

OSLO LITERARY AGENCY

**Evy Tillman**

Literary Agent  
Children and Young Adult  
evy@osloliteraryagency.no



Marianne Kaurin:

## **BLUE LAGOON DELUXE**

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Age: 9 – 12

English synopsis and sample translation

### **SYNOPSIS**

Translated from the Norwegian by Alison McCullough

Ina is eleven and a half years old, and the summer holiday is fast approaching. It will consist of fifty-four days – Ina has counted them on the calendar – and she’s even worked out how long the summer holiday will last in hours and minutes. Ina lives with her mother in Titten Court. She’s embarrassed about where she lives (the housing cooperative is nicknamed ‘Shitten’), rarely attends birthday parties, and never has friends over. The other students in her class live in pretty white houses with gardens and garages. They go to dance classes and football practice and play instruments in the marching band. They always go to each other’s birthday parties, and in the summer they go on holiday – abroad.

On the last day at school before the summer holiday, Regine and Mathilde, the most popular girls in the class, suggest that everyone should tell the rest of the group about their holiday plans. Regine is going to Paris and Crete. Mathilde is going to a resort in Portugal. Everyone has big plans - Dubai, the USA, Mallorca, Cyprus, France. Everyone, that is, except for Ina. When it's Ina's turn to speak, she suddenly blurts out that she's going to the Med. For several weeks, all-inclusive – a wonderful, five-star place called Blue Lagoon Deluxe. She's going to do Med-type things, she says, and someone laughs. *The Med* isn't a real place, someone says – it isn't a country. The teacher intervenes and says that actually, while the Med isn't a single country, it *is* a real place on the map – it's short for the Mediterranean, an area further south where people often go on holiday to relax and have a nice time. Today there's also a new boy in class, who will start at Ina's school in the autumn term. His name is Vilmer, and he's just moved into Titten Court. When it's his turn to speak, he simply says that he'll be staying at home because his father is poor.

Ina stays at home in her apartment and hides, pretending to be in the Med. Despite the summer heatwave, she doesn't dare open the windows that look out onto the street in case anyone from her class walks by. Ina spends her time searching for beautiful places in the Mediterranean online, daydreaming and getting lost in the images she finds. Blue Lagoon Deluxe – that looks wonderful. In the class chatroom her classmates post pictures from their holidays, which the others then mark with hearts and comment on. Ina copies the photos from the Blue Lagoon Deluxe website and posts them. 'Having a great time', she writes, and waits to see how many likes she'll get.

One evening, Vilmer is standing out in the housing cooperative's backyard. He sees Ina in the window, and Ina realises that she's been found out. Vilmer throws stones up at Ina's windowpane and calls her name, night after night. Ina needs friends who will lift her up, not drag her down – and Vilmer definitely seems like the latter kind of friend. But after days spent inside the hot apartment, Ina is tempted to go out into the backyard and meet him. Perhaps he can just be a 'holiday friend' – someone to spend time with in the absence of anyone better. And if nobody sees them, what can be the harm?

Vilmer has discovered an old, abandoned caretaker's apartment at the end of the yard, and this is where he's started to hang out. He suggests they turn the caretaker's apartment into the Med, to Blue Lagoon Deluxe. Because the Med isn't a single country, he repeats – it's a place where people go to relax and have a nice time. Plus, the caretaker's apartment is at the southern end of the backyard.

Ina and Vilmer get started on project Blue Lagoon Deluxe, collecting things to turn the old caretaker's apartment into a Mediterranean paradise. A paddling pool, beach mats, a kids' club mascot, a parasol, wallpaper featuring a picture of a tropical sunset. The old kitchen is transformed into the Sunlight Taverna restaurant; the bathroom becomes the Paradise Spa – where dreams come true. It's a silly but fun game, and a friendship develops between the two. Ina finds Vilmer easy to talk to – she can be herself around him. They make a Blue Lagoon Deluxe pact that everything they tell one another will stay here, in Blue Lagoon Deluxe. Ina tells Vilmer things she's never told anyone before, difficult things, about having no money and feeling like an outsider. She thinks about Vilmer as she lays in bed at night, wondering whether he's thinking about her, and feels butterflies in her stomach whenever they're together.

Ina and Vilmer fall in love. They live a secret life down in the caretaker's apartment – Ina and Vilmer's Mediterranean paradise. Everything is perfect – right up until the day that Regine and Mathilde discover that Ina has lied; that the images she posted were fake. They also find out that Ina has made friends with the weird new boy and that they're playing a stupid, childish game, pretending they're in *the Med*. Regine and Mathilde see the 'Mediterranean paradise' in the caretaker's apartment, and Ina blames Vilmer, claiming that it was all his idea. He's such a nerd, she says, and breaks their Blue Lagoon Deluxe pact, revealing several of the secrets Vilmer has told her. But while Ina believed that Vilmer had gone home, it turns out he was only hiding in the kitchen – and has heard every word she said. The betrayal is devastating, and it isn't enough for Ina to simply say she's sorry. Vilmer destroys Blue Lagoon Deluxe that they created together, and avoids Ina. Ina regrets what she's done and understands that she has to *show* Vilmer how sorry she is – otherwise their friendship will be lost forever. Ina makes a plan for how she can show Vilmer that she's sorry.

On the first day back at school, Ina stands up and suggests that everyone in the class should take a turn telling the others about their summer holiday. When it's her turn, she says that she's had the best summer holiday ever, in the Med, at Blue Lagoon Deluxe. With the greatest holiday friend in the world. It was just a slightly different Med to that which most people in their class might have heard about, she says – because the Med isn't just a single country.

Ina stands up for Vilmer in front of the entire class – she doesn't care if anyone laughs. Together, they leave the schoolyard and head home to Titten Court, down to the caretaker's apartment where they reconstruct Blue Lagoon Deluxe once again.

*Blue Lagoon Deluxe* is about understanding that you have less than everyone else, but using the little you have to create your own dreams. It's a book about daring to be honest and to like yourself just as you are – and not needing to try to be like everyone else.

## **SAMPLE TRANSLATION PAGE 5 - 20**

Translated from the Norwegian by Rachel Rankin

Today is the last day. There are only a few hours left. Then it's over.

Now, this isn't the kind of ending you cry about. There won't be an axe-murderer or a meteorite or an epidemic. This is a good ending. Most of us have been looking forward to it. Counted down the weeks in the calendar, packed suitcases and bought sandals. Got a summer haircut. I've also said I'm looking forward to it. It'll be insanely amazing, I say, and work out how much longer we have to wait.

I've always liked counting things. Days and minutes. Scrunchies, felt-tip pens, friends. It kind of happens by itself – I just start counting things. I have fourteen purple pencils in my pencil case, even though my favourite colour is blue. There are sixty-eight stairs from the third floor down to the backyard, forty-two steps to the ugly sign that

welcomes you to Titten Court. I've been alive for over four-thousand days already. I've lived in six houses. In three towns. Been in five different classes. I've had three friends with names beginning with M. I don't have contact with any of them now, but M is my favourite letter. That's why it goes so well with Maria.

If someone had asked how many steps there are between the gym-hall and the classroom, I'd have known the answer. And now I'm standing exactly here. Right outside the gym-hall, on the way to the classroom. The asphalt is burning. The flag is flying. Mathilde and Regine are leaning on the fence of the lower secondary, as if they can't start there quick enough. They're standing in the gang everyone wants to be part of. All of them wear tight tops and have long hair. Regine is holding up her mobile, trying to take a photo of the whole gang. They're laughing. Having fun.

I walk past them with my mouth shut. It's best to count in my head, I think. I see that Mathilde is posing, pouting, before she turns back to the others again.

Markus is standing in the huddle of boys over by the flagpole. He's wearing a red t-shirt and he's already tanned on both his arms and his face. I hear his laughter all the way over here, even though I'm over sixty steps away from the loud, wonderful sound. I should really count out loud when I walk past him, just so he can see that I actually exist, but then I'd be the weird one, and it's hard enough being the new one.

Johanne and some other girls from the class are standing up by the entrance, looking longingly at the swings. Johanne is wearing a windbreaker even though it's forty degrees, and she is still wearing her bike helmet. They are talking about scout camp they are going to after the summer holidays. It'll be so much fun. I could maybe join this bunch. Go with them to the scout camp. But I let my thoughts drift towards the flagpole and the lower secondary, towards those who could really lift me up.

So I walk the way I usually do. I just say hello and walk quickly towards the entrance, up the stairs to the first floor and into the classroom with the windows looking onto the schoolyard. The classroom which is always quiet. Which waits.

I set myself down by the window to get a good view of a certain flagpole when the door opens. A head with masses of curls pops in. A boy.

"Hi."

He is standing in the doorway. Only his head is visible. I've never seen him before, so I hesitate and keep standing. He smiles. His eyes are big.

"This is 6A, right?"

He takes a step back, closes the door and opens it again, most likely checking the schedule hanging outside. I nod and hurry away from the window. I take my seat and act like I'm doing something important, rummaging around in my pencil case.

"What's your name?" he asks, stepping into the classroom.

He looks around and smiles, as if he's never been in a classroom before, as if this one is so different and so much nicer than a completely average Norwegian classroom. He has one hand in his pocket and is holding a cap in the other. His t-shirt is from the Zoo and his poo-brown shorts look far too big for him, sagging, but not in a cool way. He is sockless and wears canvas shoes which must have been white about a hundred years ago. His arms and legs are thin and pale. His curls bounce up and down, even when he's standing still.

"Ina," I reply.

"I see," he says, smiling even more broadly. One of his front teeth is crooked.

"I'm Vilmer."

He doesn't say anything else. He just looks at me, as if waiting for me to get a conversation going, as if that's my responsibility. I could ask where he comes from and what he is doing in our classroom, or if he likes the zoo and shorts that are too big for him, but I don't manage because now the bell is ringing and after four seconds the noise level in the classroom is sky-high. The boy called Vilmer is leaning against the wall at the very back. It doesn't seem like anyone has even noticed him. Everyone is just laughing and talking and messing around. Because today is the last day. Soon, it will be over. Three hours with our teacher Vigdis and then the summer holidays begin.

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The summer holidays are fifty-four days long. I have counted them on the calendar which hangs on our fridge. Fifty-four days is the same as one thousand, two hundred and ninety-six hours. Which is seventy-seven thousand and sixty minutes. I haven't worked out how many seconds yet, but there must be loads. Several million, maybe.

Now Vigdis is standing in front of us. Our very last day in year six. She is dressed for the occasion, wearing a light-yellow dress and carefully applied makeup. Her lips glisten pink and her hair is pulled into a mushroom-like bun right in the middle of her head.

"Welcome, my lovelies, to your last day of year six, she says grandly as she looks around the room, like a queen speaking to her underlings.

She takes off her round glasses and puts one of the arms in her mouth, something she does every other minute. And since she sucks on the arm so much and wears so much lipstick, she is often pink behind the ears. Lots of people in class think Vidgis is lame. They mock the waddling way she walks and criticise her stupid clothes. It doesn't seem like Vigdis can be bothered to care about it. Once, she caught Markus red-handed. He was mocking her, waddling around the classroom and cackling like a hen while Vigdis stood in the doorway and watched him. Markus was really embarrassed, but Vigdis just laughed.

"Looks like you're the Chicken Little here!" she said and went out to monitor the schoolyard in a luminescent reflective vest that sat tight over her sagging boobs.

Now she is pointing towards the back wall of the classroom and everyone turns around. Whispers spread through the room when everyone claps eyes on the unknown boy in the awful clothes.

"There you are!" Vigdis says to the one who calls himself Vilmer. "So wonderful that you could come."

She walks to the back of the classroom and greets him, pulls him up to the board and throws up her arms.

"We have a visitor!" she announces, putting her hands tightly round his shoulders, round the t-shirt from the zoo.

She looks proud, as if she's presenting a new-born baby to her family for the first time.

"And this boy, ladies and gentlemen, will be joining our class in the autumn. He's just here to say hello today."

She bends down towards Wilmer.

"You can tell everyone your name," she continues.

"Vilmer," says Vilmer, loud and clear.

Some people snicker.

“Indeed,” says Vigdis. “Vilmer has just moved here. Where do you live again?”

“30 Robin Street,” says Vilmer. “Entrance F.”

He sounds like a small child who has just learned how to recite his address.

“Indeed,” says Vigdis again. “That’s in Titten Court, so it is!” Now there is even more snickering. I don’t know what’s so funny about Titten Court, apart from the fact it has a nickname that rhymes with “Titten” and that it would be guaranteed first place if there was a prize for the ugliest place to live.

“Ina lives in Titten,” says Vigdis, pointing at me. “So you can walk home together after the summer holidays.”

I do like Vigdis. She’s nice. But right now she is starting to annoy me. Why should she decide that I have to walk with a guy who wears oversized shorts and a t-shirt from the zoo, just because he also lives in Titten? Why does she have to talk about Titten at all? It’s great that Vigdis is trying to find friends for me – she’s done this since I started here in year six – but I need friends who pull me up, not down. And this Vilmer fell into the second category. Without a doubt.

Vilmer is finally allowed to leave the board and sit in a chair at the very back of the classroom. He tries to meet my gaze as he walks past my desk, as if we’re best friends already. Just because we live near each other and met ten seconds before everyone else came into the classroom. I quickly look the other way.

“Vigdis! Vigdis!”

Mathilde is waving with one arm and starts talking even though Vigdis is still preoccupied with Vilmer.

“Can’t we go around the class and everyone can say what they’ll be doing during the holidays?”

Several people think this seems like a great idea. Mallorca, USA, France is shouted out around the classroom. Mathilde is half standing, half sitting, flailing her arms around to try and organise the class since so many want to take part. Vigdis suggests that not everyone has to say what they’ll be doing, but Mathilde is so worked up that she doesn’t hear.

“Tuva starts!” she shouts, pointing towards the desk by the window in the first row.

My leg is trembling. My mouth is dry. And then Tuva starts. She’s going to southern Italy for three weeks. Mathilde points at Teodor so that everyone knows that we’re going back a desk at a time. I count eleven. Place my hand on my leg so it won’t tremble so much. Eleven desks until it’s my turn. Teodor is going to Croatia. Selma is going to Spain for a few weeks. Simen, who sits behind Selma, is going to Florida. He speaks loudly and clearly, and several people gasp with envy. Una, who sits behind Simen, says that she wishes she was travelling as far away as Florida, but that she’s just going to Denmark.

“But next year,” Una continues, “we’re actually going to Thailand for four weeks.”

There are seven desks remaining until it’s my turn. Mathias is going to Rhodes. Vilde is going to Dubai. Everyone has plans for the summer holidays. Everyone wants to tell the rest of the class. Everyone is travelling. Abroad. People in this class are so concerned with foreign countries. There was a competition to see who had travelled to the most. Regine won with twenty-two.

I look at Vigdis, and I look at my desk while I hear that Mathilde is going to spend two weeks at a resort in Portugal. I’m not entirely sure what a resort is, but it sounds great. It’s my turn soon. I have to speak soon. My stomach flips, almost up to my heart.

“Oh, gosh!” says Vigdis, overwhelmed. “So many of you going out into the world! Do you know where I’m going?”

There are three more people left until I have to speak and it’s great that Vigdis takes over for a moment, just so I can think a little longer about my own travel plans.

“I’ve bought a little cabin, so I have. By a lake, deep in the forest. My own little resort, if you like. I’m going to be there for the whole summer, just reading books and eating good food. That can also be fun, don’t you think?”

Nobody replied. There were just a few people who nod, and some let out a kind of grunting noise. As if Vigdis’ travel plans stank. Who wants to sit by a lake in a forest and read books, you know?

Markus is the next person. He sits two desks in front of me. I spend over four hours a day looking at his back. That’s quite a lot of minutes if you work it out for the entire school year. I know his back inside out – how it looks when he coughs or laughs, the small movements between his shoulder blades. I notice immediately whenever he’s wearing a new jumper. I must have spent two thousand hours imagining how it would be to let my hand glide from his neck and down the back I always stare at.

Markus tells us that first he’s going to his cabin in the south of Norway. He’s leaving as early as tomorrow morning. Then he’s going to Spain for a few weeks. I see that he nods towards Selma.

“But what I’m looking forward to most,” Markus continues eagerly, “is travelling to London.”

He looks around the classroom to make sure that everyone is following.

“Because dad and I are going to watch a Chelsea match. It’ll be dead cool because dad is just as big a Chelsea fan as me.”

He smiles, satisfied, and turns around to face Julie. My face is heating up like a kettle. Because I’m sitting right behind Julie. So he is almost looking at me. There are just a few centimetres until his eyes meet mine.

Julie starts off carefully. Her voice is hoarse. Imagine if she has nothing to tell us, that not one thing will happen over the next fifty-four days, that she’s just going to stay home. But of course, she wouldn’t do that. Nobody stays *home* during the summer.

Julie was going to Cyprus, so she was. With her mother. And then she was going to France with her father.

“That’s the good thing about having divorced parents,” says Julie, shining with glee. “You get two trips abroad. It kind of doubles up.”

She turns around in her seat and looks at me. Everyone is looking at me. Vigdis too. The classroom is silent. Completely silent. I know that I have to open my mouth, that they’re wondering where I’m going during the summer, what exciting plans I have with my family, what I’m going to experience. I look from one to the other, the expectant faces, and feel that my mouth is empty. There isn’t a single word in there. I gape for a few seconds, clear my throat, and then a weak noise emerges from my vocal chords.

“This summer,” I say, and look at Markus.

He’s looking at me too. Now he’s looking at me!

“This summer,” I repeat, waiting to see what I’m going to choose.

“This summer, I’m going to the Med.”

Vigdis nods encouragingly and smiles. Markus is still looking at me. Everyone is looking at me. They want more.

“And I’m looking forward to it,” I say, picturing swimming pools and water slides and an endless white beach, parasols and kids clubs. Which, of course, I’m too old for.

“I’m going to swim and sunbathe and chill out. Just do Mediterranean things. For several weeks. I’m leaving tomorrow.”

Suddenly, I hear a snicker. Or, more correctly, two snickers, coming from the second last row by the window. Mathilde is bending towards Regine, holding her hand over her mouth and whispering something.

“The Med isn’t one place,” says Regine matter-of-factly.

She is the deputy chair of the student council and is going to be a lawyer when she grows up, just like her mother.

“It just kind of sounds lame to say the Med.”

My leg is trembling again. My left arm too, a little. Can’t we just move on now? Can’t someone else take over?

“Where are you actually going, Ina? The Med isn’t a country.”

They are snickering again. Several others are laughing too. But fortunately, Vigdis takes over.

“It’s completely normal to say the Med, even if it’s not exactly a physical place on the map. It’s what people say when they’re travelling further south to chill out and swim and enjoy themselves, just like Ina will.”

Vigdis is pointing irritably at me, as if the people in the class are senile and had suddenly forgotten who was going to the Med.

“So it doesn’t matter where.”

Vigdis looks towards Marte and we continue going around and hearing about everyone’s holiday plans. Thankfully. Enough of the Med. Marte is going to the mountains and will also cycle the Navvy Road. Patrick is going on a road trip through Europe for three weeks. Johanne is going to her grandparents in Lofoten. Regine is going to Crete, which is an island in the Med. She looks at me when she says “Med”, pronouncing the word as she if was explaining it to a three-year-old, or someone with brain damage.

“But before that, I’m going shopping in Paris,” she says proudly, looking at Mathilde.

Vigdis takes over when the rest of the class have told everyone about their travel plans.

“Moving on,” she says, but then catches a glimpse of Vilmer at the very back. “Oh, we forgot to ask you, Vilmer. Do you have any exciting holiday plans?”

Everyone turns and looks at him. He smiles.

“I’m also going to the Med,” he says, looking at me.

What does he mean by that?

“Nah,” Vilmer continues. “I’m staying home.” He looks at Vigdis.

“Dad’s broke, so we’re not going on holiday this year.”

He shrugs and looks around the class. Of course, someone is snickering. There’s always someone snickering.

“No Med for me!” says Vilmer, smiling broadly.

As if it’s totally fine that he isn’t going anywhere. It looks like he’s looking forward to the holidays even though he’s just going to stay home. With his broke dad. In Titten Court.