon forgets everything else and just spends as much time as he possibly can with Horimyo before the next day's concert.

However, it turns out that Stig-Rune saw them kissing and at the folk music evening on Friday, he gives away the secret, shouting out "Torleif's a poof!" loud enough for everyone to hear.

But instead of admitting it and standing up for who he is, Torleif chickens out and says Stig-Rune is lying – claiming that he's just jealous because Torleif ran off with two of his girls. To make matters worse, he pretends to be involved with Wilhelmina, one of the girls he has been teaching for the past week, who has also indicated that she's interested in him. Stig-Rune is furious and repeats that he saw Torleif kissing Horimyo. Tallak punches him and Stig-Rune responds by smashing the Best Fiddle. The precious fiddle Torleif was given by Grandad, which has been in the family for several generations, is in splinters. Amid all the chaos, Torleif tries to find Horimyo, but he's gone. Torleif runs over to the little log cabin where Horimyo is staying but no one opens the door when he knocks.

The next day, Torleif and Grandad take a look at the damage, but instead of being angry, Grand opens up about how he felt after Torleif's grandmother, Grandma, died. And he lets Torleif know that

he loves him whether he's homosexual or hetero. Torleif is relieved that Grandad at least knows he's gay.

When he gets back to town, Torleif is confronted by Rada and Kim about his failure to come out as gay in the village. Rada thinks he's behaved like a jerk to Horimyo – and especially to Wilhelmina. Torleif is tired and sad and when he gets a terrible cold he takes the opportunity to withdraw from his friends and go into isolation. Negative thoughts churn around and around in his head. He thinks a lot about his suicide attempt the summer before college.

After Torleif has been off school for a week, his teacher Vegard contacts him, suggesting that he should see the college nurse. That same day, Anne comes for a surprise visit and Torleif opens up about how he's been lately. Anne thinks it's odd that he hasn't shared more with his friends and encourages him to do so. Torleif does as she suggests. Rada and Kim realise that the trip home might have been on the tough side but they both agree that Torleif should send apologies to Horimyo and Wilhelmina. Wilhelmina ignores his message. But Horimyo replies somewhat ambiguously that he no longer wishes to live a life "in the shadows."

When Anne invites Torleif to come to the last folk music evening before Christmas, Kim thinks it's time for Torleif to show Horimyo and the rest of the village who he really is. Torleif decides to play Fiddle Fever, the tune that sings in his heart, and dedicate it to Horimyo. Torleif tells Anne to keep it a secret that he's coming home. He wants it to be a surprise. Torleif, Rada and Kim go to Cunnigone Valley together. But things don't go quite to plan. Stabburet has a new lighting system and when it's Torleif's turn to go on stage, he's blinded by the spotlight. So he doesn't see that Horimyo isn't in the audience and nor does he see that his old man and Tallak are there with their whole hunting crew. Torleif declares his love and plays the tune, but when the lights go up, he sees Tallak storm out, and his old man looks like a deer caught in the headlights. Horimyo is nowhere to be seen.

Torleif runs, but his old man stops him by the door. He has an inscrutable look in his eyes, and begins to say something, but Torleif doesn't stay to hear what he has to say, he just wants out and away. Tallak is in the car park, in the middle of an argument with his new girlfriend. She's angry about the way Tallak dealt with the news about Torleif. Tallak says: "It's fine for you to be a homo, yeah? But do you have to go around shouting about it?"

Finally, Torleif manages to stand up for himself and his brother leaves Stabburet. Just then, Grandad's old car comes skidding into the car park. Out of the passenger seat jumps Horimyo, holding

the fiddle case containing the Best Fiddle. He was watching a live stream of the folk music evening at Stabburet, so he did see Torleif's performance after all.

Horimyo has a surprise for Torleif too: over the past month, he and Grandad have been working together to repair the Best Fiddle, and now it's good as new again. Even better, in fact, because Horimyo has redrawn some of the decorations on the back of the fiddle that had worn away after years of use.

The book ends with Torleif asking Horimyo to dance with him at Stabburet in front of the whole village.

Translated Extract

Fiddle Fever

By

Elin Hansson

Translation by Lucy Moffatt

This translation has received a support grant from NORLA.

It's bingo and bubbly night at Kåre's. Kim and Rada sit with their scorecards and felt marker pens at the ready. I smile to myself. It's become a kind of a tradition for us to hang out here on Wednesdays and watch the bingo caller getting more and more tipsy with every round. The smell of the waffles they serve at the student pub earlier in the day mingles with the aroma of mango IPA and for some reason I find myself thinking of that dance tune, Knepphalling – because it feels just like something's jumping and crackling inside me, a sort of bubbling anticipation, as if something great is about to happen.

“So, we all have our travel plans for the autumn break sorted, right?” yells Kim.

I nod.

“Staying at our rooms here until Thursday and then spa-o-rama with my Ma the last weekend?”

“You two may be staying here,” Rada says, rolling her eyes. “But I have seven-day date with Philip.”

Philip is her giant forest cat. At Easter he was even bigger than when I first met him one Christmas getting on for two years ago. Rada's Bosnian grandmother “Bako” moaned endlessly about that cat. She thought it was a crazy idea to give the animal food inside instead of sending it outside to hunt for mice the way her cats used to.

The loudspeaker crackles and the bingo caller, dressed today in a pretty convincing Elvis outfit, peers out over the hall.

“Hello,” he says, pitching his voice artificially low.

Rada giggles.

Then he spins the little wheel around and picks out a red ball.

“Ladies and gentleman, we’re up and running! B-12! That’s B for “Blue Hawaii” and twelve.”

Rada and Kim pore over their scorecards.

The velvety voice of the real Elvis seeps out of the loudspeakers. I see at once that there’s a number twelve in the bottom left-hand corner of my scorecard and dab it with my felt marker. Maybe I’ll win tonight. The idea sets me thinking about that Monday in autumn break two years back. Suddenly it was just the three of us in the canteen. We looked at each other and laughed. It was the first time I’d laughed for as long as I could remember. The same evening, we ended up in Kim’s room stuffing ourselves with cheese puffs and watching a Netflix documentary about Dolly Parton, and I remember it felt like I’d won the lottery. Neither of them asked me why I hadn’t gone home for the break. And I never asked them either. It’s a kind of pact between us: We never talk about crap from the past.

“You lucky pig,” Rada says, nudging me.

“B-63,” says the bingo caller. “B for ‘Blue Suede Shoes.’ And 63 for the year I filmed *Viva Las Vegas*.”

Rada and I both have the number on our scorecard this time. Kim tugs his red curls.

“Ugh!” he says. “I never win this stupid game!”

Rada laughs loudly and gives him a hug.

“Focus on the autumn break instead. Just picture it: you and Torleif at the spa with your mum – and with any luck you’ll find someone to flirt with on Tinder and everything will be fine again.”

She delivers this last comment with a touch of irony that only I notice. Because no one in the world falls in love as often as Kim. In the two years I’ve known him, he’s fallen for everyone from a waiter on the Denmark ferry to a super-straight glacier guide in the Jotunheim Mountains. And me too, of course. But we soon found out *that* didn’t work.

“Thanks, Rada,” he says and smiles again.

“B-69, ‘ladies,’” says the bingo caller, taking a sip from his umbrella drink.

“Yessss – at last!” Kim yells, dabbing a square with his felt marker.

The bingo caller raises his glass in the direction of our table.

Kim winks at him and takes a generous gulp of beer.

“I’m going to ask him for a dance in the interval,” he says with a grin.

If there’s one thing I love about Kim, it’s his self-confidence. He’s never scared he’ll make a twit of himself. It’s just about possible I might get around to asking out someone I liked here in town – if I ever

found anyone – but that would never happen at home. The thought of Cunnigone Valley makes me shudder. Apart from Grandad and his fiddle-making workshop, I don't miss a single thing about the valley. My heart gives a little quiver when I think about Grandad. As if I've tightened the hair on my bow too much and the stick is at breaking point. I don't know why, but for the past week his name seems to have kept coming up all the time. I shake my head, trying to focus on the game. But then the same thing as always happens: someone on the table next to ours shouts Full House long before I've filled in even half my scorecard.

Then Kim walks out onto the dancefloor and asks the bingo caller for a dance as Rada and I look on.

"Is Philip the only one you'll be hanging out with or will anyone else be back home for the holidays?" I ask.

Rada shakes her head. I know she had a thing with some guy last summer but I never dared ask too much about it.

"How about you?" Rada says, fixing me with her brown eyes. "Planning on having a little fling with a masseur?"

I laugh. Loudly.

"Naaaah – that's not really my style."

We watch Kim, who's slung his arm around the Elvis impersonator and is waltzing past us.

"You're just waiting for the right...?"

"Something like that," I say.

She nods. Takes a sip of her beer.

"Well, don't wait too long, okay?" she says, downing the rest of her drink in one. "You know what they say: Be the way you are if you ain't turned out the way you should've."

She turns away and walks towards the bar. God, Rada must be *really* drunk, I think. At least, that's the only reason I can think of why she'd suddenly start doling out pearls of wisdom from the Ole Ivars dance band of all people. And why would I need a guy now anyway? It's the last year of college, I've got insane amounts of schoolwork and I just HAVE to make it into the Norwegian Academy of Music – there's no other option. I simply don't have time to think about anything except my fiddle right now. End of story.

That night, I dream I'm playing in a fiddling competition. But the tune that comes out of my fiddle is different from usual. The notes ripple out of it. They tumble. They rage. They roar like Hell Falls during spring flood. My fiddle sings in a way I can't remember it ever doing before. When the dance tune's over, I look down at the instrument. I see it straight away: I'm playing the Best Fiddle that once belonged to great-grandfather. The one Grandad keeps out on top of the bureau in case someone special comes to visit.

The vibration of my smartphone wakes me up. I sigh. I'd have liked to spend more time in that dream. But the telephone buzzes away on the floor. I roll over and pick it up.

It's my old man.

Damn.

It's not like I don't speak to him. God, no. We talk on the phone every week. Six o'clock on the dot every Sunday. After supper. Before the evening news. Regardless of whether he's at sea or at home. That's when he calls me. End of story. So I know something has to be seriously wrong for him to be calling me now.

"Yeah?" I say.

"It's Grandad," he says.

I sit up quickly in bed.

My heart is hammering.

"Oh?"

"Tallak found 'un on Monday. He'd jus' stopped by to pick up the Krag."

Monday, I think. Why the hell didn't they call me before? But I don't say anything, just listen to my old man's monotonous voice.

"First off, we thought he'd jus' had a drop too much to drink, know what I mean?"

I nod.

My heart is pounding.

"But then he were fair muddle-headed. We couldn' seem to get through to 'un. So Tallak called the ambulance."

I keep quiet.

"It were a stroke."

"Oh," I say again.

I can't think of anything more sensible to say, try to breathe as normally as possible.

"Luckily, they managed to treat 'un in time."

My old man hawks at the other end of the line. Like an old rooster clearing its gizzard. I don't see why he couldn't have done it before calling me. It's so disgusting. And somehow, the sound feels even closer over the telephone line than when he stands over the kitchen sink every morning after the first cigarette of the day.

"Yeah?" I say.

Because I'm guessing he's after something else. My old man never calls unless he wants something.

"But now he wants to come home, see" he says.

I wait.

"It's jus' tha' hunting season starts on Saturday."

He gives a short laugh.

I should have known when he mentioned the rifle, the Krag.

My old man's whole world revolves around the hunting season. First reindeer hunting up in the mountains in early August. And now the village elk hunt. I almost burst out laughing. But I pull myself together. I still don't get why he's calling me.

So I ask.

"But what do you want me to do?"

"Someone'll need to look after 'un," he says. "They'll not let 'un out 'less we've someone to look after 'un, Tøllef."

A shudder runs through my body.

No one has called me Tøllef since I left. In town, at school and in the student apartments everyone calls me Torleif, stressing the r and the f. Just like they used to on the radio when I was little, when they played one of Grandad's dance tunes on *Folk Music Hour*. "...Torleif Nystøyl's version." And I remember how proud I used to be that I was the one named after him. Not Tallak.

I sigh. I know I don't have any choice.

"He's champion now," my old man continues. "Jus' a tad unsteady, is all. But he's talking, he's his same owd self. He were askin' after you."

I picture Grandad's big grey-blue eyes.

“How long?” I ask. To distract my head from all the thoughts that are suddenly forcing their way in.

“Jus’ the autumn holiday week. A district nurse’ll stop by mornings and evenings. And some woman or another from the council, an ergo-physio-whatnot. She’ll come by on the Monday.”

“Okay,” I say. “But I need to check with Vegard if I can leave. We’re in the middle of a project right now.”

That’s a lie.

I’ve just handed in a project on my main instrument. I even sent the multidisciplinary report about composition, fiddle tradition and music history to Vegard yesterday. But there’s something about my old man that makes my hackles rise. I can’t ever just give him what he wants. Not without resistance. Maybe it’s because I’ve never had anything from him for free. So every little favour is a kind of payback.

“Send us a message once you know,” he answers curtly. “I’m off for a turn around the woods.”

“Okay,” I say. “Bye.”

But he’s already hung up.

I shower. Make myself some porridge in my room but can’t force it down. All I can picture is Grandad lying in the hospital. Grandad pressed down into a little metal bed with the sheet wrapped around him like a strait jacket. Grandad pottering barefoot across a linoleum floor. Grandad sitting by a window, feeling homesick. He’s happiest in his workshop, is Grandad. Glasses perched on his nose as he draws ink decorations on a Hardanger fiddle. That’s where he belongs.

The first class on Thursday is Norwegian with Astrid, as usual. Kim must be bunking off because his place is empty. I try to focus, but Astrid’s words turn into mush. When the bell rings for lunchbreak at last, I run over to the park by the lake where we usually meet up. I find them straight away and hurl myself down on the picnic blanket.

“Uuuuugh,” I say, putting my hands over my ears.

“Whassup?” Rada asks.

Kim gives my shoulder a shove.

I half sit up.

“Grandad’s had a stroke,” I say. “My old man called.”

“Oh no!”

Rada puts a hand on my shin.

“Is your grandfather doing okay?”

“God, yeah,” I say and try to laugh. But the nagging feeling in my stomach stops me. It feels like something’s starting to grow in there. “But my old man wants me to come home over the holidays to help him out.”

“What?” Kim says, pushing his sunglasses up onto his forehead. “What about our spa break?!”

Rada fixes a stern brown gaze on him.

“And you?” she says. “What do you want?”

Rada looks at me intensely.

“I don’t know!” I say, getting up. “Or yeah, I do know. I swore I’d never go back to that hell hole again – Cunnigone Valley. Even the name’s an insult.”

Kim laughs.

“But it’s your Grandad, isn’t it?” he says.

I nod, turning towards the lake. It’s smooth as a mirror. Not a ripple on its surface.

“No one there knows,” I say softly.

“Huh?” Kim says.

Then I turn towards them.

“No one in the village knows I’m gay.”

“Ah,” Rada says.

“I know,” I say.

“Yeah, but HELLOOO,” almost yelling, Kim jumps up from the blanket. “This is the perfect opportunity to show them thar hillbillies who you REALLY are. Ladies and Gentleman: The Fabulous Torleif Tjønnsstaul.”

“There ain’t no gentlemen up there, that’s for sure” I say laughing drily.

“Shit,” Rada says, holding up her phone. “Next class starts in five.”

So we go back to school.

Luckily the last two hours on Thursdays are for independent study on your main instrument. I drop by my room to pick up my fiddle case. All the best rehearsal rooms have been taken of course, so I’m stuck with the corner room that always stinks of onions. But that doesn’t matter today. I think about what my

old man said as I take my fiddle out of its case. The dragon's head looks at me quizzically. Was it really Tallak who found Grandad when he was looking for the rifle?

I peer through to the little hole into the peg box where the strings are attached beneath the dragon's head. The only things a Hardanger fiddle and a rifle have in common are the sights, I think. The tiny hole up there is identical to the square sight hole on the Krag rifle. Or at any rate, on the rifle Grandad keeps in the gun locker behind the john. I only tried it once. Tallak lined up some tin cans along the edge of the field. Then I fired. One shot. Another. I didn't like a single thing about it: not the smell of gunpowder and wet clay. Not the recoil against my shoulder. Not the sound of a bullet hitting the target. Metal on metal. Clack-clack. Clack-clack.

But Tallak carried on. Walking back and forth between the edge of the field and the rifle.

I went inside.

Sat right up close to the stove. Listened to Grandad playing fiddle. And the faint clacks from Tallak and the Krag became part of the tune.

I tune my fiddle but can't seem to play. I picture Grandad's big grey-blue eyes. His big warm hands. Fuck it. It's Grandad, after all. I take my phone out of my coat pocket, open the bus app and look up the timetable to the mountain lodge. There's an express bus leaving in half an hour.

I swallow.

Put my fiddle back in its case.

Run back to my room.

Chuck every clean piece of clothing I can lay my hands on into my bag, sling my fiddle case onto my back and walk with rapid steps to the bus stop.