

EN HIMMEL FULL AV SKYER

(A Sky Full of Clouds)

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(Extract pp. 5-19)

1

A GREAT DAY

I run so fast that go-faster-stripes stream out behind me. That's just what happens when you know: today is going to be a great day. I can tell it's going to be a perfect day, even as I'm running: I drop my mobile phone, but manage to catch it again while it's still in the air. A cyclist comes straight towards me but at the last moment swerves to avoid a head-on collision and crashes into a nearby garden. I find an unopened packet of sweets on the ground. I slip on some dirt, but manage not to break a leg or crack open my skull when I fall on my back.

What's not to like about days like that?

Ok, so I'm a bit sweaty and out of breath. My bum hurts after my fall. But it could have been so much worse: bad breaks, poisoned sweets or a smashed phone.

As soon as the building comes into sight, I spot a person pacing up and down outside. Purple sweater, blue trousers, yellow scarf. Not many people are as colourful as my mum.

I give it my all on the final stretch, even though I'm exhausted. Yikes, just managed to avoid that hole. I give a taxi a wide-berth in case the driver decides to accelerate.

'Henrik, no detours now. We're late!' Mum shouts.

I decide not to use the parked bikes as an obstacle course and hurry over to her. She looks like she's swallowed a toad.

'Honestly, Henrik, if you'd got in the car with me, you would have been here twenty minutes ago,' she says, all red in the face.

‘If you’d got yourself an electric car instead of that diesel guzzler, then I would have got in the car. But instead I got some exercise.’

‘Come on, the doctor’s waiting.’

Mum grabs me by the arm and pulls me into the hospital. I know exactly where we’re going, because I know the place like the back of my hand, as they say. Mum goes the wrong way down a corridor, and now it’s me who pulls her back and says the doctor’s office is *this way*. When we get there, Mum is about to knock on the door, but I stopped doing that long ago. The doctor stands up when we barge in. He smooths down his doctor’s coat, as if it were full of crumbs.

‘Oh, come in, come in,’ he says, and waves a hand at two empty chairs.

‘Sorry that we’re late,’ Mum says. ‘There are several reasons...’

‘Not a problem,’ the doctor says. ‘Not a problem at all.’

He’s normally quite slow and gloomy, but today he’s bright and cheerful, so that must be a good sign. After he’s given me the good news, I’ll go for another run. It’s like my body is fizzing with energy.

‘Good to have you here, Henrik,’ he says. ‘You’re looking very well. Good colour in your cheeks and... nice clothes.’

I look down at my sweater and trousers. The doctor’s never shown any interest in my clothes before. Maybe something special has happened in his life. Maybe he’s got a puppy or won the raffle at work?

‘Have you had your hair cut?’ he asks.

Why all this attention to my appearance?

‘Eh, no.’

‘Right. Well, it’s very cool. Suits you.’

‘You’ve done another scan, haven’t you?’ Mum says, without warning.

‘Yes, indeed. As you know, we did another scan to see if your treatment had got rid of the cancer. Sorry, I think I need a drink of water. Would you like some?’

He grabs one of the plastic cups. It’s usually good to have some water after a run, but I just want to get this over and done with, so I shake my head. Mum does the same.

‘Water is good for the body. In fact, a child’s body is seventy-seven per cent water. Incredible, isn’t it? But anyway... goodness, I’m talking rubbish...’

The doctor takes another drink of water, and keeps the plastic cup to his mouth for some time. Is he drinking or just keeping the cup there? Eventually he puts it down and takes a deep breath.

‘The thing is that... I’m not very good at things like this. So, as you know, your treatment included radiotherapy, Vincristine and Prednisolon...which you know, are supposed to kill all cancer. Only... well, that hasn’t happened.’

‘Do I have to have more treatment?’

‘The cancer has spread.’

‘So, does that mean I have to have even more treatment?’

‘You’re only eleven years old – this is so unfair. I just wish I had better news to tell you.’

‘What are you saying?’ Mum explodes.

But he doesn’t need to answer. All too fast, a great day becomes a really bad day. Children died all the time in the old days, but now practically no one dies because the doctors are so good. The medicines are much better. The hospitals are clean. So really, I’m lucky to be living now. Even though it perhaps means that I’m particularly unlucky as well. Because I understand what the doctor is trying to tell us.

‘The truth is... well... here, have a tissue.’

He offers Mum a tissue. She stares at him horrified. I stare at the tissue. They must produce enormous amounts of tissues for there to be enough for everyone to blow their nose, dry their tears and wipe their fingers. They could of course use a cloth instead, the kind that you can rinse out afterwards. If you put it in the washing machine, the washing powder will pollute the water. It does no one any harm to share a bit of snot and tears.

‘We hoped so much that you would be clean. But well... the opposite is true. That’s the worst thing about this job... oh, sorry.’

The doctor keeps offering her the tissue. To think that entire forests have been chopped down because people can’t stop crying in doctor’s surgeries. I can’t take my eyes off the tissue. And then all of a sudden, it’s as if my mind has never been clearer.

‘But... but... but... how long are we talking about?’ Mum asks, her voice choked with tears.

‘We don’t know. Perhaps a year. Hopefully more. It’s simply not possible to...’

‘A year?’ Mum says. ‘One year?’

‘I’m sorry...’

I realise I’m going to be busy. Very busy. And people who are busy can’t just sit around twiddling their thumbs. I stand up quickly.

‘You can’t just tell me that my boy’s going to... to... I can’t even say it,’ Mum sobbed. She takes the tissue. That does it.

I run out of the office, along the corridor and down the stairs. I pick up speed once I'm outside. I think I hear someone calling my name behind me, but if I turn round now, I'll only regret it. It's as though my lungs expand when I run. My breath is like fire in my throat. New muscles grow in my body.

I know where I'm going. I cross two roads, run along a path, through three garden and a small woods. My pace gets slower towards the end. The fire in my body is like a wildfire that can't be put out.

Then there I am. Tall grasses lean towards me. Colourful flowers cover the ground. Heather and moss. An open, grassy area surrounded by green trees. Above me, dark clouds. A sluggish gust of wind tugs at my damp fringe.

'I am going to save the world!'

My throat burns when I shout. I lie down on wet grass and look up at the dark sky. The sun will never break through today. There's a little wind, just enough to dry me. And the ground is soft. I have my head on a cushion of moss. I don't get up for a long time.

'I'm going to save the world.' I whisper it this time.

I just knew it: today was going to be a great day.

2

THE GOOD THING ABOUT FIGHTING

I wrestle with Bredo. He thrashes me, I thrash him, and every now and then we laugh. What he has in strength, I make up for in speed, so it's really hard to get a good grip on either of us. One moment I have him in a deadly headlock, the next my face is being crushed to the floor. Afterwards, we lie side by side, exhausted, on his bed.

'I was being nice because you've been ill,' he said.

'Right! If I hadn't been running today you'd be cowering in that corner over there saying *please, please, Henrik, no more, please, I'll lick your shoes clean if that's what you want.*'

'I'd rather eat worms for a week than lick your shoes.'

'You're just saying that because you love worms. I've seen you sneak a couple of fat ones into your packed lunch.'

‘And I’ve seen you licking your shoes every morning. That’s why your tongue is so black.’

Bredo is my best friend, and I think we can talk about more or less anything. Sometimes we even chat about boring things. He’s also my brother, and two years older, so every now and then says things that are quite wise, I think. He was pleased when I said I was going to save the world, and asked me straightaway how I was going to do it. I explained to him that it was better to have a goal than no goal at all, but that didn’t stop him pressing me. At least it meant I didn’t have to tell him what the doctor said. I’ll wait for the right time to tell him later. Maybe when he’s doing something else and not listening properly.

‘Do you want another beating?’ I ask.

‘Nah, not today.’

‘Well, I owe you a thrashing tomorrow then.’

‘Ha, I’ll rearrange your face for you.’

‘And I’ll make your legs bend the wrong way.’

We can go on like this for ages, describing tomorrow’s violence. We stop abruptly when Mum appears in the doorway. The skin on her face hangs heavy and she’s not taken off her coat or shoes.

‘You... you just left,’ she said, in a voice that was so thin that you’d think she sucked on a helium balloon.

‘I won’t disappear,’ I said.

‘But that’s exactly – oh, I can’t even think about it...’

Mum turns and leaves.

‘What’s up with her?’ Bredo asks.

‘Maybe she’s angry because I didn’t want to go in the diesel-guzzler.’

‘She’s like that because of... the car?’

‘Sure you don’t want another fight?’

‘It wasn’t just the car, was it?’

‘Can I just say, no comment?’

It only takes three minutes before Bredo knows. Even Dad, who’s gone somewhere way up north to be a fisherman like his father and grandfather before him, finds out soon enough and wants to talk to me on the phone.

But I don’t have time. Because I have important things to plan. We’re actually incredibly lucky to have found a planet that isn’t uninhabitable, like all the other planets in the solar systems we know. Lots of different kinds of plants and trees grow here, and billions

of animals and insects and micro-organisms, and we have evolved from amoebas to apes to human beings who can talk, ride bikes and invent mobile phones. But now that we're finally as smart as we are, we've started to pollute it all by making things like cars and airplanes. We build factories that fill the air with poison, chop down the rainforests and dump our rubbish in the ocean. Even though everyone agrees that it's a really stupid idea to destroy the only planet we have, almost nobody is doing anything about it. Makes you wonder if there's a flaw in our ever-so-smart brains.

Every second someone on this planet dies. Some are knocked down by a bus or fall off a cliff, others are just old and worn out. But lots of people die from pollution. Have I got lymphoma because I'm extremely unlucky? Or is it because my body is so full of all sorts of things that my cells have run amok, and some of them are now properly evil? Do these baddies thrive on poor air quality, poison in the food chain and plastic in the water? The worst thing is that no one knows. So we just carry on and pray that it's not the case.

There's a war going on inside me. And I'm losing the battle. For a moment, I think how lucky I am that I won't live to experience the sun getting too strong, the air too polluted and the sea too high. But you can't think like that, because that's exactly what too many people have done for too long. Which is why we are where we are today. At the edge of a cliff. Our heads almost under water. On our way to the barbecue. We don't have time to wait for the politicians with their love of long meetings and agreements written on paper that practically no one reads. I very definitely don't have time to wait for those laggards. My clock is ticking super-fast, but they do say that the busiest people get the most done.

There's no harm in hoping.

Having such big thoughts exhausts me. Just like Bredo's questions exhaust me. Even though he said otherwise last week, he doesn't actually want to be an only child. He doesn't need two rooms, and my clothes are too small for him. He'll be bored to death without his little brother around to annoy him, and Mum will be even sadder when her other child dies of boredom.

'I'm not going to kick the bucket tomorrow,' I say, when he comes and stands in the doorway to my room.

'But maybe next week?'

'The plan is to wait as long as possible.'

'But... don't you think... about the fact that you soon won't be here?'

'Well, if the planet is destroyed in the next five or fifty years, it doesn't really matter that I soon won't be here. But you might live to see the world becoming a desert or a

snowball, or you might get a beach in your bedroom. And thinking you can always move to Mars won't help, because that only happens in films.'

'And you're going to stop all these terrible things from happening?'

'If everyone had done something, then I could just lie down and die. But I don't need to. So that's a good thing, isn't it? In fact, I'm really rather glad. Because now I know what to do with the rest of my life. Most of the people we know don't even have a plan between them. It feels like going to see the doctor today made me a bit wiser.'

'I think only stupid people aren't sad when they find out that they're... well, you know...'

'Hang up? Pull out the plug? Go the eternal hunting grounds? Just say it like it is. I'm going to die. And so are you. But neither of us is going to die today. It's quite possible that what I'm saying sounds stupid, but it's pretty smart as well.'

'So, either you're smart to be someone so stupid, or stupid to be someone so smart?'

'I'm like a tightrope walker who never falls.'

'Sometimes I have no idea what you're talking about.'

'It's hard to believe you're two years older than me.'

'Well, I'm upset about it,' he says, and leaves.

I take down the calendar that's hanging on my wall. Then I get out a big piece of paper and draw a line in the top left-hand corner. This is my new calendar. Tomorrow will be Day Two and in a year, it will be Day 365. And I will continue to count. It's possible I won't need any more paper. It's there to remind me how little time I have left. In fact, I should really divide each day up into minutes to get the most out of the day, but that would take too much time. I'll have to focus on sleeping less.

And there's something I have to tell my mum. She's sitting in the kitchen with some kitchen roll, crying.

'I want to stop going to school,' I say.

'You want...? Oh yes...but... Fine, if that's what you want. But only if it's legal.'

'You know I can do things that aren't legal now and get away with it?'

'Henrik, you've always had so many plans and ideas, I thought maybe you'd take it easy now. Take some time to think things through.'

'What do I need to think about? What's happening inside my body? Is that going to make me happier?'

‘I just think... it might be a bit much for an eleven-year-old to save the world... in the time that...’

‘That I’ve got left? I won’t die until I’ve done it. That’s how stubborn I am.’

I turn around and go back to my room. If Mum wasn’t so sad, it might mean she didn’t care about me. So I’m actually quite glad that she’s upset. Even though I’m not sure that’s really allowed. To stop myself thinking about it too much, I turn on my computer and read about how the sun’s rays come into the atmosphere, but then can’t get out again because the greenhouse gases are lying like a heavy blanket around the world. Even though it might be fun to grow grapes and oranges in our garden, I’m not so sure it would do much good for the world.

Bredo comes in an hour later to say that supper is ready.

‘What are we having?’ I ask.

‘Fish.’

‘Imagine if fish had been smarter. Then they might have seen the difference between food and plastic and not eaten something might kill them.’

‘If fish had been much smarter, I’m not sure we’d be eating them for supper. Maybe they would be fishing for us instead.’

‘Hmm, you might have a point...’ I say, and imagine some enormous fish eating people.

They could hide by the water’s edge and throw nets over us, then drag their catch back under water. I mean, sharks already enjoy a surfer or two for their supper, so maybe it would only take a couple of generations to develop the best way to catch us. I once read about a jellyfish called the Portuguese Man of War, which is so poisonous it gives people heart attacks. And a shoal of piranhas can clean the flesh of the bones of a person in minutes.

‘Are you coming?’ Bredo asks.

‘I’m not sure that I want fish today.’

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6

DELTA ON THE WAY!

On Friday, Bredo has a temperature. That's because I've held the bedside lamp to his forehead and pushed a hotwater bottle under the duvet. Mum agrees that he's not well and asks if I can look after him.

'I've got plenty of time, so that's fine,' I say.

When Mum has gone, he jumps out of bed and gets dressed. I've already made our sandwiches. And the bag is packed and ready beside the laptop.

'We can still not do this,' Bredo says.

'I'm sure we could drown ourselves in a toilet too.'

'Why would we do that?'

'Because it's the same as doing nothing.'

We each leave the house with a piece of toast in our hand. The neighbour waves to us; I'm sure he thinks we're rushing to school. I can just imagine him being interviewed on the news: "*They looked like they were on their way to school. I would never have thought it of them, those boys, they seemed so innocent.*"

Only now do I realise that I have a knot of dough in my stomach, the kind that rises and rises until it hurts so much something has to give. We don't say a word on the metro into town. I had a final go with the hairbrush before I left to make sure I looked good, and spent a long time picking out clothes that were not too colourful, or too funeral-like. Bredo's hair looks like weeds and his jacket is lumpy and worn.

The clouds are like heavenly mud when we come up from Nationaltheatret station. I'm a step and a half ahead of Bredo all the time. When we get to the prime minister's fort, Bredo's gives me a kind of *good-luck* nod before he carries on walking down the street with the laptop under his arm. I press the intercom. "*Yes, can I help you*" crackles out from the loudspeaker.

'Erm, hello, I was here a couple of days ago to see if I could get the prime minister's autograph. I've got a proper autograph book with me and a yellow felt tip pen that gives really nice autographs.'

I peer into the camera and point at my bag.

‘Yes, I remember you,’ the voice says. ‘Just wait there a minute and I’ll see what I can do.’

‘Cool. I’ll just... stand here... or walk back and forth a bit. But I won’t be far away.’

Most of life is spent waiting. I don’t remember who said that. But right now I know what whoever it was who said it meant. I think waiting just before something major is about to happen, is worst.

I can see Bredo further up the street, watching me. When we tested the cameras, the quality of the picture was good enough for YouTube. It would have been impossible to do this alone. I must remember to thank Bredo over and over again afterwards so he understands how important it is for me. If I had the money, I would buy him one of those Yankee caps he wants so badly. I get out my autograph book and pen, so I don’t need to rummage around in my bag when the prime minister comes out. The syringes are ready in my outside pocket.

‘Are you there?’ the voice asks on the intercom.

I run over.

‘Yes, I’m here.’

‘I can’t promise anything, but she’s on her way out.’

I give Bredo a thumbs up. He takes out his mobile phone. Why’s he doing that? Is Mum calling? Hope he doesn’t answer.

A black car is parked in front of the entrance. A man with an earpiece comes out of the building. Then another one. And then finally she comes out.

‘Hello, Prime Minister!’ I shout. ‘Could I have your autograph, please?’

She’s spots me, and crosses towards the gate with a big smile.

‘Can you open the gate?’ she says to one of the minders.

The gates swing open and she come over to me.

‘That’s so kind of you,’ I say, with such enthusiasm that my voice sounds squeaky.

‘I’ve already got the Swedish prime minister’s autograph.’

‘What’s your name?’

‘Henrik.’

‘Then I’ll write, *To Henrik*,’ she says and takes the pen.

I start to cough as though I might spew up my guts.

‘Oh dear, are you not very well?’

‘I’ve got a knot in my intestine, and when I get stressed it makes me ill. Do you think I could maybe borrow your toilet? It’s a bit of a crisis.’

I come up with the intestine story on the spot, but it seems to work. Because she turns to one of the minders and says: ‘We can make an exception for a nice boy like him, can’t we? How old are you, Henrik?’

‘E-e-elevn,’ I say, as my body succumbs to another coughing fit.

‘This way.’

‘Th-ank... you,’ I say, as I clutch my stomach.

‘Truls will take you.’

Truls is one of the prime minister’s bodyguards, a serious man with not much hair. We walk towards the entrance, then suddenly Truls grabs me by the shoulder. We stop. He puts a finger to his earpiece, as though that helps him to hear better what is being said. His grip on my shoulder is a little too hard.

‘Roger,’ he says, and turns around. ‘Prime Minister. Code Red. This way, please. Now!’

‘What are you saying?’ she exclaims in alarm.

‘Come on,’ Truls orders.

The other bodyguard hurries behind the prime minister towards the door.

‘What’s happening?’ I ask.

‘The boy has to come too,’ the prime minister says. She sounds stressed. ‘He can’t stay out here alone.’

One of the minders takes me by the arm and pulls me so fast into the house that I drop my bag. The door closes behind us.

‘What’s the threat?’ Truls says.

Someone answers in his ear.

‘Prime Minister, we’ve received a tipoff that there’s a person on a roof nearby aiming a rifle at you. The caller knew that you were standing outside signing the boy’s book, so we’re taking it seriously.’

‘Ok,’ the prime minister said, with a very serious expression on her face. She looked down at me. ‘Are you alright?’

‘Yes, but I dropped...’

I point towards the door.

‘Good. This is really not something you’d want someone your age to experience. I’ll look after you,’ the prime minister says.

‘That’s great, but I lost...’

‘This way, please,’ one of the minders interrupts.

I can already hear the sirens in the distance. A hand on my back steers me through the house and down some stairs. The bodyguards seem to be perfectly calm and know exactly what they're doing, but the prime minister is nervous, I can see her body twitching and her eyes are darting everywhere. She loses her balance on the stairs in her high heels, but manages to steady herself before she falls. We stop at the bottom while the men listen to the instructions on their earpieces.

'Delta is on the way,' one said.

'What happened? Did he not have time to shoot?' the prime minister asks.

'Don't know. Reinforcements are being called in.'

'Sofie,' she said. 'Should she be collected from school?'

'The prime minister's daughter. Should she be collected?' Truls asks his earpiece.

He listens closely. Then he gives the prime minister a thumbs up. She seems to breathe more easily.

'We'll wait here for Delta,' the guard says.

'They're talking about the special forces,' the prime minister explains to me. 'They're called in whenever there's an incident like this and they're very good. So there's nothing to worry about.'

'They've traced the tipoff call to a Bredo Hansen,' one of the minders says. 'Does that mean anything to you?'

To begin with, I think he's speaking to me. But then I realise he's looking at the prime minister, who shakes her head. Why did Bredo do that? Has he lost his mind?

'First patrol is in place,' the guard says. 'They'll secure the area. Delta is three minutes away.'

I pull my mobile phone out of my pocket and text Bredo as fast as I can: *Get rid of the phone*. If he's got his mobile in his pocket, the police will be able to find him. And Bredo's the sort of person who would burst like a balloon under pressure.

I send another text. *Don't go home*.

That's the first place they'll look. He doesn't answer. Maybe he's thrown his phone away already.

'My daughter, Sofie, is the same age as you,' the prime minister tells me. 'I hope she won't be too frightened.'

'Is she coming here?'

'The police have routines for situations like this. We have safe houses.'

'At home, my mum makes me and my... I mean, me, practice for catastrophes,' I say.

‘Practice for catastrophes?’

‘Yes, what best to do if there’s a fire, or an earthquake, or we get snowed in, or the roof blows off in a hurricane... But we haven’t learnt what to do when there’s a man aiming at us from a roof. Maybe we just haven’t got that far.’

‘We have frequent practices with the police, too. But I don’t want Sophie to deal with it all, so she hasn’t taken part in some of the exercises. Perhaps that was a bit stupid...’

‘Well, maybe it would help... if I was to come and talk to her?’

‘But don’t you have school?’

‘Inset day.’

‘Well, yes, she could perhaps do with some friends who were boys. She’s a law unto herself, that girl, but wonderful and very intelligent. And I love her very much.’

‘And I’m sure she loves you very much too.’

‘You’re good at saying the right things, Henrik. I think Sofie will like you.’

‘And I like girls... and boys too. So I’m not looking for a girlfriend. And I’m not gay. Even though there’s nothing wrong with being gay. A few of my teachers are gay. At least, I think they are. Well, maybe just one of them.’

The prime minister puts her hand on my head, no doubt to make me shut up.

‘Eight patrols in place,’ the guard says. ‘Delta thirty seconds away.’

‘Will we be leaving?’ the prime minister asks.

‘Possibly evac within five minutes.’

‘That means evacuation, that we have to leave,’ she explains to me, before looking at Truls. ‘The boy’s coming with me.’

The guard doesn’t answer. He’s obviously getting more information through his earpiece.

‘No visible threat. Could be an eight thirteen,’ he says.

‘You’re losing me as well now. Eight thirteen?’ the prime minister says.

‘False alarm. They are securing the area at the moment. Delta on their way in.’

I hear noises upstairs. And then four men come down the stairs, in helmets and bulletproof vests, carrying machineguns. I really hope that no one finds out that Bredo is my brother.

Once they have established that the prime minister is alright, they discuss the situation with her bodyguards. I realised a while ago that my plan is pointless now.

‘Prime minster, we’ll take you to location thirteen,’ one of the Delta men tells her.

‘Can’t you just tell me where we’re going?’

‘Jar. Your daughter is on her way there now.’

‘Ok.’

She explains to me quickly that she doesn’t actually live in the prime minister’s residence, but they don’t dare to go back to her house right now either. So we are going to a safe place that they use in emergencies. We go up the stairs between two lines of armed police, then through the house and out a back door. We’re escorted to a big, black car with darkened windows that are no doubt bulletproof. I get into the backseat between Truls and the prime minister. Then we drive away from the prime minister’s residence at top speed and on through the west of the city.

‘It’ll be a relief to see Sofie,’ she says.

‘But you...’

‘Call me Vibeke.’

‘But, Vibeke, is it the first time this has happened to you? Or does it happen all the time?’

‘The first time. You see, we generally live in a quiet corner of the world.’

‘But we’re not completely unknown. We’ve got the Nobel Peace Prize and lots of oil that the world wants to get its hands on, and salmon and people who are good on skis...’

‘Yes, that’s true. But that doesn’t mean that terrorism is an everyday thing here.’

‘But should we be so proud that everyone wants our oil?’

‘Oil has made this country rich, you know.’

‘But it’s also one of the things that causes most pollution.’

‘True. But if we hadn’t extracted oil here, someone else would have supplied the world, and we would still be poor.’

‘Are you so sure we would still be poor? We might have come up with Apple or Amazon or IKEA or something like that...’

‘You’ve got a good mind there, Henrik. And I thought you were just a very enthusiastic autograph hunter.’

‘Oh, but I am. Very enthusiastic. Only, my autograph book is in my bag and I dropped it when we ran in.’

‘Can we get the boy’s bag driven over? He dropped it outside the residence,’ Vibeke says to Truls.

‘Will do.’

‘Shall we call your parents?’ she asks.

‘No, Mum has a heart attack when it’s nothing more than a nosebleed. Better that I tell them all about it this evening.’

‘How are you feeling?’

‘Oh, my tummy, you mean? It’s still a bit sore, but alright.’

Vibeke squeezes my hand and gives me a slightly forced smile. I look out of the window and wonder when she’s going to let go. Maybe you can do that when you’re the prime minister, just do what you like.

‘Two minutes to arrival,’ the bodyguard in the in the front says.

I gently move my hand and she lets go. Not in my wildest dreams, or if I’d borrowed anyone else’s, could I have come up with a plan that would end up with me sitting in a bulletproof car with the prime minister in our way to a private address. I haven’t even committed a crime. Not yet, at least.

The house in Jar looks very ordinary from the outside, but when we go in, I feel like I’m in a hotel. Nearly everything is white, apart from one of the lampshades, which is pink. There’s a girl sitting on the eggshell-coloured sofa, fiddling at her mobile phone.

‘Sofie, there you are,’ the prime minister says and hurries over to her with open arms.

The girl doesn’t get up.

‘I was in a gym class when those hairy apes came in and dragged me out. Do you have any idea how embarrassing that was?’

Vibeke gives her a hug, and Sofie tries to wriggle herself free.

‘You know that things like this can happen,’ Vibeke says. ‘We’ve talked about it before.’

‘You don’t exactly look like you’ve been shot,’ Sofie says, in a huff. ‘I was going to do something with Vilde and Synnøve after school. And now they’ll do it without me.’

‘You are the daughter of a prime...’

‘I didn’t ask you to be the prime minister. Why can’t someone else do it? And you’ve chosen the worst party ever. You never listen to me.’

‘Yes, I do listen to you...’

‘And who’s he?’

‘This is Henrik. He’s here because... well, he got caught up in it all. You might enjoy getting to know him.’

‘Didn’t you hear what I said? I was supposed to be with Vilde and Synnøve and now I’m in this prison instead. And he’s here.’

‘Be nice to him. He’s got an upset tummy.’

‘Urgh! I don’t want to know about it. And I haven’t got any of my things here.’

‘It’ll soon be over. I’ll go and make us some tea.’

Vibeke goes into what must be the kitchen.

‘What are you looking at?’

‘Eh... nothing.’

‘You’re looking at me. Look at something else. My mum doesn’t get to decide who I hang out with. I’ve got enough friends.’

‘Ok. I thought you could never have enough friends. But maybe I’m wrong, because I don’t have many myself.’

‘What’s wrong with you then?’

‘I don’t know. That’s just how it is. And I’ve not been that well recently, so I haven’t been at school as much as I should. But my tummy’s fine, really. Is that the truth, that you don’t like your mum’s party?’

‘Don’t tell me you’re one of the young members. They’re the worst of all.’

‘No. No, I’m not. I just think your mum doesn’t do enough to save the world, even though she’s the most powerful person in the country.’

‘Save the world? Are you Jesus, or what?’

‘No, I’m just prepared to do whatever it takes to make a change. And your mum doesn’t do anything.’

Sofie stares at me.

‘Who... are you?’

‘Someone who’s got nothing to lose.’

‘You didn’t just *get caught up in it all*, did you?’

Sofie keeps looking at me. It’s my turn now to tell her to stop staring. I swallow a doormat. I’ve said too much. She’ll tell her mum. How stupid can you be?

‘Is that true?’

‘Eh... do you want it to be true?’

‘How sick in the head are you?’

‘I... I don’t know.’

‘Because if it is true, that would just be so cool,’ she says, and grins.

‘Yes, it is true, then.’

‘So, all this happened because of you? How did you do it?’

Before I can answer, Vibeke comes in carrying a tray with three mugs on it.

‘How are you both?’ she asks.

‘Henrik’s, well, not what he seems,’ Sofie says, and glances over at me.

‘Oh, I’m so glad you’re getting on. I thought you’d like Henrik.’

‘It’s a bit early to send out the wedding invitations, Mum.’

The prime minister bursts out laughing.

‘It hadn’t even occurred to me, darling. I just thought you might be able to deal with the drama better if there were two of you.’

‘Can Henrik and I go out into the garden?’

‘I’ll check with security.’

We’re allowed out into the garden, with its neatly cut lawn and pruned bushes. Sofie heads over to a hedge that looks like a snake, and I follow.

‘So, no one was actually going to kill Mum?’ she says in a hushed voice.

‘No, she’s perfectly safe. It was my brother who called.’

‘They sent out Delta. You’ll be in big trouble.’

‘Only if they find out that Bredo’s my brother.’

‘That’s so cool. Did Delta wave their guns around?’

‘A bit.’

‘I’ve been nagging Mum to get a gun, but do you think she’ll give me one?’

‘Probably not.’

‘I don’t think there should be an age limit for guns. I’m not saying that everyone should have one. Fritjof in my class probably shouldn’t have a gun. And nor should Nils and Aksel, they’re not right in the head. But the rest could. And I definitely could. But I’ve only got knives.’

‘You’ve got knives?’

‘Lots.’

‘There’s just one thing I wondered about. Do you think your mum does enough for the environment?’

‘She recycles.’

‘I mean, politically. She’s the prime minister, after all, and has quite a lot of influence.’

Sofie thinks about it.

‘Hmm, I haven’t really heard that she’s done anything about it. At home she mainly talks about how awful the other politicians are, *he’s an idiot* and *she’s an idiot* and *he said something so stupid*, but she never talks about saving the world.’

'You and I are the ones who are going to inherit this world. And right now it's really sick. In fact, I think it's close to death. Do you want to help me do something about it?'

'Do you think that you and I can do something about it?'

'You're the prime minister's daughter. Do you realise how much power that gives you?'

'I've never thought about it like that.'

'Because she does listen to what you say, doesn't she?'

'Hard to tell really, because I say so much.'

'And you know how to get her to say things she'd never say on TV, don't you?'

'Yes, I'm quite good at that.'

'If I get my bag, there are some cameras in it. Could you maybe put them somewhere discrete around the kitchen table, for example?'

'You know what, Henrik? I thought you were the boring type. But I was totally wrong.'

'I have to warn you though: if you do it, it might be really embarrassing for your mum.'

'That's the best thing about it! What do you want her to say?'

'Right, listen up,' I say, and then talk in a whisper, to be on the safe side, so that no one else can hear.