

People Who Hate Local History
(Folk som hater lokalhistorie)

by Tyra Teodora Tronstad

Sample translation, pp. 7-79

There are Many Traces Through the World

“I’m leaving”, says Gunn Smedplassen, who is on her way out the door, the way teenage girls are when the moment has arrived, when they know that they must. It’s early in the morning, it’s Sunday and June, the year is 1996 and summer is already intense and clear with early summer flowers fighting their way up through cairns and ditches. Gunn stands on the stone steps by the porch; she will soon complete her first sixteen years and begin the next sixteen.

“I’m taking the 10 a.m. train”, she tells her father.

Ingemar, which is her father’s name, has just woken up, and he is confused, because his daughter has actually brought out her rucksack, her shoes and her sweater and is leaving home, much the same way boys that went to sea did back in the day, backpack on, and then: gone for years. It looks like she means business, her face glows with South America and Asia and the Indian Ocean.

“We were supposed to go and look for goldeneyes”, he says and pulls a hand through his hair the way fathers do.

“To hell with goldeneyes”, Gunn says. “Nobody gives a damn”.

Ingemar stands in the doorway. Gunn is wearing the knitted sweater and the trainers and is about to throw the rucksack on her back. She will walk to the station; there’s no bloody way she will ask for a lift. She claims she’s going to a friend in Oslo.

“You haven’t even eaten breakfast”, Ingemar says.

But what kind of argument is that? Sixteen-year-old girls don’t need breakfast, they need to leave their father and the house where they grew up, they need to get the hell out of the valley and away. Ingemar knows this, he’s a teacher after all, and has dealt with teenage kids for years, but this is his own kid. Gunn is the only one he’s got, and he has counted every single day of her life since she was four months old, since the day he realised she was all he had left. And now she’s leaving?

“Has it got something to do with Pelle”? Ingemar asks.

“To hell with Pelle”, Gunn says.

There are many traces through the world, and one of them is the trace of daughters who leave. Ingemar senses that Gunn’s rage is nothing new, realises that he’s not been paying attention. Where was she last night? He doesn’t know, it wasn’t his intention to get so drunk, but that’s how it played out, and when he woke up, he found her like this: furious and busy packing her bag.

“You need money”, he says and hands her two five-hundred-krona notes. She looks at them and appears relieved, and that makes him relieved as well: Great, then it’ll have to be money that ties them together from now on.

It’ll pass; he tells himself. Perhaps she has already been here too long. Perhaps it’s me, it wouldn’t come as a surprise, as much as I have listened to the sound of her footsteps, listened and listened, it can’t be easy having a father who spends that much time listening.

“The 10 a.m. train”, she repeats. “And you don’t need to drive me.”

He knows she means it. He knows when fights are futile. When she has turned on her heel and left, the house is filled with a silence that neither the radio nor the record player can change. The entire Gunnarsmoen is silent as if in a science experiment, a newly created vacuum. Ingemar takes a seat in one of the garden chairs, allowing time to pass until he hears the train honking as it arrives at Koppang station. She’s heading south, soon she’ll leave Stor-Elvdal municipality and continue into Åmot, then Elverum, through Stange and via Hamar to Oslo. Of course she’s heading south. Everyone’s heading south. Everyone’s heading to Oslo. And then? Oslo, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Zürich, Rome, he wouldn’t know, where are people going these days?

For those who want to leave Stor-Elvdal, and for those who want to return, there are two options: the train or the road. They both follow the river’s route.

The River that Created and Destroyed Everything

Gunn has known this time would come. She's been waiting for it, the way adult children often sniff and smell their parents, wondering if they've begun to reek of old age. And suddenly Ingemar has become one of them: confused on the other end of the telephone. "How am I supposed to go to the supermarket in Koppang, how am I supposed to do it on my own?"

"If I catch that virus, I'll die", he says, his voice trembling.

Gunn needs to go home. She drives the Yaris a little too fast on the E6, and when the Østerdal landscape opens up on Highway 3 just before Elverum, there's only a little more than an hour left to Koppang. She drives up the valley, and eventually the road follows the Glomma, the river that has dictated peoples' lives around here. Then she reaches Stor-Elvdal, the valley where she grew up, where her father still lives. She drives along the part of the river that's wide and full of islands. In the past, the large farmsteads were located down here on the flatland, with water and grass on all sides, Koppang was the name of one of them. Later the area was split into islands, the farmstead was moved after the river's assaults, and gave its name to a place, a scattered cluster of houses up among the trees. Kaupang, yes? The word *kjøpe*, to buy, is still present. Stor-Elvdal is not particularly well-known, neither domestically nor abroad. There are fewer people living here. "People move away from here as if they were paid to do so", Ingemar often says, and then Gunn replies like the human geographer she is: "But Dad, that's exactly what they're doing".

Gunn drives uphill along the river, recognising every bump in the road and every bend in the river. "The river", Ingemar has often said, "has both created and destroyed everything", and he's right. The Glomma has been wild. She has fought back, it says so in the old letters: *Oh King, let us pay less taxes, we have this infernal river*

to contend with. In landscape paintings the river's portrayed as serene and beautiful, but she can certainly also be unreasonable and ugly. People have taken control of the river, regulated it and built power plants here and there. But still, the river is troublesome; meltwater from the mountains has reached high up on the memorial stones over ancient floods several times in the past ten years. Some believe it's coincidental, but Ingemar is convinced; the river's trying to regain its power, it cannot stand the fact that it's currently Highway 3 that connects Norway. People race through the valley on power that also comes from rivers, but nobody thanks the river for it. No wonder it runs riot.

Gunn sits in the car and feels the draft from the Glomma all the way inside. It's March, and the water's frozen, but soon the ice will break off. It will crack into blocks that will stack up on top of each other and create an ice floe, an ice floe that with sudden slowness slides away, and that slowness is a powerful force, Gunn has seen it several times. When she was little, she and her father used to stand on the bridge and watch the ice floe float downriver and break trees like matchsticks, and Ingemar would say: "Bloody hell, Gunn, look at the sheer force of that." And Gunn would answer: "Bloody hell, look at that", because it was only when the ice broke off that she would be allowed to say *bloody hell*.

She passes the petrol station right before the Stai Bridge. In the backseat lies her computer and an extra monitor, as well as speakers, she has packed her work into the car. Gunn has never liked working from home, but now it's apparently the only option, the virus has altered everything overnight, talk about the world changing quickly. While Gunn drives up through the valley, she thinks about the press conference the previous day and the Prime Minister who said, "we have to press the big red button", what is it about politicians who get their metaphors from soap operas? It's a phrase intended for the history books; you notice it as soon as those words are spoken.

The snow lies heavy along the roadside. Gunn allows the trailers to speed past, after all they're driving the food to the supermarkets and they're more important than a human geographer, a writer of analyses, a free thinker who uses her profession for whatever, a talker. Here on the road, she takes pleasure in feeling small. The Yaris is big enough for her, it might even withstand a collision with a moose, and *she* might too, the car's designed to take such a hit. There's something sensible programmed into the construction itself. The locals would laugh at her trust in a Yaris; such gullibility is the proof that she has moved away once and for all.

She turns off Highway 3, relieved to no longer be forced to drive between the trailers, and swerves through Koppang town centre, where she must stop and buy a few things from the supermarket. There's hardly anyone else between the spacious shelves, the red button has been pressed everywhere. Gunn brings pasta and salami, stuff Ingemar doesn't buy himself, and she doesn't greet the few familiar faces she glimpses but stays focused and busy. Ingemar has told her on the phone that he won't have dinner prepared for her, which he usually has whenever she visits, his voice so thin and frail. She wonders if he might already be sick, old people apparently don't survive the disease that is spreading; down in Italy they're busy dying. Outside it's minus fifteen, the air is clear and blue, and the smoke from the rooftops stands straight up in thin lines. Gunn makes a turn and drives down the slope, catches a glimpse of the river, turns off and sees Gunnarsmoen ahead of her, glides past Pelle and Margrete's house, and then she's home.

The King of the Road Has Lost His Foot

This is completely accurate: for people to survive in Norway, there must be someone who's ready to stay awake during the winter nights. There must be someone who's ready to drive the snowplough while others are sleeping or gaming or smoking outside on the terrace. Life in this country requires someone who only takes quick breaks at the petrol station to fill their coffee cups and then works through the rest of the night. Such people are probably required everywhere, but they're particularly important in a valley where the country's main artery runs, where the indispensable transports zigzag between the south and the north with the forest on one side and the river on the other. Such people are almost always men. Men who drive snowploughs and deal with sleety conditions, ice patches, potholes and tight turns. Men who deal with cold, darkness, moose that appear out of nowhere, crazy people without safety reflectors and useless winter drivers. These men must forge a traversable path through the ice, the snow and the sleet. They must reopen the artery, night after night. The world stops without men who drive the snowplough, it literally stops.

Pelle is such a man. But now he hasn't driven the snowplough for several weeks. It began with a small, lousy splinter that penetrated his heel and then caused his whole foot to swell up. It could hardly fit into the shoe. The locum doctor at the medical centre examined him several times and finally sent him home with a course of antibiotics that didn't improve anything, either because it was incorrect or because it was too late, and he will carry her warm, tender gaze with him for the rest of his life. What is it with people who look so friendly, but who are utterly incompetent, who fail to see the writing on the wall. Pelle, the king of the road, eventually ended up in hospital, but when he got there, his old life couldn't be

saved. He woke up to a new one. Yes, when Pelle wakes up at the hospital in Oslo after having undergone surgery, he's flooded with light: from the lamps in the ceiling, from the walls, from the cloudless sky outside. And from the woman in white clothes, the one with a name tag too unclear for him to read. She asks him if he'd like an ice lolly for the nausea, she's fetched one from the children's ward. Pelle wants to say no, can't bear to be that needy, and when the nurse hands him the ice cream, he refuses at first. He doesn't want to take up her time for no reason. He doesn't want to say: "I'm scared." The nurse is pretty, younger than Margrete, older than Ann-Sofie, younger than Gunn, closer to Ingrid, perhaps, or Ann-Karin. It's amazing how there are women's names running through his head at this moment, names from another time, from a time when he would hold them and release them in a single movement. He's not himself. And he feels nauseous. He doesn't feel anything where his foot is supposed to be. What could that mean? He wants to ask if that means the foot's still there and that they managed to save it, but he doesn't. He didn't think things could get that bad, the cut wasn't particularly big, but inside it grew bigger, the infection ate its way into flesh and bone, invaded with force and without regard. He only felt a little unwell, right up until when he collapsed and was sent here by ambulance. While his foot was still there, it was only a foot. But now when he doesn't know if it's there or not, it seems impossible to mention. Then the chief physician comes by on her rounds, and it all becomes clear, she tells him that his foot has been amputated from the knee down. "It's gone well, given the circumstances", she says, and then something else, something unintelligible, "and we'll talk when you've recovered a bit. We've removed what had to be removed. And it went well."

Well? Pelle thinks to himself.

But he knows the doctor's right. He could've died, he could've been gone by now, but he isn't.

A few days pass. He sleeps and dreams. He's in pain, but he doesn't want to let it bother him, doesn't want it to take control. He texts a little with his daughter Michelle, he sends her a smiling selfie from the bed. He refuses to whine. He wants to be someone who says: *That's how the cookie crumbles*. She sends him pictures in return, shows him that she has dyed her hair, tells him that she's going for a drive with Gregers, who's eighteen, sends him pictures of the two of them in the car, and in these pictures, Michelle looks far too young and Gregers far too old. His fourteen-year-old is driving around with a grown man. Pelle fears every part of this: a man, a car, the two of them alone, the car that stops and stands still. But he has no power. He's a father with only one leg. He sends messages to Margrete. She always replies quickly. She writes that everything's fine, and that Michelle's out for a drive with Gregers, as if he didn't know. Margrete writes that Gregers has borrowed a Toyota Hilux with a towing hook from his mother and received his license just before Christmas. Pelle feels dizzy even though he's lying down.

Pelle: "What are the tyres like on the Hilux?"

Margrete: "Acceptable". Emoji with a smiley face and sunglasses.

Pelle: "I don't like it".

Margrete: "Surely you never drove around with young girls when you were eighteen." Another emoji with a smiley face and sunglasses.

Margrete again: "You're worried about Michelle because she herself isn't worried." Heart emoji.

Pelle: "I'm just an anxious father."

Margrete: "You're sweet. Everything's fine here."

Pelle: "Look after her."

He falls asleep and later wakes up. He's fed, falls asleep again.

The nurses call his leg the stump. He himself doesn't say much. If your body has become smaller, perhaps you also have fewer words. The day he's going home with patient transport - because there's something wrong with Margrete's car and she can't pick him up - a nurse hands him a white plastic bag with some clothes, his

watch, toiletries and his shoes, a pair of brown Gore-Tex shoes with velcro, which appear completely alien in the plastic bag. Two shoes for a guy with only one leg. “Do you have everything you need, Pelle?” The nurse smiles. “Maybe these will come in handy”, she says and points to the bag with the shoes.

“I’ve had surgery”, Pelle tells the taxi driver who will take him home, but the driver is foreign and doesn’t understand. Pelle obviously knows it’s called *amputation*, but the word makes him nauseous. He wants to say surgery and the foot, not amputation and the stump. He’s lost things before, but this is something completely different, and he wonders what will be possible the way he is now. Can a one-legged man shovel ice and snow away in the middle of the night, see the twinkle in the eyes of foxes and hares, and occasionally hear the bang from moose carcasses against the bonnet, and then clean the mess, call the wildlife authorities and carry on? Can a one-legged man be the one who keeps the artery open? And the other question: can a one-legged man smile at a woman and let her talk for so long that she can no longer control herself and begins to touch him, starts to desire him? Or are one-legged men a little bit like sick moose: all they can do is lie down on the road, lie completely still in the snow and breathe until someone slams into them?

Gunn Comes Home and There's Something Wrong with Ingemar

Ingemar stands outside on the porch in a wool jacket and waves with both arms. He smiles at Gunn as she parks. When she's out of the car, he tries to shout something to her, but it comes out slurred, his voice is too weak. When she's reached him, he asks her about the driving conditions. "Handsome car, that, I've always thought so." His face is grey and haggard, and what's that, has he hurt himself? His whole jaw is yellow, it doesn't look good, he hasn't mentioned a word about this.

"What on earth has happened?" she asks.

"The door frame to the pigsty happened", he says. "I walked straight into it the other day."

"You walked straight into the frame?"

Ingemar's wearing slippers and one of his countless flannel shirts, but this one's so wrinkled, and what's that on his arm, traces of liver pate? He looks like an old man, one of those who scurry instead of walk. He's not allowed to look like this, so shaggy and messy, he who's so strong, he who poured a new floor in the basement as recently as last year.

As she enters the house, she notices something else.

"What's that smell, Dad?"

"We'll talk about that later. Come inside where it's warm, my girl."

In the living room everything looks as usual, from the local history magazines to the garden magazines, the parish magazines, and then a new addition this winter: five books about iron mining on the mountain pastures during the early Middle Ages. But then there's the smell of smoke, sour and sickly. "What's happened to the stove, is there something wrong with it?"

“There’s nothing wrong with the stove, exactly”, Ingemar says. “It’s the firewood, rather.”

“The firewood?”

“It’s damp”, Ingemar says. “Completely useless.”

“How come?”

“I had to buy some more. I was empty”

“Yes, but how come it’s damp?”

Gunn receives no answer, and she can’t make any sense of it. Ingemar’s a world champion at woodburning, like most men in the valley. He has followed the wood through growth, harvesting, chopping, stacking, drying, carrying and burning since he was a little child. These days he doesn’t chop the firewood himself; he orders it from others. But he knows what he’s buying.

“Who did you buy that firewood from?”

Ingemar doesn’t answer.

“Dad?”

“We’ll talk about it later. It is what it is”, he says quietly, and it’s almost like he’s talking to himself, and not to her.

“It was my fault. I went too far. I had no right.”

Gunn takes the goods out of the supermarket bag and is about to put them in the fridge, but she immediately notices that she must scrape out the last two months first. The jam is covered in mould, and so is the cheese.

“Dad, I’m going to clean up a little”, she says pointing, “you can’t eat this.”

“I wasn’t planning to, either.”

“You have to tell me who sold you that firewood.”

“He’s been unwell”, Ingemar says. “And he had his reasons”.

“Who?” Gunn asks.

“That’s just the way things are.”

“Who are you talking about, Dad?” she almost shouts, she can’t take any more of the innuendo.

“I’m talking about Pelle”, he shouts back.

“You bought firewood from Pelle?”

“Well, he arranged it for me. He was the middleman. And now he’s in hospital. Or *was* in hospital.”

“For what?”

“There’s something with the foot”, Ingemar says. “An infection. They say he almost croaked.”

“Pelle arranged the firewood and now he’s in hospital?”

Gunn tries to make sense of it. Can’t figure out what’s going on with Ingemar. But Pelle being sick, that makes her wince. “Pelle” and “sick” are words she doesn’t want to hear at the same time, she can’t bear it, it’s too close and she wants it to be far away.

“He came home earlier, right before you did, with patient transport. But Pelle had his reasons, it’s nothing to get hung up about. We mustn’t blame Pelle.”

She doesn’t know what’s at the core of Ingemar’s confusing story. She doesn’t understand what’s gone wrong, except an unfortunate firewood purchase, something neighbours should be able to sort out without problems. She could’ve just told Ingemar this, but the neighbour is Pelle, and Gunn has no desire to talk to Ingemar about Pelle. Pelle shouldn’t even be living here. Had he lived somewhere else, it would have been easier for Gunn to go home to Gunnarsmoen. But no, of course Pelle must live right next door to her father, right in Gunn’s field of vision every single time she’s here, she can’t get away. Who would ever carry on living in their parents’ house when there are other houses to choose from, and especially when the house is shabby and brown and a prefab home from Moelven? He used to live in a fancy old Swiss chalet in the town centre for a while. Pelle has a wife and daughter now, and because of that he has sort of become the boss of the place, it’s totally unfair, she has grown up here just as much as he has. Gunn is polite and greets Pelle when necessary, but otherwise she stays away. She’s done that for years. And now he’s apparently sick and has a bad foot. He might have

been just in front of her on the highway, and for one reason or another he's provided damp, useless firewood for Ingemar. It's not easy to deal with, but Gunn fears that she will have to deal with it, nonetheless.

"We need to order some dry firewood for you", Gunn says and rearranges her distorted emotions into a straight line, turning them into a practical task. "I'll have to make some calls; we can't have it like this."

It's strange how her language becomes different as soon as she gets here, it becomes simpler, purer, more poignant, it's as if every single word has more impact. It's not the dialect, there's not much left of that anyway, it's the weight of the words. *Like this.*

"You're permanently occupied with trivialities", Ingemar says. "That's typically you. You only manage to see the insignificant stuff."

"Ok, Dad."

She hasn't been on Gunnarsmoen for more than ten minutes, and he's already morally superior. This is how he's always held his own: by insisting on the big picture, and that way making himself appear enormous. The fact that Gunn now has a doctoral degree in human geography and is often asked by the media to explain the larger context of the world, does not make her an authority in Ingemar's house.

"Now the pressure is on them, the bureaucrats", he says and looks over at the news. "Were all your colleagues sent home, Gunn? Because of a cold?"

"Everyone", Gunn says, but doesn't say: "*because of that same cold, you have asked me to come home.*"

She needs to have a chat with Pelle. It's the last thing she wants, but she needs to. She has a father who has begun to stomp his feet and forget cheese in the fridge, a father who has fallen over in the outhouse and won't tell anyone about it, a father who talks like he deserves to carry damp firewood on his old back. Inside the living room Gunn sees how Ingemar's hands tremble when he tries to pick up the parish magazine, which has fallen on the floor. On the front page there's a picture of the

parish church down by the river, and underneath it a sentence written in cursive:

You are forgiven.

There's something heavy about the entire house. How long has the sour smell been around? Should she have come earlier? She puts on her shoes and jacket, and before she goes out, she looks at herself in the mirror. An adult woman stares back at her and says: *come on, you're not sixteen anymore.*

To Send Aubergine Emojis to Amputated Men

Gunn rings Pelle and Margrete's doorbell. On the iron steps ice and snow have transformed into a hard cover, and the light brown front door hangs loosely on the frame. Gunn has walked through this door a thousand times, she knows all the nuances of the stained wood, and yet everything feels alien. It's Margrete who opens the door, she must be approaching forty now, she looks huge and short-sleeved in her fleece vest, and behind her is a jumble of jackets, shoes and thermal suits. A black dog with a shoe in its mouth pokes out between Margrete's feet but doesn't get far before Margrete grabs hold of its collar and curses. Gunn should never have rang the bell. She has no business in this house. And it doesn't smell like it used to back then.

"So, the lady's home?"

"Yes."

"And Ingemar?"

"He can't be on his own. He's not in good shape. With the virus and everything."

"Yes, I suppose so."

Gunn realises that she doesn't want to be invited in, that she can't be invited in. It makes things easier that she comes from the Norwegian virus hot spot and must be kept at a distance. It smells of stale indoor air from the living room, the evening news is blaring ominously, and Gunn leans back slightly.

"I need a word with Pelle", she says, and she knows it's wrong. She really shouldn't get involved with the firewood, shouldn't be such a big city lady who complains about everything that isn't entirely perfect and right, things that regular people sort out amongst themselves. Then they wouldn't be here.

"Pelle's sleeping", Margrete says.

"I hear that he's been unwell".

"He has, yes."

But there's nothing to gain from Margrete, she doesn't give anything away voluntarily, there's not a shred of enthusiasm at seeing Gunn who was in the class above for years, they were never friends, but never anything else either. They never had anything in common, and they still don't. Gunn has no idea if Margrete has had a single proper job since she left school.

"Michelle, could you please take Gordon?" Margrete yells, and suddenly Michelle shows up and tries to take the dog. Gunn has seen Michelle many times, from when she was little and through the years, and via Pelle's many father-and-daughter pictures from the social media feed. *My princess*, he writes, stuff like that, yet this girl is more forest spirit than princess. She has grown taller and rounder since Gunn last saw her, the body's completely hidden behind a large sweater, and her hair's green: an intense, home-dyed colour.

"The shoe! It's Dad's shoe!" Michelle shouts.

"Dad has given it to the dog", Margrete shouts back. "Dad doesn't want that shoe. He doesn't give a toss about that shoe!"

"What the hell", she hears Pelle shout from the living room. "Can't you bloody shut up?"

"I can come back later", Gunn says. "It's ... well, I should have a word with Pelle when it's a good time. It's not urgent."

"You can come whenever, Pelle doesn't do anything apart from sitting there," Margrete says and appears cold and harsh. Gunn hears what she hears, and she interprets it something along the lines of Pelle and Margrete's marriage being situated in Antarctica, on Queen Maud Land, and at that time of year when the frost is most severe and even the penguins are motionless to survive. She remembers that time from her own marriage.

"But perhaps it's better to meet outside, the way things are", Margrete says.

"Gordon, let go of the shoe now!"

The dog drops the shoe on the ice-covered steps.

"No problems", Gunn says.

She raises both her hands in the air, a disarming wave. She has to come up with something for her to be able to turn her back and leave. At least now she's tried. "Dad's lost his foot", Michelle says. "They cut it off at the hospital, first he was at Elverum, but then he had to go to Ullevål. Mum says that it's the locum doctor's fault that he lost it, she didn't do her job properly, and now Dad will have to live without it. Or he might get a prosthetic, well, in a while. And he also needs rehabilitation..."

"Michelle", Margrete says sternly. "Take Gordon and get inside."

But the dog doesn't listen, takes a leap and races into the snow, and Michelle throws herself after him in nothing but her socks. She grabs hold of the collar again, before they both disappear behind the house, and Margrete looks at them without raising her eyebrows, and then Gunn does the same. Now Margrete's alone in the doorway, and a little further away Michelle's shouts can be heard: "Gordon! Come here now!"

"So, he lost his foot", Gunn says, feeling dizzy. She has no right to feel that way, so she rushes to say "my apologies and give him my best. That was bad. It was" ... She begins to walk backwards, first down the steps, then down the road towards Ingemar's, but Margrete apparently doesn't notice.

"Yep, that's it", she says. "From right underneath his knee. Can you imagine? A grown-up man, healthily walking around only a month ago. He almost died, so they had no choice. And Michelle can't stay out of it, she's sent messages to everyone in the choir and to her friends, and I'm going crazy. She sent a snap while he was changing bandages, can you believe it. She sent it to everyone she knows. Pelle almost lost it. I don't think kids should be allowed to roam free."

"I understand," Gunn says. "As if things weren't bad enough as they were."

She knows she's only saying what she's supposed to say, just to say something, to conceal how surprised she is by all this information, everything that Margrete's now unloading on her. She doesn't want to know all this about Pelle. It's unnecessary.

“People are behaving like idiots”, Margrete says. “We’ve received messages from a crazy amount of people; they’re sending hearts and sympathies and rainbows and God knows what. Someone even sent a unicorn emoji. Pelle’s furious, he can’t deal with another frigging heart, he’s received enough hearts to build an entire heart shithouse with six seats in a row. Just because Michelle has sent snaps to the whole world. So, he’s tetchy. And now he’s finally calmed down a little.”

“Please give my best to Pelle and wish him a speedy recovery”, Gunn says. “I’ll get in touch later instead. I won’t send a single heart. Just a couple of ... peaches, or cherries. An aubergine? Maybe I could send that?”

She has no idea why she’s saying this, it’s a rude thing to say, and Gunn hadn’t planned on being rude. She was only going to sort things out and go home.

“Do send an aubergine, definitely”, Margrete says and smiles. “That’s perfect. *Those* are the types of emojis one should send to amputated men.”

Gunn has hit the mark, precisely and handsomely, and it conceals everything else immediately. The two women do not laugh, but they both smile, and it’s as if something releases, and a couple of evening clouds blow past in the sky above them and a little bit of snow fall from a branch and makes the world lighter.

“The fire pit”, Margrete says and is about to close the door. “I guess we’re not supposed to meet inside but outside should be okay. There are benches there, Pelle built them last year. Pelle always gets so grumpy when he’s forced to stay indoors, I guess he’ll soon be climbing the walls.”

“The fire pit, great”, Gunn says. “If he has the energy.”

She doesn’t know what she had planned to say, but it wasn’t this. Maybe now she’ll have to sit by the fire with Pelle and Margrete, it’s nuts, but she has accepted.

On her way to Ingemar’s house, Gunn sees the fire pit and the benches, all of it shovelled and with charred logs on the steel ring. The fire pit stands where the drying rack used to be. Gunn knows that Ingemar didn’t want to tear it down, that Pelle had to argue his way, and she’s heard Ingemar say it on many occasions, the chief argument itself: “But the kids have spent so much time playing there!”

It was Blossoming, it was Blossoming Like Crazy

When there's only Gunn and Ingemar left in the family, the river gets the blame. The responsibility lies with the Glomma, because it has not only given nutrients, fish, farmland and currents for log driving, it has also regularly taken a plenty. Through the years there have more than just a few who have lost their lives in the torrents of water, and still she continues to flow as if nothing has happened. And it's the Glomma who takes Ulla and Marianne away, drags them down and underneath the water and several hundred metres away on a Saturday in June 1980, and these two persons are Ingemar's very own. During these metres their lives come to an end in an accident nobody can fully understand. Even decades later, everything's almost impossible to comprehend. The only thing one can be certain of, is that improbable things also happen.

It's June 1980, and Østerdalen is boiling, a heatwave has spread from the south, it's twenty-four degrees even though summer has barely begun, and along the entire Glomma, the bird cherries are blossoming like crazy, something Ingemar will keep saying later on; apparently, it's a song or a poem he once learned: *it was blossoming, it was blossoming like crazy*. Yes. It's Saturday and his wife Ulla, who's thirty years old, and his daughter Marianne, who's ten years and two months, are driving to Rena. Ulla is a director for the youngest members of the Koppang school band, and this Saturday they'll be playing together with the apprentices from the Rena school band, now that the Constitution Day performance is done and the older kids have lost interest. And even though Ulla has an infant at home, because Gunn is only little more than four months old on this day in June, it's fine to go for a little outing and be away for a few hours, because Ingemar's good at looking after the kid. Ulla pumps her breast milk, to avoid giving any financial aid to Nestlé, kisses Gunn on both cheeks and Ingemar on the lips, and then she and Marianne get into the car and drive south. It's sixty kilometres away. In the gymnasium at Rena

Elementary School, the little ones play a series of musical pieces, and even if it's not beautiful, there's certainly quite a bit of future optimism that can be heard from the kids aged nine and ten and eleven and twelve, standing there with their cornets, clarinets and trumpets. Rena's conductor, who has initiated the whole thing, believes that this could be really nice once they've had a bit more practice, and he's slowly beginning to dream about a Christmas concert even though the swallows have just started building nests in the old barns on the islands, and the flowers are heavy on the bird cherry trees, making them bend down towards the river water. During breaks there's squash and bread slices with egg and anchovies, and laughter rips through the wall bars. When they're finished for the day, the kids tumble onto the bus which will bring them home, but Ulla and Marianne are driving their own car, because Ulla has just received her license and wants to drive as much as possible.

The time is around four p.m. when Ulla and Marianne get into the car to drive home. Marianne walks with the cornet in her hand, and this is how she will be remembered. Because when Ulla and Marianne walk across the parking lot this afternoon, they walk out of time itself. The green Mazda drives around the bend, and after that they're gone.

They don't come home. Ingemar waits at first, but then he begins to make some calls. Is it possible that they've gone to visit someone? Have they stopped somewhere? Evening comes. Who would just take off without letting anyone know when there's a four-month-old kid waiting at home? Ingemar calls absolutely everyone and enquires if they've seen his wife and daughter, and they all say: "No, they're not here". But Ingemar doesn't go out searching, no, he sends Yngve, his brother who no longer lives locally but who happens to be visiting that weekend. Yngve drives up and down the valley without catching sight of anyone, and it's Yngve who calls the police as midnight approaches and gets to talk to an indifferent constable who asks him to calm down a little, people turn up sooner or

later. On Gunnarsmoen, all Ingemar knows is that he needs to hold onto his kid. He sits with four-month-old Gunn in his arms all through the night.

The following afternoon, ten-year-old Marianne is found in a swimsuit at the bottom of the river, a few hundred metres south of the sandbar at Stai Bridge.

They find Ulla on the other side of the river, floating in the water. The corpse is visible from the highway, a body in a yellow dress, that's how she's discovered.

Then everything that must happen happens: police cars, boats with divers on the river, ambulances to no avail, and after that: hearses. The Mazda is found in a parking space in the clearing right next to the bridge. It's unlocked and with a tape in the cassette player, a tape which Ulla has put together herself, including the Bee Gees, *How Deep is Your Love* was her favourite song all through spring, and the car's parked with the key in the ignition, then it's her handbag, and shoes. Everything's there. It's as if mother and daughter just got out of the car for a moment.

In the afternoon, the priest rings Ingemar's doorbell. Until that point, he's carried a faint hope, even though people have told him frankly that two dead people have been found in the river. When the doorbell rings, he still believes for a moment that it's Ulla and Marianne coming home, and why this late, he's been waiting and waiting, but it's the priest. Ingemar stands with Gunn in his arms, and all he can do is to reprimand the person delivering the message on his doorstep. "Don't come here and tell me such nonsense, this is a mistake, surely you understand that". But the priest insists on coming inside. The priest isn't used to unimaginable accidents, most deaths make sense, God's not of much help in this case, because not even God can comprehend how the river can claim a mother and daughter on an afternoon in June, right below the Stai Bridge. "The police is obviously investigating", the priest says. "They're trying to get a clear picture of what happened. But it could well be that these two were just very, very unlucky."

Get a clear picture?

Unlucky?

Ingemar stays on his feet. He's holding the small child in his arms. The child's wearing a yellow woollen hat, Ulla's home-knitted protection against whatever, even though it's over twenty degrees hot. He goes to the bedroom and fetches a blanket in which he wraps Gunn while telling her: "Here my darling, we can't allow you to get cold." The priest believes that he understands, but he doesn't dare to leave just yet. The priest stays for hours. Ingemar's in shock, but he's understood what he needs to understand. Nobody tells him about what's so remarkable, how Marianne is found with her fingers clutched around the cornet, that she's simply brought the cornet with her into the water. It'll be too much to deliver something like that to Ingemar right now, he only learns the most important: that Ulla and Marianne have been found drowned, and that it's all a tragedy, that the river may have some harsh traits, some strong currents, especially in spring when the meltwater trickles down from crosswise rivers and mountainsides, making the river huge. The assumption is that Marianne wanted to go for a swim, perhaps play a little at the same time, kids want to do the strangest things, and then she was taken by the current, and the mother wanted to rescue her child, and then she was taken by the same current. River currents are a good explanation, everyone knows that the river not only gives, but that it's a real devil, and everyone knows that Ulla was a terrible swimmer, could she even swim at all? People can drown in small ponds if they're bad swimmers. On Sunday night the accident's featured on the news. Up in the valleys it's all anyone can talk about. There are rivers running through almost all of them. The bird cherries are blossoming like crazy.

Ingemar wraps the blanket around his child. He nods off, but forces himself to wake up again, Ingemar needs to know that Gunn's there, he needs to know that Gunn's breathing. He desperately clings to the child. And this is something that will give rise to malicious gossip in several places, that Ingemar, the father and husband, didn't even participate in the search, didn't even stand on the side of the river watching the events unfold, but instead stayed at home. What kind of a man

would do that? And here the men and the women will be divided. The men will show contempt, the women will show support, roughly speaking and with a few exceptions. Perhaps the whole debate is just a way to deal with the events. Because everyone knew both Ulla and Marianne, everyone remembers Ulla who proudly conducted the school band through the town centre and past the retirement home on Constitution Day, it was only a few weeks ago. These images are clear and distinct, but the notion of the two bodies in the river? There's simply too much powerlessness in the fact that people may be dragged under by a current and die on a day with so much beauty in it that the very village song springs from it, *where the Glomma bursts forth wide and mighty, at the bottom of the valley, that's my childhood home*, and then this outrageous fact that the girl held the cornet in her hand. A hard grip, impossible to coax it out of her hand, that's what the rumour said. No. Better then to think about what real men must do, when the river retaliates, and to be completely honest about that requirement, things are much simpler that way.

From that June day in 1980, there's only Ingemar and Gunn in the house on Gunnarsmoen. For the rest of time there will only be the two of them. Well, for most of it: the two of them. When Ingemar sees his wife and his eldest daughter for the last time, it's just before the funeral. They're lying in their coffins with the lid off, and this is where Ingemar witnesses the thing with the cornet. It's only the man from the funeral home who knows how to cut around the funeral clothes and arrange everything around a hand holding a cornet. Ingemar looks at Ulla, and then at Marianne, and the cornet hits Ingemar's body like a rifle shot, and it looks as though he's about to break and collapse, but Yngve holds onto him and commands him to stay upright.

"My brother", Yngve says, "you can manage this. You have another child."

Marianne and Ulla are buried underneath the rowanberry trees next to Stor-Elvdal parish church on Stai in the middle of June 1980. Only one hundred metres below,

the Glomma continues to whoosh, fish swim, goldeneyes nest on the banks, stones are honed by sand and water, ice breaks off, sandbars form and disappear.

The cornet remains with Marianne in the soil, as if a drowned ten-year-old will one day suddenly come back to life and play march music. A short distance below their gravestones stands the memorial stone for Storofsen, the flood in 1789, the one who took away almost everything. You can't imagine how many people this river has claimed, the stone says, nobody will ever know the full extent.

Ingemar Survives

Winter has come, and Ingemar sits in the living room with the child. At night he carries Gunn close to himself while he hushes, even though the child's sleeping and close to one year old. Around him there are traces of the life that existed before. Ulla's wool jacket is thrown over a chair, her dressing gown hangs on a hook next to the bed, the tea bags from the specialty store in Hamar lie in a basket on the kitchen windowsill, her slippers are underneath a chair, the silver chain hangs in the bathroom. Ulla's a silhouette. Marianne's a shadow. The only one who appears real nowadays, is Gunn, the child that lived. The other child, the one who died, must be left to freeze and rest underneath the snow. But the grief constantly emerges. It must be suppressed, before it flares up again, and be suppressed yet again, it's a constant battle. Ingemar finds methods. He requires spaces where he can rest. He reads old village books, because in them there's nothing that opens abysses. He takes on Anders Fosvold's opus, *The Village Book of Stor-Eldal*, a two-volume work where the first volume was published in 1935, and which begins like this: *This village book does not claim to be a history of Stor-Eldal in the usual sense. And continues like this: If that was the case it should have included everything that concerns the village, like the district council, the school- and social authorities, the labour movement, the trade and many more aspects of local life.* The author was a teacher, just like Ingemar, there's a statue of him up on Atna, and there's something in his opening lines that affects Ingemar. They seem important and matter of fact and tell the story of hard work. The book itself is a memory from another time. It dates back to a time when Ingemar wasn't yet born, and his parents hadn't yet met. There's peace to be found in books like these.

Outside it's snowing. The neighbour Leif shovels in front of Ingemar's door, his wife Ester pops around with a portion of food when he least expects it, and Yngve drives from Oslo weekend after weekend. Yngve does a lot for his brother this

autumn: he sorts out the firewood, he bakes bread that he later freezes, he buys milk, he makes liver pate, he cooks dinner and puts the leftovers in the freezer. One weekend he clears out all of Marianne's stuff. He packs the toys and the schoolbooks and the cassette player and the Rubik's cube and the diary and the notebooks and the skipping rope and the marker pens. He puts everything into paper bags and takes them to the barn. He doesn't touch Ulla's belongings. He tries once, but Ingemar throws himself at him and rips the stuff from his hands. To clear out Ulla is impossible right now, so Yngve clears out the ten-year-old child and allows the thirty-year old woman to remain. Yngve realises that he's setting an immense and perhaps unforgivable silence into motion, because who knows when the paper bags in the barn will be opened again, but right now it's crucial to take care of the living. Ingemar's standing on the edge, he may fall into the abyss, that's how Yngve reasons, and in such circumstances, one can only trust one's gut instinct. Yngve believes it's a mistake to clear out the toys, the notebooks and the homemade bead necklaces made of Play-Doh, but that it's also for the best to make this mistake. He does what he must do to keep Ingemar going. During this time Yngve's never far away, but he stays with acquaintances so as not to be too close to Ingemar, it's a pedagogical method: Ingemar needs to learn to manage on his own. Sometimes, as Yngve arrives, he waits on the porch, sometimes in the hallway. He hears Ingemar humming to the child, hears Ingemar crossing the floor, hears him lie down when the kid is sleeping, hears him put on the coffee. Right now, Ingemar isn't required to do anything more than to take care of the daughter he has left. Everything else would be too much to ask. He only needs to keep the kid and himself alive, that's his duty, because no grief is so immense that it's acceptable to leave a child behind to shoot yourself in the forest or behind the house, as the men around here sometimes do. Ingemar has received that message loud and clear, and he understands that message: "You do not give up." So Ingemar keeps himself alive, attentive to this one and only demand.

It snows a lot. The snow lies heavy on the fir trees, blankets the houses and makes the doors creak. Yngve tiptoes around Ingemar and empties the bins and refills the fridge. On Saturday evenings, neighbours Ester and Leif take little Gunn over to theirs, and then Ingemar and Yngve drink, because it's Saturday, and Saturday's the day for numbing yourself. Ingemar quickly falls asleep underneath the picture of Ulla sitting by the wheel in her Mazda, with her elbow hanging out of the window of the car in which she learned to drive, the car they found down by Stai Bridge with the keys still in the ignition, and it's astonishing how Ingemar leaves the picture on the wall, but he does. Ingemar stays mostly inside, rarely goes outside, not even to shovel in front of the door. Others do that for him; he just doesn't always know whom. That's why it takes time for Ingemar to grasp that a baby's born next door, that Leif and Ester welcome their second son only weeks before Christmas, and that the second son's called Pelle.

Moelven Senior

This is something that makes Leif proud: the fact that Pelle's born in the hallway when the ambulance doesn't get there on time. He's the one who's made sure his family has a house of their own. It's a good house, it's a good hallway, and there's no harm in being born there. The house comes from prefab home manufacturer Moelven, bears the name Moelven Senior, has two bedrooms, and is delivered in four sections during the summer of 1974. The sections are clicked together on the site like a building set, and everything that needs to be connected to water comes in the same section, the way things do when the price must be cheap, and everything's pre-made in a factory. Even the wallpaper's glued onto the walls in the factory. "Moelven", Leif eagerly declares as he returns from the barber the previous year, because it's the barber who's told him about this opportunity, "it's not that difficult to get a new house, Moelvans are affordable, the barber's been offered a mortgage."

"You shouldn't believe everything you hear at the barber's", Ester says, and they both smile, because they do want a new house, neither they nor their son Lars-Arne have ever had dry feet during winter. They live on Gunnarsmoen, in a house from the 1930s, built with the cheapest materials possible, it's as if winter itself breathes through it. The new house from Moelven is insulated and has an oil stove and radiators. "And it's funny", Leif says, "because Moelven began by producing barracks for loggers. And we certainly know those barracks, don't we?" he says. And Ester laughs, because she remembers trekking through the forest to see Leif when they were recently married. Leif didn't take the time off work to go down to the village because of the piece rate, he preferred to stay in the logging area. The barracks from Moelven were already a few decades old, but they were still standing and they were dry and warm, and the two of them would sleep in one like that. Lars-Arne was made in one of those barracks, or else he would never have been made, because Ester couldn't bear doing the business either on the ground or in

the open air, Ester likes comfort. So, she smiles when Leif comes home and tells her about the Moelven house and the mortgage.

The house is assembled in 1974 right next to the old house, which is turned into an outhouse, but no matter how comfortable the new house may be, there's no sign of another child. It takes time. It's not until Ulla and Ingemar have had their second daughter that the plan for Ester and Leif's second little man finally comes together. Ester invites Ulla around for coffee, Ulla brings her new baby with her, and Ester tells her that she and Leif are also expecting their second child, and that their new kid will be born in December. Ulla smiles. They already have two kids who are friends. Marianne and Lars-Arne have already been inseparable for years. They're always outside playing together, and Lars-Arne has asked time and time again if he can join the school band like Marianne, but Ester says no. Ulla tries her best to convince her, she even says he can sit with her at rehearsal. Ester lights a cigarette while she caresses her belly that's still invisible, shaking her head. "I can't stand that school committee", she says. "It's enough with all the football clothes, and there's not a chance that a kid like Lars-Arne can look after an instrument", she says, "and then there's the uniform, I feel like I can picture Lars-Arne wearing a band uniform, he's going to ruin it", she says, "there's not a single garment that Lars-Arne hasn't torn to shreds, he's half kid and half fox and then a little bit of troll on top of that", Ester says, smiling. Later Ester will think that had she given in, had she been bothered with the school band, or looking after band uniforms, she could have had one less son on that day in June 1980, her son could also have been found in the river with a cornet in his hand. That thought is one big abomination, and so is the relief that this befell someone else's child and not hers, a relief that God can impossibly forgive. Ester thinks about how kids in other places and other times have died in bus loads, entire ships filled with kids have capsized, imagine what a struggle it has always been for people when they lose their children. At the same time, she feels that she too has one less child. It's not right

for her to think like that, because Marianne wasn't her child. There are so many thoughts that are abominations, Ester has lost count entirely.

Lars-Arne's enraged during the time that follows Ulla and Marianne's funeral. He flares up for nothing, and every single week there are messages from school mentioning fights. It's always been embarrassing how stubborn Lars-Arne is, but now it's even more embarrassing. Now Ester has completely lost control, everyone can see that, pregnant with her second child and with no get-up-and-go. Ester knows that it's this thing with Marianne and the river that makes the boy so impossible, but what is she supposed to say, after the funeral the whole village is silent. She has Pelle in December, gives birth to him on the hallway floor, he's healthy and beautiful. With the boy in her arms, she watches Yngve trek through the snow with paper bags, she knows he's clearing out Marianne's stuff, and Ester tells Lars-Arne to ask if he can have something, a memory perhaps, surely, he could do that? "He's over there right now, uncle Yngve, you can ask him." Lars-Arne doesn't even look at her, kicks a shoe across the floor, and Ester knows that she could've been the type of mother who sorted things out, who would talk to Yngve, to make sure her boy could have something from Marianne, a drawing or something to remember her by, but she can't bring herself to do it. It's not something you would ring people's doorbell for, either. Ten-year-old Lars-Arne spends a lot of time on the sofa, furious and lonely.

Then there's Ester and Pelle at home on their own all day. Lars-Arne's at school, and Leif's at work in the kitchen factory. In the two houses on Gunnarsmoen, people don't exactly run through each other's doors. Ester and Ingemar don't see each other up close until spring comes, and then it's because they both happen to be hanging laundry on the shared drying rack outside. Ester and Ingemar don't say much, but the kids take a shine to each other from the first moment they catch a whiff of the other. They stare, Pelle from the pram, and Gunn from the baby

carrier that Ingemar has been given as a present from the teachers at school, they've chipped in and bought it, even though it's not common for men to carry around their children in a backpack that way. But there are special circumstances, this thing with Ingemar, everybody knows that the ordinary rules don't apply. And that's how Pelle and Gunn meet, one of them a little more than a year, the other one six months old. From that day by the clothesline, Pelle and Gunn are aware of one another. They look at each other, too small to understand what they see, but they smell one another, inhaling the scent of something significant, something intense. The river flows relentlessly behind the forest grove, the sun forces the world to thaw, and everything's telling Gunn and Pelle that this is your lot, this is where you live, you have parents that don't get each other at all, but it doesn't matter, all you need is this clearing between the houses, open land, neutral ground, and it runs underneath the clothesline which is on the border, on the ground below there's a soft layer of moss, does the world need to be any bigger than that? It's big enough. It's April, it's 1981, it's exactly ten months since Ulla and Marianne were pulled into the river for reasons nobody can understand, but Gunn smiles, and Pelle smiles. A few years later, there's a new duo running around underneath the clothesline, back and forth across the uneven swampy ground. The two kids, Gunn and Pelle, are playing and playing, unaware of how much it hurts to watch them from either window, but they play, nonetheless.

Pelle, the School, the Scolding and the Free Church

Pelle can't quite figure out school, it shows already on the first day when the principal calls out his name, and he clings to Ester. When he's finally made to go to the blackboard, he can't manage to circle PELLE, which the teacher has written in chalk, a pedagogical method introduced in line with the model curriculum for primary school, M87. He's simply unable to find his name. Ester finds the incident embarrassing and yells at Pelle afterwards. She tells him that he's certainly able to read his own name, what kind of nonsense is this. It's the first day, the others blend in and conform. It's to be expected that Pelle finds it difficult to learn to read. It's to be expected that Ester doesn't say a bad word at the PTA meetings, if she even shows up at all. It's to be expected that the letters are impossible to put together into something comprehensible, and that Pelle is unable to recite the words the way Gunn does, which Gunn has been doing for a long time already. It's to be expected that Pelle throws his lunchbox across the classroom and doesn't come in when recess is over. Pelle's called to the principal's office already in the first year of school, and before he enters, he must pass by the teachers' lounge, where Ingemar sits closest to the open door, and Ingemar says without a hint of surprise in his voice: "Hello Pelle, is that you?" Everywhere Pelle goes, his brother Lars-Arne has gone before him, and it's a tricky path to navigate. Pelle would rather not read anything at all, unless he's forced to. The only thing he won't do is curse, because Ester and Leif have forbidden him from doing so.

When Pelle starts first grade, he embarks on nine years of elementary school which teaches him several things. First and foremost, that he's probably not the type to get much use out of reading. He learns that Gunnarsmoen, the place where he's grown up, has two kinds of adults. Those who make the rules, like the teacher Ingemar and his dead wife, who came from the kind of background that made it possible for her and Ingemar to buy an entire house for their own money and who

then ensured that the village got a full-time daycare. And then, those who do not, like Pelle's mum and dad, who have never set the rules and never will, and who don't even believe they should. Pelle's dad, Leif, leaves for the kitchen factory every morning at seven and returns home at three o'clock in the afternoon. Pelle's mother, Ester, goes to the supermarket two days a week, but otherwise she stays at home, when she's not rushing around to her cleaning jobs of course. When Pelle finally learns to read, it's because Ingemar helps him. "Let's read out loud", Ingemar says the first few years, and later he says: "Can't you just do your homework together here at Gunn's?", and Gunn and Pelle do as they're told, and Ingemar helps Pelle, and while it's not that many hours per week, it's enough for Pelle to pull himself together, he becomes an able reader, it's Gunnarsmoen that makes Pelle read as well as he does. Pelle struggles through elementary school, and perhaps it works well enough because he holds on to Gunn so tightly, until the day he doesn't. But until then, Gunn and Ingemar's house is Pelle's second home, where they're allowed to mess around in ways that are unacceptable at Pelle's. Ester doesn't like that Pelle spends so much time at Gunn's, she tells him that he shouldn't harass the neighbours, that the best thing for kids is to be outside, she speaks these words in a high-pitched, nagging voice. She continues a tradition, because that's how her mother used to nag, and that's how all the mothers she has known have nagged. Children who are not scolded become hopeless adults, they grow up without understanding right and wrong, they end up like wimps, and they need to be able to play outside, like children should, it's good for them, and for their lungs, and besides it doesn't get as dirty inside if they do. Nagging is scolding, but Pelle understands scolding. Scolding is words. Scolding is natural. "Come inside", Ester nags, "get outside, hurry up and eat that slice now, don't miss the bus, do your homework, get to bed faster than a speeding bullet." It's a melody, nothing else.

At Gunn's house things are quiet, and things are especially quiet when it comes to scolding. Ingemar's angry voice is so confusing, because it's so soft. Still, nobody's as devastated as Gunn when she's reprimanded in Ingemar's gentle manner, the one that means his face turns to stone and he sorrowfully says things like: *You're not being considerate, Gunn. You need to show more compassion for others*, the one that means he might spurn her for hours on end when she's woken him up with too much noise on a Sunday morning. When this happens, Gunn's inconsolable, but she never contemplates if things would be better if he had nagged: *Make sure you get outside so that grown-up people can get some sleep*, like Pelle's mother does.

Gunn and Pelle live in two different countries.

They both have visas for the other one's country, and they cross the border on a regular basis. Eventually Gunn learns that Ingemar must be allowed to sleep in and have some time alone on Sundays, as he's been sitting awake in front of the tv screen the entire Saturday night, pouring himself the first glass after the news and not stopping until early morning. He watches old movies while he sits there alone all through the night, he's bought himself a VHS player and has a pile of video cassettes, and the sound of Gunn on Sunday mornings is too much for his head. So, Gunn learns that Sundays are best spent outside, because it's very good and healthy to be outside, that's what Gunn tells Pelle, and that's why the two of them are outside on Sundays. But one Sunday every month things are different, because then they can stay indoors at Pelle's together with Lars-Arne, then they can play boardgames and create a ruckus, because the parents have taken their car to attend a meeting at the free church that's not in the village, but further south, and on this one Sunday every month only adults are allowed to attend, and then there's free rein and soda and chips and wrestling on the sofa, and Gunnarsmoen is rocking with so much freedom, rocking so loud that the river can hear. But there's one person who can't hear a thing, and that's Ingemar, that's how deeply he's sleeping, that's how drunk he was the night before. And this: the journeys to the free church

for Pelle's parents in the one house, and Ingemar sleeping off his hangover in the other house, it's like a system invented by Gunnarsmoen itself: it works perfectly, it works flawlessly until the day it's no longer working. But until then it rattles and moves like a marble in a snow track and creates a kind of balance, because finally they can be inside Pelle's house, and there's always something that breaks, a glass or something. But Lars-Arne hides the shards, and when Ester and Leif's car lights appear in the front yard, everything's been tidied and the tv is on and everyone's sitting on the sofa, exhausted and happy to have gotten so much hullabaloo out of a Sunday. Pelle's parents often bring a Napoleon Cake upon their return, there's someone in the congregation who sells them during the meetings, and this is how some of Gunn's best childhood moments involve sitting in Moelven Senior on a Sunday, eating Napoleon Cake with Pelle and Lars-Arne, and then there's the taste of the filling: butter, cream, sugar, vanilla, egg, it all tastes wonderful, Gunn never has cakes like these at Ingemar's. And when the kids receive Ester's shrill message saying *get yourselves to bed, or we won't bring cake next time*, Gunn goes home again, and at home she finds Ingemar sitting in his chair, having just woken up after Saturday night's long numbing session, and now he's gentle, now he says:

"Well, well, I guess things are not that great over at Pelle's. You can bring him here someday."

People Who Exist

Ingemar has a degree in education, has learned to put himself in other people's shoes, has read Kierkegaard, Rousseau and Piaget, has read Sartre, while at the teacher's college in Elverum. In addition, he's living in the century of the child. He knows full well that he should tell Gunn about her mother and sister in a way that's suitable for her age, but he'd rather not. The truth - could this really be helpful for a three-year-old, four-year-old, five-year-old? But forgetting isn't allowed, everyone says so, even Science says so. Yet it's oblivion that is most tempting to Ingemar. But he tries, he's an educator after all, he introduces rituals that don't make much sense, things he himself can live with: he sometimes carries Gunn on his arm to the cemetery, lets her wave to the mossy gravestone he found on the mountain. At night he and Gunn stand together at the window on Gunnarsmoen.

"Good night, mummy", Gunn speaks into the evening darkness, as she sits on Ingemar's arm in her nightgown. "Good night, Marianne".

Then they wave. For a long time, Gunn believes she's waving at the stars. Then she slowly begins to understand more: Mummy is Ulla, Ulla owned the dressing gown that still hangs on the hook, Ulla owned the feminist magazines that Gunn isn't allowed to touch, Ulla founded the daycare (or so Ingemar claims), Ulla was from Rena, Ulla's mother lived in the big house on the big farmstead in Rena, mummy Ulla smiles from a green car in a photo on the living room wall. Gunn learns that there are people who no longer exist, but whom she still must wave to every night. Ingemar believes he's doing his duty with that wave, and by saying things like "your mother would've liked that", but he's generally occupied with silence.

"Hey, were you my mummy's dad?" Gunn says one day as they're eating buns with Ulla's father, Gunn's grandfather, in Rena, it's summer vacation.

All the adults are taken aback.

"Was Ulla *your* *kid*?" Gunn asks in a dramatic voice.

“She was, yes.”

“But she’s DEAD.”

“Yes, she is.”

“But aren’t you SAD?”

“Let’s eat some buns!” Ingemar exclaims.

Gunn will spend her life trying to understand how things are connected and it’s been a long time since she began this lifelong task. But at this point, her sister Marianne’s only a candle burning in the cemetery and a few hearts that she draws because Ingemar asks her to. Heart, heart, heart and Marianne, Marianne, Marianne. Gunn and Ingemar place the drawings next to the lantern burning by the grave. And then of course it’s the “Good night, Marianne”, out towards the forest, night after night. That’s all Ingemar can manage when it comes to such things, but there are other things he can manage far better: vitamins, PTA meetings, buying shoes and clothes in Hamar during autumn break, rain clothes, calling Gunn’s playmates when she doesn’t come home on time, talking to their mothers, picking her up if it’s too cold, which it sometimes is, but otherwise she’s made to walk or take the kick sleigh, there’s no way she’ll become a wimp. Ingemar has a job, a salary, he has the house which Ulla paid for, and which he now owns outright, and he has the small inheritance from Ulla, because Ulla’s mother owned a forest property that was harvested and the money was transformed into stock shares, so Ingemar doesn’t lack anything, and he provides firewood, provides food, provides almost everything. In the evenings he goes outside on the porch and calls out to Gunn to get inside, and as he does this, you can be sure that Gunn’s hiding together with Pelle, they get up to all sorts all the time, that boy doesn’t stop, he never stops, his mother’s always frustrated, he returns home with holes in all his clothes, that’s who he is, commandments go through one ear and out the other. But he’s kind, he always smiles, that boy’s almost like a brother, that’s how Ingemar feels and he gets lost in thought, reminisces about another girl who also almost had a sibling, a brother next door, and then he interrupts his train of

thought before he reaches the conclusion that something feels similar, and that things may repeat themselves. Because nothing must repeat itself. He can't help that his house is the same, that the house next door is the same, that the Glomma is the same, that the world claims to be the same as before June 1980, the year when the bird cherries were blossoming like crazy. But he's relieved that Gunn's not alone. Gunn messes around with Pelle who insists that Gunn build treehouses with him. As a bonus, Gunn is scolded the same way Pelle is, because nobody can do scolding like a true Pentecostalist, like Ester and Leif are, and that makes Gunn stand tall like a soldier, the kid accepts the reprimand as if it's squash and waffles. She becomes just as good at this as she is at creeping around Ingemar's silence, it's really something else. Gunnarsmoen's intrinsic upbringing makes Gunn interdisciplinary and competent, and the same goes for Pelle.

The preoccupation with context begins the very same day Gunn finds the album. Gunn's five years old, and she's rummaging through the shelves in the living room. Ingemar's in the kitchen, the radio's on, and then she's suddenly holding a dusty photo album in her hands. Thick cardboard pages with photos, at first baby pictures and a hairlock that's been glued in, then more pictures, words that are sometimes written in ballpoint pen, sometimes in pencil, a handwriting Gunn doesn't recognise, but that she should have known, because it belongs to Ulla, until it suddenly changes and becomes Yngve's. The photo album has been hidden behind a couple of large books at the bottom part of the shelf, hidden from everyone since the day Yngve added the last pictures right before Christmas that wretched year. He took the photos from the envelope that came in the mail and glued them onto the pages, one by one, with a few brief comments, such as dates and names. He put the album on the shelf in the living room, and the years went by. This is the day when Gunn finds it. This is the moment Gunn becomes someone's sister. With the album in her hands, the context appears in her mind through a quick and astonishing connection. She has a sister, the way other people

have sisters, that's WHAT Marianne is, a sister. Every single adult who has spoken to Gunn, watched Gunn and Ingemar walk across the cemetery with drawings in their hands, have believed that Gunn has realised that Marianne was her sister as in *her sister*, as in the general term "sister". But Gunn hasn't realised this, not until the day with the album, which she finds on the bottom shelf and starts looking through, and this is how Ingemar finds her: on the floor, while she flicks the pages. "Who's this?" Gunn asks.

Ingemar replies:

"It's Marianne, your sister. Who died. You know this already."

The album has blue plastic covers, and there's nothing written on it. It could be an album about anything, but an entire life has been glued onto those pages. There's a baby lying in a woman's arms, they're in a hospital bed, there's a birth announcement (*A beautiful daughter arrived on 12 March 1970. Ulla and Ingemar, Koppang*). First there are black-and-white photos of a girl who's two years old, three years old, birthday pictures, then the colour pictures begin, the girl has grown older, there are pictures of her with a cornet, and Gunn recognises the parish house, the school, the houses in the town centre. She recognises other people in the pictures: teachers, Ingemar. There are pictures of the girl dressed as a sunflower, together with a woman who's also dressed as a sunflower, there's a picture of Ingemar carrying the sleeping girl on his shoulders, and of Ingemar and the girl making food on a portable stove, and there are pictures of Ulla and Ingemar and the girl with a little baby in their arms. There are pictures of the girl on a scout trip, of the girl having jam on her entire face while she smiles, of her dancing while holding a cassette recorder. Then there are pictures of two coffins standing side by side in Stor-Elvdal parish church, two coffins and wreaths and arrangements and bows and ribbons and a folded sheet that says stuff like *entrance music: Air by Bach*.

"Why didn't you tell me that she was my big sister?" Gunn says.

“My darling, I’ve told you about her. Marianne, that’s your sister, I’ve told you so. I’ve talked about her since you were little”, Ingemar says.

“No, you haven’t! You’ve forgotten to, you haven’t said anything about it. You’ve only said that she was a girl!”

“Yes, and that she was your sister.”

But it’s not true. Gunn lifts the album, holds it in the light, looks at the girl, flicks the pages, now she can see it: the girl in the pictures is sitting in her house, she’s even inside the room that Gunn calls her own. And she’s also sitting in Pelle’s living room, together with Lars-Arne and Ester. What could it be, this life that looks like hers, but that isn’t hers? And the rage that now begins to simmer, will there actually be an end to it? This anger stems from something terrible: that she’s lived all this time without having realised that she once had a sister, that she hadn’t truly realised. A sister. She rushes to her feet, grabs a soup plate that’s on the table, the one from Ulla’s mother, Ingemar has taught Gunn the difficult name of the porcelain manufacturer *Johnson Brothers of Stoke-on-Trent* just for fun, and she throws it through the room so that it hits the floor and breaks into three pieces. The sound of it crushing will last for decades, it will last until the moment Gunn will throw the same soup plate into the wall once again and for the same reasons, but it’s still a long time away.

“You haven’t”, Gunn fumes. “You haven’t TOLD ME ANYTHING. And still, it’s MY SISTER.”

Ingemar packs all the porcelain into a bag and lays the broken plate on top. Then he puts the bag in the barn.

“I don’t get how she couldn’t understand it, I’ve told her so many times”, Ingemar tells Yngve on the phone. His brother now lives in Karlsrud in Oslo and doesn’t return to the valley as often anymore. He works for the NSB, just like their father did, but back then they just called it the railroad.

“What you say and what she hears, it’s not the same thing”, Yngve replies.

“I can’t deal with this”, Ingemar speaks into the receiver, “I can’t deal with her flicking through that album. I had hidden it. Or I don’t remember that I’d made it.”

“If you hadn’t hidden it, she wouldn’t have found it like that”, Yngve replies, and after that call, it will be a long time before Ingemar phones him again. To Ingemar, this moment, the one where his five-year-old daughter throws a porcelain plate through the living room and cries with anger, is still on his list of absolute defeats. That list is long; it has grown over the years.

Yes, there’s a lot of shame that has accumulated, and when Gunn drives up the valley to help Ingemar in March 2020, this is something he’s still struggling with. It’s a shame that has tripled over the years, and that is now moving at slow speed, pushing things in front of it like an ice floe in the river. Here he is, with a messy shirt, snow on his slippers and with damp firewood in the old pigsty, completely baffled. He uses his daughter like his lawyer, his helper, but how will she be able to clean things up? She’s the last person who can clean up the mess he’s made. He knows he owes Gunn an explanation, but this is something he’s failed at, not just once, but several times. And here she is, ready to help, without realising that it’s impossible. She has driven her Yaris along Highway 3, she has walked through the door and tidied the fridge with a forty-year-old’s belief in that everything can be fixed, and God help her for believing so, the amount of arrogance people that age carry. *Forty-year-olds, he can’t bloody stand them.*

Ingemar Has Become Old

There are two living rooms in Ingemar's house. For the heat from the stove to reach both rooms, the door between them must remain open. In one of them Ingemar follows the recent events, silent and depressed. In the other one Gunn sits by her computer and sends an e-mail to her co-worker on the goddamn conference project. Never has a shutdown come at a more convenient moment, the conference they're supposed to arrange has been postponed indefinitely, the world has come to a standstill at the nick of time. She shuts her laptop and takes a break. She's not used to taking a break, but now she will. She sees Ingemar's hunched back, what is she supposed to do, she begins to clean the bathroom, then the living room. If she begins to clean, it'll be an endless task, but Gunn enjoys endless tasks. She has always appreciated testing boundaries, only to discover that the boundaries are shifting. Ingemar watches Gunn as she rushes around the house with a bucket and cloth, lifting stacks of newspapers and magazines, removing several days old bread crust from a plate, cleaning the razor on the bathroom shelf of small, stiff hairs. Normally, Ingemar would have felt awkward sitting still while others are working, but now he doesn't appear to give a fig.

"Apparently I've become old", Ingemar says.

"Yes", Gunn agrees.

"It just happened so fast", he says.

"When do you think it happened?" Gunn asks and pauses with the cloth in her hand.

"It happened... I don't know when it happened."

"But was there something specific that happened?"

"Of course there was something specific", Ingemar says and knows he's saying too much.

Outside the house Michelle is zipping by, the dog leash is tight, the girl's pretty much getting dragged into the forest, she keeps shouting, *Gordon, easy now*, but the

dog has other plans, it makes its own way through the snow, eagerly and out of control. Ingemar gets up from his chair and watches them go by.

“Well,” he says. “Off they go, I guess.”

“Tell me what happened”, Gunn says.

But Ingemar sits down again and closes his eyes.

“Just leave it alone, Gunn”, he says. “And leave *me* alone.”

She leaves Ingemar alone, she continues to clean what else can she do. She’s received a message from Pelle, he’s asked if she can come outside around six p.m. tomorrow, it was a friendly message with a smiley from an unknown number and *all the best from the one-legged neighbour*. So, he’s using the leg as an alibi. But she asked for this, after all she was the one who went over and rang the doorbell because she imagined that she would defend her father and sort things out. She and Pelle will just have to sit there for a moment, they don’t have to talk that much, maybe it’ll all be over in fifteen minutes. Once upon a time a wall came down between them, and Gunn isn’t keen to remove it. But now he’s sent a message, the first one in over twenty years. It probably helps that it’s so cold. Who in their right mind would linger outside when it’s minus ten degrees?

“Seriously, are you and Pelle going to sit outside?” Ingemar asks when she mentions that she has plans.

“We’re just going to have a little chat.”

“But I didn’t think you and Pelle were on speaking terms anymore?”

“Everything has been shut down, what else can we do?”

Ingemar stretches out in the armchair, puts the blanket on top of him and takes a little nap. This thing about them no longer being on speaking terms keeps hovering in the room.

It’s a long time until tomorrow, and Gunn needs more to do. She collects Ingemar’s clothes which are scattered around, some of them have been used so often and so thoroughly that they’ve begun to smell, it never used to be like this, and when he wakes up, she lies and says *Oops, I thought it was dirty laundry, and well,*

now everything's in the washing machine. She imagines that this is how it should be: in certain situations, it's reasonable to clean other people's dirt, pick up their nail clippings from the floor, and keep their bodies tidy. If you're too good for that, you're an idiot. *One day people will do the same for you, so don't be so high-and-mighty,* she tells herself, and thoughts like that give her energy. She will use the time to make Ingemar's house shine. Everything will smell of soap and peacefulness and freshly polished ceramic hobs when she's done.

"Have you heard anything from Hanses?" Ingemar asks out of the blue as Gunn rushes past.

"Ehrrm, no", Gunn says.

"I saw him on TV", Ingemar says. "Perhaps it had something to do with the Venice Biennale?"

"Yes, it probably did."

"I don't understand that much of his art. But it was sad that things ended between you two."

"Dad".

"Yes, I know. I shouldn't interfere."

"Maybe you could call him?" Gunn says. "You know he'd be happy to talk to you."

"I don't think so. I'm probably a closed chapter to him."

The gloominess. This weight that has enveloped Ingemar's entire long body. This is what makes her clean more intensely, run in and out with food waste bags, recycled paper, empty glass cans, this is what makes her go all in on the next task: to polish the small-paned, crooked windows that never get completely clean. Maybe Ingemar believes that a father must be loyal and not call a former son-in-law.

"Someone wrote that Hanses' porcelain stuff may set us free", Ingemar says. "I don't understand how porcelain can set anyone free."

“That’s just how people in the art business write”, Gunn says. “It’s not certain that porcelain can actually set anyone free.”

“He does make beautiful things”, Ingemar continues. “Where does he get his inspiration from? I’ve never quite figured that out.”

Before, Gunn and Ingemar used to talk a lot about Hanses, but now all the questions regarding Hanses are difficult to answer. Gunn believes she knows where Hanses gets his inspiration from these days, but she hasn’t planned on telling Ingemar, that’s what it’s like to not be married anymore. She has driven up to Ingemar alone this time, Hanses exists in another universe, and Ingemar doesn’t need to know which one. When she and Hanses were married and drove up the valley together, they would sit in the car and talk about what Ingemar needed help with, they would make fun of his shirts, plan how they would split the chores on Gunnarsmoen, make a cunning plan to coerce some Christmas gift requests. Now when Gunn’s here on her own, she must think of everything herself, and Ingemar still hasn’t asked her about her own job. That’s just the way it is, she reflects, men pay most attention to other men and their things, it doesn’t matter what kind of men or what kind of things.

Ingemar Attends a Meeting

Stor-Elvdal is a small valley, a snapdragon seed, barely visible in the bigger picture. It's a river that takes a bend through the valley floor, and from above: a strip of water that trickles over rocks. Here, like in most other places, there are also people who do their utmost to look backward rather than forward, who diligently read local history books, books that are almost without exception written by men with stable jobs in the education system. There are people who spend their entire lives in this limited discipline, a discipline that in Stor-Elvdal's case means a section of the world that only covers a few miles, and an era of only a couple of hundred years. Local history has very few critics. It can be a good place to inhabit for someone who is grieving.

Ingemar Smedplassen brings nine-month-old Gunn to his first meeting with the editorial committee for the Christmas pamphlet *At the Bottom of the Valley*. It's October and the meeting takes place in the home of Annemarte, who is a student teacher and editor, but this is not yet a history team, but an editorial committee established by interested parties on behalf of the sports team's skiing club. The skiing club requires the money the sales from a local history pamphlet can generate, and it's published once a year leading up to Christmas. This year's cover has already been decided: a snow-covered landscape seen from Hammeren, illustrated by the elderly Isak B, a former logger.

Ingemar sits on the sofa at Annemarte's, she's renting a flat in the basement of a newly built house down on the construction site.

"So, how are things going?" Annemarte says, because you've got to say something when someone enters your living room, but she immediately feels that she could have chosen a better opening line.

Gunn whimpers, but calms down with a bottle, and Ingemar says: "thank you, I'm hanging in there."

Not a single word about everything that took place last summer: the two dead bodies in the river, the cornet in Marianne's hand, the bright yellow dress in the river water, or about the Bee Gees tape in the Mazda, and the funeral, all the things people have been talking about for months.

No, nothing about any of this.

Just coffee with milk, thank you.

This meeting is Ingemar's first away from home since Marianne and Ulla were *taken by the river*, as people call it. Annemarte squirms like a snake on the sofa because she's so afraid of saying something wrong. This skinny, long-haired man and his kid are quite a duo to have as guests, and she had no idea they were coming, they just showed up. The others have cancelled, so this gathering of horrible events is something she must handle all on her own. Annemarte originally intended that this issue would focus on the Glomma through the ages with an emphasis on floods and devastation, but here's *taken-by-the-river-Ingemar* with his kid, making the proposal completely impossible. Annemarte tucks the sheet with the agenda underneath her thigh. May he never find it.

"What should this issue be about?" Ingemar asks. "We need to fill this pamphlet with something."

"It should be about what we want it to be about", Annemarte says.

She's just barely out of her teens, Ingemar was her teacher at school, and therefore he holds too much power to be contradicted. And the cooing baby on top of that.

"I can write about the station houses", Ingemar says. "I used to live in one of them when I was little."

Annemarte is so relieved that she knocks over a cup of coffee, because Ingemar isn't just the problem, he's also the solution, and he's handsome, she believes he'll probably find himself a new wife soon, as long as he takes matters into his own hands and cuts his hair, or maybe he doesn't need to cut his hair. Because there's something beautiful about a man sitting with a child like that, there's something heroic, and under different circumstances than a meeting with the editorial

committee for *At the Bottom of the Valley*, she could imagine meeting him for more carnal reasons, yes, that thought is very tangible, maybe not so explicit, but it exists in her body.

“If you want to, you’re welcome”, Annemarte says, feeling scared. Afterwards she burns the old agenda in the fireplace. She will later come to realise that the river’s devastation, the fact that she could imagine it as a topic this year, is an example of how stupid a person can be.

Ulla and the Full-time Daycare

Gunn gets a place in the municipal daycare when she's a year and a half old. The marvellous daycare, the refurbished Swiss chalet that now has swings and a playpen and a laundry room, became part of the municipality's welfare services in 1977 and is considered by many as Ulla's work, because it was Ulla who raised the issue at the local council back in 1975. She allowed herself to be interviewed in the newspaper and argued that a full-time daycare was a fundamental municipal service and not something unnecessary, as some of the dissenting voices claimed. Ulla grew up knowing that battles are there to be fought. She was raised on a big farm; her mother had her own money and her own inheritance. Her mother had her furniture reupholstered with wool fabric from abroad, her mother was buried in a designer dress from Paris right before Ulla met Ingemar. Ulla inherited some nice things from her mother, including courage. The dissenting voices made her grunt, the ones who chanted: *Here we look after our own kids*. Ulla believed that the opposition to daycare was oppression disguised as concern, and she gained support from the Public Health Association, of which she was not a member. We're living in modern times, Ulla said, and there were many that listened to what she had to say.

Yes, we're living in modern times. Ulla holds a little baby in her arms while she debates. The vitality a young mother exudes, that power, is something that many of the older men fall for, while the older ladies are sceptical, perhaps it's rooted in plain and simple jealousy. But the modern times are becoming visible, and everyone can see it: there are many women working while they still have families. Or: the women in the village have always both worked and had families, the kids have either gotten in their way, gotten in a neighbour's way or have looked after themselves, but the accident statistics are dire, not even these kids are immune to accidents that occur while their mothers are busy doing other things. Cars smash into playing kids in broad daylight, that is a fact. Ulla doesn't use it as an argument,

but most people shudder when someone insists that it's dangerous for kids to play unsupervised all day long in a society where both kids and cars travel down the same roads.

And then it happens. The new daycare opens at 8 a.m. one day in 1977, and within weeks there are no vacancies left. Mothers drive their kids there in the morning and pick them up at no later than 3 p.m., seeing as the supermarket closes at 4 p.m. The daycare's kitchen interior is nothing fancy, that's the consensus, so after only a couple of years it is replaced by a new one and installed the very next day after Marianne and Ulla's burial. The new kitchen is delivered by kitchen factory Svestad, north of Koppang town centre, right next to the train tracks, where Pelle's father Leif works until the factory downsizes and goes bankrupt a couple of times before it finally closes, but in 1980 it's still vibrant and delivers kitchen after kitchen to Norwegian houses and cottages, and also to the daycare when times are tough. It's Leif himself who arrives to assemble everything in the municipal building, and as he lifts the corrugated doors and screws in the hinges, it's as if his body is shivering, it's as if he has a cold in his muscles, he can't understand why, but it's obviously because of the funeral the previous day, and that Ulla somehow remains in the walls of this building.

Leif's son, Pelle, will never attend any daycare, because if there's one thing that his parents Leif and Ester know, it's that they'll look after their own kids, so that Pelle and Lars-Arne become the sort of boys who have Gunnarsmoen as their territory, where the treehouse-building will become so extensive for a few years that all loose planks will disappear into the trees, and rusty nails will be pressed into children's feet and demand medical attention a couple of times a year, but boys will be boys, Ester keeps saying, isn't that their purpose in life, to come rushing in with torn sweaters, bruises, and scars from nails? No, it's only kids like the teacher's daughter who goes to daycare from 8 in the morning, but then again, the kid can't be home alone now that her mother's dead, that's obvious, so Ingemar receives some kind

of compassion as he delivers his daughter to the welfare castle. *The welfare castle.*

That's how he chooses to view the daycare.

He hides what he also knows full well: how annoyed he was with Ulla for constantly attending meetings about the daycare. How impatient he could get when she read documents night after night. Ulla knew a great deal more than Ingemar about everything that concerned the new daycare law and municipal administration, and could speak up at any meeting, there was no fear. Perhaps Ingemar didn't like that. He tries to remember if he once had a go at her following one of those meetings, or perhaps he was just tempted: to roar that a woman who doesn't have the time to be a mother, is a traitor to the feminist cause. He knows full well that he wasn't fond of the women's rights activist group and often left home when they gathered there. He didn't like it when women came together like that, didn't understand why they were suddenly opposed to deodorant, make-up and bras, and why they kept talking about how oppressed they were. He never said it out loud, but it must have been obvious, and others may have noticed it, this is something he will later spend much time pondering. Perhaps he was a bad husband. He's unsure of these memories. No, what he will remember and talk about, is the daycare Ulla fought for, the place that would look after her future child when she couldn't be there herself.

"As if she knew", Ingemar tells people, moved by the story he invents.

"The way she fought", he says. "She fought like a lioness."

This is what he tells the manager of the daycare, his voice full of emotion, but also many others, and regardless of who it is, they all shed a tear for sweet Ingemar, the brave man, the bearer of the tragedy, but also the bearer of a grief full of affection.

Women Come, Women Go

The world tries to make Ingemar's family bigger by throwing women his way. The attempts appear as a few scratches in the family vinyl, some periods of disruption in the relationship between father and daughter. The first foreign element is Bjørg. Gunn is only two, she has no recollection of either her mother or her big sister, even though Ulla's dressing gown's still hanging next to the double bed and her bracelet's still lying on the bedroom windowsill. Gunn learns songs and clapping games and puts on her jacket herself and learns about the seasons and builds with blocks, and Bjørg, the name of the municipal daycare intern, notices Ingemar from the first day. Sometime later she scores, receives an invitation to Ingemar's and has sex with him in the double bed. Ingemar needs Bjørg's warmth, he's overflowing, he gets up with Gunn early in the morning and goes to bed with Bjørg, and there's not much sleep, but he can deal with it, he's once again a man, that gives him strength. Gunn knows Bjørg well from daycare, she likes the mood at home when Bjørg's around. Ingemar's happier now. But he's also more short-tempered, more on edge, he both wants and doesn't want Bjørg there. One night when Gun calls out for Bjørg from her bed, and not Ingemar, Ingemar starts to yell.

"What do you mean", Bjørg says, "I can't help that she's calling for me."

That's the beginning of the end.

Gunn doesn't know any better than to like Bjørg, she sees Bjørg every day at daycare, and now that Bjørg's living with them, Gunn sees Bjørg more than she sees Ingemar. Therefore, Ingemar frequently begins to complain that Bjørg walks in with dirty shoes and tells her she shouldn't chew so that he can hear it and that she talks too loudly, and that she shouldn't flirt with other men when she's at the supermarket. But things don't really come to blows until Bjørg decides to clean out Ulla's closet to make room for her own things. Before Ingemar has had a chance to react, Bjørg has put on Ulla's slippers, and Ingemar shouts that she should leave his wife's things alone. Bjørg shouts back "you're such a dick, Ingemar, talking that

way to the woman who looks after your kid from morning until evening.” Also, Bjørg has heard that Ingemar refused Ulla a driver’s license, that she had to use the money from her mother, because Ingemar controlled all their money, including Ulla’s own. That’s how great he was, the big feminist, this is what Bjørg claims to have heard from other mothers at the daycare. Ingemar tells her it’s not true, that there were just some quarrels, but Bjørg says that she’s heard something else, and she knows what she believes to be true. And then Ingemar’s had enough, the warmth in his bed isn’t enough to hang onto this arrangement, because the fact is that Bjørg has stolen Gunn right before his eyes, and to make matters worse she’s also wielding her axe into the sacred sphere of privacy with her talking. Ingemar throws all of Ulla’s clothes back into Ulla’s closet and tells Bjørg to go to hell. Bjørg moves out. Then she’s gone, and Ingemar has Gunn all to himself again. It’s lonely, but it’s also simpler, without any demands of sharing the one thing in his life that’s impossible to share.

It takes a while before the next foreign element appears. Her name is Gro. Gro remains with them for nearly two years and brings a lot of light to the house on Gunnarsmoen. Gro, Ingemar and Gunn almost become a family, they feel almost natural to one another down there on the plain. Gro hopes that she and Ingemar will have their own baby, but Ingemar doesn’t want to hear any of it. Gro has a lot of patience and demands very little. There are two Christmases with Ulla’s rib recipe and two Easters with Ulla’s chick decorations, summer vacations with visits to Ulla’s relatives on Rena and June evenings with trips to the cemetery with candles and Gunn’s drawings.

Gro becomes increasingly childless.

As soon as Gro has coaxed Ingemar for his final answer: *there will be no more children*, she packs up and leaves. The timing confirms her decision: the day after she has moved out, an article is printed in a magazine where widower Ingemar talks about openness, about the loss of Marianne and Ulla and about life in the wake of such a

tragedy, but without mentioning Gro, or that Gro has helped him with Gunn every single day over the last two years and tried to be the mother that's needed. But the real mother, the dead mother, she'll never die, Gro knows that by now, Ulla will always be exploited as a memory. Gro thinks that Ingemar enjoys the role as a bereaved widower much more than the new family that was emerging, and he really milks that widower thing to get things his way. There will never be an end to it. It all becomes clear to Gro as she reads that magazine, and Gro phones Ingemar every night for a whole week, she's furious. Ingemar doesn't understand what has made Gro so disgruntled, he just feels betrayed, and wonders whether Gro might be deranged in some way.

Following that magazine article, he receives love letters from women in almost every county. But he can't be bothered to reply. He feels tired just reading about the expectations that so obviously exist between the handwritten lines. All they wish for, is a halo, the heroic act of marrying a widower with a child. What's missing in their lives, seeing as they require that extra sprinkle of heroism? What they're after, with their smiles and curls and turtleneck sweaters in the photos they attach, is what Ingemar won't give them: a child. Because Ingemar has enough children. He has one who's lying in the cemetery with a cornet in her hand, and one who's immersed in drawing paper and markers by the wood stove.

The Two Houses on Gunnarsmoen

The house that Ingemar and Ulla buys is located on Gunnarsmoen and is beautiful and old and built in 1897, in Swiss chalet style. People ask if it wouldn't be just as well to tear down that impractical ramshackle structure with so much old wood, and build something new, but Ingemar likes old houses, he wants to become the sort of person who repairs and renovates, even though he's not very good at those things. Ulla won't be cold, and neither will Marianne, who is born a year later or so. He insulates the house and installs a new roof: it's Ulla's money, but he does the work. Ingemar wants to be in control of everything, he collects wood in the forest, chops it during the school holidays, drives load after load into the old barn and stacks it in the room where the pigs once lived. Ulla sows summer flowers and receives perennials from other people's gardens, and a hop climbs its way up the wall to the roof.

Ingemar builds a sandbox for Marianne.

Ingemar's strong and gets things done; he wants to look after the house in the old-fashioned way and is obstinate. While other people buy new windows, Ingemar takes out the old windows one by one and reglazes them himself. He snorts at the wood panelling people install in their living rooms and basements, hates the vinyl floors that begin to appear in all kinds of places. Ingemar grows a beard and makes his own wine from rowanberries and dandelions, he's a homeowner, he has a stable job in the education system, he has creative power and intellectual power, and it shows in the house he's renovating with his own hands.

Leif, the neighbour, assembles his Moelven house on the adjacent plot in the summer of 1974. If it wasn't the cheapest one in the catalogue, it was certainly in the lower range, like the salesman told him. The boys from Svestad arrive to lay the foundation with him. Ester stands together with Lars-Arne watching how the concrete's mixed together and poured over the formwork that Leif has built over

the past few evenings according to the instructions from Moelven. The new house arrives in sections on a trailer and is lifted into place by cranes. Ulla makes soup for everyone, it's an event, a new house on Gunnarsmoen, clicked together in less than a week, who'd have thought. Ester and Leif and Lars-Arne move in. The power is turned on, the house is the colour of bark brown, measures 92 square metres in size, and it has so many brothers and sisters up and down the country that it will be invisible for many years to come, it's one of many and is completely at one with the world. Moelven Senior is the opposite of spectacular, Moelven Senior from 1974 is the house of mediocrity. And mediocrity, that's something Leif likes, Ester too, maybe because their faith is constructed from a different manual than that of the rest of the village.

As devoted Pentecostalists they stick out in a valley where churchliness is either fairly silent, or an academic discipline. Along this river Pentecostalists are religious outliers with their penchant for outspoken and independent talk, the word dissent has recently been removed from the legislation. This nonconformity is something people find strange, and of course Leif and Ester notice it: the weekend trips to the southern counties and the summer holidays at camp, no, that's not something Leif and Ester will share with the uninitiated. It's a far distance between Stor-Elvdal's Lutheran serenity and summer camps with church tents and speaking in tongues, also in spiritual kilometres. Ester and Leif live as far away from the Pentecostal heartland that's possible, they've grown up here between the mountains and yet they have received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, a foreign faith that's also an imported item, an American phenomenon, or Swedish? But they will not move, they will stay in the village, they will stay on Gunnarsmoen, this is where Ester and Leif settle down and build a housing bank house. Ester and Leif's faith breathes underneath a modest surface. Nobody stays long in this village because it's obvious that attracting attention or being different is not a good thing, it's like shouting and screaming out loud. Decent people try to avoid it, and here's where Moelven Senior comes to the rescue.

It's Leif who first becomes a Pentecostalist. His mother and father are regular folks, as they call it around here when someone is Lutheran and baptised as an infant in the state church to the tones of a psalm playing on the organ. But when Leif's nineteen and has worked four years in the forest, he goes to Hamar on a day off. He intends to buy some tools; he's standing in the hardware store and isn't sure what to do when the shop clerk comes over to him. The clerk's young, only a couple of years older than him, and he comes across as so outspoken, so friendly, as if this hardware store wasn't a place for selling goods, but a place for the big questions in life, there's something about his facial expression and the bright look in his eyes. He looks at Leif as if the two of them are already close friends and always have been. And yet the young clerk hasn't said a word, he just stands there in his light blue warehouse coat, and then there's that moment when the sun slips out from behind a cloud and illuminates the window display with the new planes, the new batch of nails and the brand-new chainsaw, the one Leif has seen in an advertisement. But he's not thinking about that now. Now it's the future that occupies his mind. For the clerk says, as he throws his arms out at Leif: "What's all this really about? For what purpose are we standing here right now, you and I? Why all this, if not for Jesus? And for him to play a part in our lives?"

