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"And into the forest I go, to lose my mind and find my soul"
– John Muir

Chapter 1

This trip will be different, I thought as Oslo faded behind me with its high rises, its asphalt and its shroud of exhaust on a cold winter day. After just ten minutes of driving it met me: the forest. Not like on a motor trip through Europe, light and fragmented as green splotches in the grassy landscape, but dark and aggressive.

If had wanted to, I could have continued to drive through the forest for almost 6,000 kilometres in an easterly direction. If we were to study a satellite photo it would show an enormous green taiga belt, stretching from Norway in the west to the Pacific in the east, like a green scarf around the globe.

There is not a larger continuous ecosystem, or biome on the face of the earth today. Many take it for granted, the forest, but life on this earth would not be the same without it. Not only does it house millions of species, but the forest functions as an enormous temperature regulator, it cools the globe, moistens and prevents drought, and binds climate gases. It reduces floods and retains the soil. An earth without the forest would be a foreign earth, an unrecognisable planet of desert, savanna, prairies, fields and tundras.

The highway stretches like an avenue through the forest. But several kilometres from Oslo it is broken up again, displaced by fields, residential areas, industry and farms. Only small scattered wood lots of pine and birch rest in spots in a landscape of snow covered fields and meadows along the motorway. A large, open felling area with tree stubs and piles of twigs leer at me, reminding me that timber from the forest has

provided housing and wood for heating, as well as ships and tools and paper. Timber was a prerequisite for civilisation, which the Roman philosopher Lucretius pointed out 2,000 years ago, and the Greek and Roman words for woodwork were respectively *hulae* and *materia*, both are synonyms for the elements.[1] After many thousands of years of civilisation there are still those unable to produce building material as strong, flexible and weather resistant as wood from the tree.

The pine forests lie like scattered, elongated green ships on a sea of white-clad fields and pastures. Down in the deep gorges the foliage and one or two spruce trees cling to the soil, out of the reach of forest machinery. After passing Mysen, a populated area under an hour's drive from Oslo, I turn off the highway towards my destination, the Svarverud woods and Mats' farm, a friend since my teenage years. After driving a way on bumpy gravel road along a narrow wedge of scattered pastures, marshes and water, a white farmhouse on the Svarverud farm appears. And the seemingly endless forest fills my horizon from east to west.

Everyone has, consciously or not, a relationship to the woods. What does it really mean to us? Is it something that is just there, like an ornament? A collection of trees which we pass by on our walks in the woods? A place where we find peace and quiet, where we breathe in the unmistakable fragrance of the woods, and see the sunlight spreading across the treetops? Or is the woods a place for hunting, fishing or picking berries in the autumn? Most people will nod in agreement to some of these questions, and so I continue: Just how well do we know the forest? The windy road that brought it to where it has become a vital life-giving ecosystem which houses birds, reptiles, insects, mammals and amphibians. And how is the forest shaped and interpreted by us humans?

These were the very questions I had begun to ask myself. Despite the fact that I grew up right next to the forest, Krokskogen, just outside of Oslo, I found myself rumbling through the woods without knowing why the leaves changed colour in the autumn. If I saw some tracks in the snow, I had no idea which animal made them. I barely managed to differentiate between the various types of trees. Even though I am a

geologist, the forest's vast history was obscure and distant. Did the woods which rushed past along the country road always look as they do now? How have they changed? The forest was a backdrop I did not particularly understand - it stood as a mystery of cellulose and lignin which I had to explore.

The urge to go out into the woods and examine it, causing me to take off from work on this winter day, did not arise suddenly, but little by little. While writing my previous book, I had bored in swamps, studied pollen diagrams and touched upon the forest's fleeting history after the ice age. Last summer my daughter and I had our own tree project. She was not particularly willing, but with a father who had become more and more obsessed by the woods, there was no way around it. We collected leaves, pressed them in book, made a little herbarium. The goal was to gather as many types of tree samples as possible. At last I learnt the names of willow and alder, and the difference between elm and ash. I came to realise that the strange looking tree down below our cottage was a linden. And could announce to my daughter with my fresh and newly acquired knowledge that the name Linné (Linnea) and the avenue *Unter de Linden* in Berlin all have their origins from this tree. Later that summer I took a tent trip to desolate Svalbard, hacked frozen fossils of leaves, petrified bits of wood and coal, signs of long vanished forests, and I stopped and considered them with awe and curiosity. One piece, a 150 million-year-old fossilised bit of tree, looked almost as if it came from the pile of wood in my shed back home. I held it up and reflected upon the ocher yellow with distinct annual rings, it seemed as if the passage of time between us had been erased. But what story could it tell? I had no idea.

Even though I have long been fascinated by the forest, it was only just a few weeks ago that I decided to go more systematically and wholeheartedly into researching it. Inexcusably little versed in botany and zoology, I began to read up on the forest. When I realised how unbelievably vast a theme I had embarked upon, a theme which I understood could only possibly be approached superficially and fragmented, I called Mats. Since he lived in the woods, is a biologist, forest owner and researcher, I know of no one who knows more about the woods and its life than he. I suggested that we could go out together on a mini - expedition into his woods. There were many a time I have

been on the Svarverud farm - partying, picking mushrooms and berries, letting the children get to know the animals on the farm or just rustling about the woods. When Mats started talking about the forest, about its use, the different types of trees, the wood grouse mating display and the number of moose, I never really listen properly. But this trip would be different, because now we are going out together to explore the forest.

As I drove up into the yard and parked the car, Mats came out wearing a blue Gore-Tex anorak, green trekking trousers and sturdy knee-high leather hunting boots. He had grown a beard since last time. His hair is cut short, and it has been a while since he could make a part with a copious and curly mane. The yard is framed by a stately farmhouse in a Jungian style, a lopsided and run-down hen house and a red notched-timber storehouse. A thick hedge of spruce shelters the yard to the west. Usually there is an abundance of animal activity here, with geese, cats, dogs, chickens, pigs and goats, but today the bitter cold is keeping them inside.

The property has been in Mats' family for six generations. His great great great grandfather, Christian Andersen Haneborg, also known as "The Caretaker" bought the place in 1858. There is written in a little book about the woods, "A great fortune for the farm and for the district that it came into the possession of this wealthy, reputed family." To be a forest owner was different back then. At that time the forest represented almost half of the export income of our country, and this very small society was connected to the woods at Svarverud. Today forestry itself is hardly enough to pay the mortgage, and even though Mats is the largest forest owner in Inner Østfold, he has to supplement his income by doing extra work.

The agreed trip into the woods with Mats was almost cancelled several times. At first, I couldn't reach him, and after a few unanswered calls, I sent off a text message, "Can you bother calling me?" "Trimming hooves. I'll call when I'm done", was the short reply from Mats. When I finally connected with him the next day, we chatted about this and that, and about the woods, before I invited myself down for a visit. However, the evening before I was to leave, a text message popped up on my cell phone. "One of the goats has given birth to kids. They are out in 20 below. Not sure

about tomorrow" he wrote. "They can freeze to death", he added "and the barn has been torn down". "Good God" I replied offended. "Will call at 8am." he wrote in yet another of his customarily short text. Luckily everything worked out. Barn-less Mats had, in the absence of a better solution, put the goat and the kids in the only entrance to the spacious farmhouse.

After all the commotion with the goats, Mats is impatient to get out into the woods, and together we wander through the garden and out onto Nøa Lake which borders the farm to the south. The trees send long shadows out across the ice-covered lake. A veil of light clouds bellow in the sky, while the sun sparkles on the snow resting on the ice.

As far back as I can remember, Mats has been gripped by the woods. As a child he would get up at five in the morning and rustle into the woods right outside of Oslo where he grew up. He would move stealthily and quietly in order to get close to the animals. Every so often he was lucky to come upon a moose or a blackcock. As he got older he began to go out to watch the grouse mating and by the time he was sixteen years old, he had shot his first moose. It was around this time I got to know him. We went to the same high school, and I remember the first trips down to Svarverud. Mats' grandmother lived there for most part of the year, and it became a sanctuary for us. Several kilometres from the nearest neighbour we partied and talked, and I don't think we even went out into the woods. About the time we began our studies, the choice was simple; Mats was going to be a biologist. His main subject was large birds and their resting spots during the daytime in the spring. He captured grouse with a net. And countless weeks og fieldwork were spent in the desolate wilderness. We lived together for a few years, in the same collective in Oslo. While we others stayed in town on the weekends, hanging out at the collective, going to parties and playing football in the park, Mats usually went out into the woods. It could be an endless raid for "birds" in Svarverud's woods together with the notorious bird expert, Fauvle-Per, (Birdie-Per) or out into the backwoods with colleagues from the Agricultural College in Ås. The forest and its creatures was and became his thing. And when he took over the family's forest property 20 years ago, and moved down to the edge of the woods, it became serious.

From that moment, he had to, together with his wife take care of the farm, a hand full of cottages and nearly 5,000 acres of forest.

A short way out on Nøa Lake we find the small pointy prints of a fox who has tiptoed across the ice in the dark of night. The fox has in a way, staggered from side to side across the lake, and we follow its tracks. It often wanders like this close to the farm, but we follow the tracks for the fun of it. Mats recounts that he worked for SNO (Norwegian Nature Surveillance) as a predatory animal contact. At that time, he did a lot of tracking in the winter, rightly enough not for fox, but for wolf and sometimes lynx. He was in a way, SNO's eyes and ears for the inner parts of Østfold.

"There is actually a lot about wolves these days", Mats continues. "There are tracks, there are cadavers, there are dogs that have been eaten. And recently there was an unusual event in Svarverud's forest, he tells me, and shows me on his smart phone a series of photos of two thin dog-like shapes, taken by a wildlife camera. The eyes light up in the dark, lit by the flash of the camera. The animals have large German Shepard like heads, a narrow-upraised body with a tufted tail hanging down. This is a rare photo, unmistakably of two wolves. And if that is not enough, Mats shows me photos of a lynx running down a slope, another seldom and difficult animal to spot, photographed not far from the wolves[2]. Two predators that many would like to see eradicated from Norwegian nature, both recently sneaking about in Svarverud's forest.

Later that day Mats is going out looking for wolf tracks, checking if the wolves have stayed around in his woods he says, and asks me if I would like to join him. Actually, I have never been particularly interested in animals, and when Mats has given me an overdose of talk about large birds, moose, deer, lynx and goshawk, I have just nodded, pretending that I was interested. The times that he invited me to join in watching the grouse mating rituals I have always said thanks, but no thanks. The charm of getting up early and then sit, hidden and perfectly still for hours on end to watch birds have sex was for me like, zero. After a while he didn't bother to ask any more. But wolf, that sounded exotic. Most people have startled upon a moose, a fox or a wood grouse. But few have seen or heard a wolf. It creates debate and circulates in

legends, religions, myths and fairytales. So even though I never really bothered about wolves, I thought, what the hell, this could be an interesting experience, so this time I said yes.

With the growing population of wolves in my thoughts I blurted out that it would be awesome to see some wolves, but the sober Mats quickly cools my enthusiasm - "If we were to come upon a wolf, we would be extremely lucky. The guy who was predator observer before me, never saw or heard a wolf even though he kept at it for 10 years", Mats, informs me, adding that to come upon a wolf, planed either here in the woods or in the established wolf territories, is like finding the infamous needle in a hay stack. First of all there are not very many of them in Norway, taking into consideration the size of the country, he explains. Secondly the wolf's sensory apparatus is superior. The animal is practically one big nose and, surely enough, its sense of smell is 100 times more sensitive than ours. Its hearing is especially fine-tuned, and a wolf can, under the right conditions perceive howling eleven kilometres away. It would take a lot to come upon a wolf without it having discovered us first.

Barren pines roll southward, filling the horizon. Because of the great number of barren knolls and thin soil the locals have given it the name Fjella. Shortly after the last ice age, when the sea was 170 metres higher here, this was an island. Fjella Island and the surrounding farming villages were then an ocean where sludge and silt and sand were deposited, today fertile soil.

From Nøa Lake Mats and I head into the woods. The trees slumber, and the buds on the hardwood trees are reddish brown and grey black, waiting for the spring. A thick underbrush of hardwood trees has shot up along the trail, while spruce and pine stretch against the winter sky. While some in a poetic moment might praise the forest, Mats is more concerned with talking about felling classes, cubic metre of timber, quality of the soil, thinning and replanting of forest. That is felling class 1, he says, and how it looks a few years after felling. At the other end of the scale is felling class 5, the old felling-mature forest. But mostly there is felling class 3, or the younger production forests, which is a little puny, he admits. The woods could be older if his predecessors

hadn't felled so many trees. When you have a forest, he says, you have to think one hundred years into the future.

Even though Mats' woods is not particularly old, one trees has been left standing, the majestic Noa spruce We become small as the spruce towers almost 30 metres above us. The trunk is massive, at least three metres in circumference. The bark is brown and shell-like. The roots bury themselves like huge elephant trunks into the ground. The boughs, flecked with tubular and witch's hair lichen stretch out elongated, resembling small bent trees growing up along the trunk. Mats is curious about the age of this giant spruce, so I have taken along an increment borer, light blue, of the brand Mora. I acquired this when I began to seriously explore the woods. By boring a little core of wood, I can determine the age of the tree. My first impression is that the Nøa spruce is old, really old. I had just read about a 537-year-old spruce tree, to date Norway's oldest, and the Nøa spruce looks just as mighty.

We set in the borer, revolution by revolution into the tree. After we have bored over halfway into the truck, we carefully jiggle the borer out again, removing the so called spoon where the wood core rests with its annual rings.

We count the rings, one, two, three, we begin, it turns out that the tree is more than 120 years old, a giant tree. In certain years, the spruce had increased almost a centimetre in width. The annual rings can tell us the tree's history. If the ring is wide, such as in the Nøa spruce, the tree has grown quickly. This means it had good access to water, nutrients and light, and when a spruce first starts to grow, it grows quickly. An annual ring consists of the wide spring wood, and of the autumn wood, which is narrow and dark. The annual rings are a section through the transportation canals of a tree, the wood vascular tissue or xylem. Through the wood's xylem the tree transports water from the roots up to the leaves. On the outside between the outer bark and wood lies the *phloem.* Here the tree transports glucose, created during photosynthesis in the crown of the tree, around in the tree. That is to say, one tissue brings water, and another supplies nourishment to the tree. Most important of all is the cambium. If you take a healthy bough from a tree and cut into it, you will see the cambium as a green

film under the bark. If it is injured, then it is game over for the tree. Because it is this film that produces the annual rings, ensuring that the tree can grow.

Even though the spruce in front of us is older than any living person on the earth today, it is not especially old for a tree. In 1963 an American undergraduate student, Donald Rusk Currey bored into a bristlecone pine (Pinus Longaeva) also called the Metusalem pine, up in the mountains of Nevada in USA. These twisted and tenacious pines can be extremely old. Many of them look as though they had dried up and died ages ago, but a few twigs with healthy pine needles reveal that the tree is indeed alive. As Curry screwed the increment borer into the tree, it got stuck. Just as we also experienced, it can be very difficult getting the borer out. It ended up that he was allowed to cut down the pine to remove his borer. Afterwards the annual rings were meticulously counted, and much to his mortification Currey discovered that he had chopped down the world's oldest tree, at least 4,844 years old. The pine was later named after Prometheus who, in Greek mythology, stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans. Curry was later named as a professor at the university in Utah, but no matter where he travelled, he was to his frustration mostly known as the man who had cut down the world's oldest tree. Rightly enough, even older trees have later been found, and the oldest tree on this earth is about 5,000 years old, also a bristlecone - a tree which was already a half a century old at the time Cheops' pyramid was completed. The location of this tree is a well-kept secret.

"These are the victors we see around us", Mats philosophises under the majestic spruce - there exists thousands of generations of survivors who have managed to carry their genes forward." Imagine the long and winding road each individual tree and every species of animal have journeyed upon. Some species have succumbed, others have adapted and survived.

Since both Mats and I are natural scientists, a walk in the woods is not just about enjoying nature, reflecting on the display of colour in the frost-bitten birches, and the beauty of a crooked old pine, but also about understanding and analysing nature. While Mats can go on about an animal's track patterns, grazing on trees and evolution, it happens that I as a geologist expound upon the prehistory of life.

Before I went down to Svarverud, I had combed through several books on the history of evolution of plants, and I summed up for Mats one of the more significant events in the history of life: If we could wander on the earth a half billion years ago, we would be struck by how desolate and barren it appeared. There would have been high mountains of grey rock, endlessly lifeless stretches where the wind swirled up great amounts of sand and silt, and the rivers branched down to the sea. Bacteria prevailed over the land masses, as they had been doing for about three billion years. Life would only be visible through a microscope. What then happened, slowly, over millions of years, began small. Plant life climbed towards the air, a greenish slime of algae lay on the beaches and rocks along the coast. Conquest of the land mass had begun, a prerequisite for us and all other living creatures on earth today, and a revolution in the history of life. Nothing of what we see around us in Svarverud forest would have existed without these first green algae taking a courageous step onto land.

The forest floor under the Nøa spruce is almost bare. A cover of boughs, like a wreath around the truck of the tree has prevented the snow from reaching the ground. In front of us we see how the dark green pine mosses weave themselves together on the forest floor and along the trunk. Life we meet out in the woods has a vast prehistory, and these very mosses remind us of the fact. They are in a way witness to the first life on land. From a carpet of green algae, the mosses developed over 470 million years ago. Equipped with a thin layer of wax which prevented dehydration, the plants conquered the land. It might eventually have looked a bit like the Reykjanes peninsula on Island, treeless and barren, yet covered with a metre think layer of moss. Everything is connected, and when these first plants conquered land, they upset, according to one theory, the entire climate system. Moss covered what once was a naked landscape, accelerating the weathering of the bedrock, a chemical reaction which sucked enormous amounts of CO_2 out of the atmosphere. With lower CO_2 levels in the air, the earth was slowly cooled, and over time this contributed to the onset of a new ice age 460 million years ago, towards the end of the Ordovicium period.

Even though most of us think that moss is moss, there are on a world basis over 20,000 species. In Norway we can study over 1,100 types of mosses. Moss is actually

pretty cool (there is even an organisation called the Moss Club), and after I became familiar with several of species of mosses, the green carpet in on the forest floor suddenly had various names. There is the bear moss (the largest), the forest peat moss (a lot of it), sickle moss (yes, it looks like a sickle), star moss (has a star shape) pine moss and feather moss (feather-like). My favourite is perhaps step moss. A new "step" is built each year, and if we count the number of steps, we find out how old it is. Step moss is also called house moss as it was used in insulting houses long before glass wool insulation invaded our country.

Without rigid stems, moss needs a moist environment, and is therefore called the "amphibians" of the plant world. If it dries out completely, it goes into hibernation, but with a little water its green hue returns. A species of moss which had been dried out for 40 years came back to life after it was moistened. In a way moss is something between algae and vascular plants. Vascular tissue or transport tissue which holds these plants up, is lacking in moss, something that has sentenced them to a life on the forest floor. "Perhaps the simplest is often the best. So why change then?" Mats comments. For moss had changed very little over the past hundred million years. Think of that the next time you try to get rid of moss in your grass: Moss's hardy forbearers were the first to conquer land, and it will take a lot more than a little lime and some weed killer to get rid of it. Moss was just the beginning, and we if allow time to flow long enough, everything is changing: The drifting of the continental plates alters the face of the earth, and new species evolve.

After the moss-like species spread out along wet gorges and ravines a new revolution was slowing developing on the land surface. Without this event the earth would look quite differently, treeless and deforested. About 420 million years ago plants began to develop stems. From being small and inconspicuous, plants began in time to stretch upward, with good help from another of evolution's great inventions, a stronger vascular tissue consisting of among other things, cellulose and lignin. In a way this created the plant's steel rods and cement, respectively. The vascular tissue gave the plants the strength to grow in height and to transport water more effectively. Plants that

did not have this supporting tissue such as moss, were banished to the forest floor for all eternity.

One of the pioneers, and in a way a predecessor to many of the land plants is, *Cooksonia* a now extinct relative. It was a sad little stem of about six centimetres which had neither leaves nor roots. It stood in scattered groups and this "forest" was hardly taller than the book you are now holding upright in your hand. But what was underway was impressive. In the course of a million years or so, also called the Devon explosion, hundreds of species developed from these previous small plants. They developed roots, leaves and the *stomata* itself, the small oval holes in the leaves where gas and water exchange during photosynthesis. In a relatively short time, geologically speaking, they created an ecosystem which was completely fundamental for the further development of life on earth.

"Tree trunks are standing monuments of the futile competition" I say to Mats and quote the British biologist Richard Dawkins. Out in the Svarverud woods I am unable to let the story of evolution lie. Trees are an example of how unintelligent evolution can be, and I continue to refer to the Brit: Why develop a meadow "raised on stilts" to collect sunlight when the operation could have been accomplished in a simpler manner if it had been pursued on the ground?"

Many non-biologists believe that nature is perfectly adapted, but that is not the case, Mats comments as we trudge through the woods on our way back to the farm. The biologist expounds upon nature we see around us today, just one of many imagined - created by an endless amount of coincidences through billions of years of evolution. - Therefore, this is just one of several possible ways to obtain enough sun, water and nutrition, he points out. None the less, the competition about becoming taller in order to gain more sunlight, unleashed a race which elevated photosynthesis towards the heavens. After a while forests began to cover the earth, and today the most extreme example is the forest of the coastal sequoia or redwood trees towering 100 metres high in California. The tallest of them is Hyperion, a tree named after the Greek Titan. This tree is the world's tallest living organism stretching 115 metres into

the air. It is an impressive construction erected by CO_2, water and energy from the sun, travelling 150 million of kilometres through space.

We obtain insight into the humble beginnings of the forest, paradoxically enough, from the barren and treeless mountainside on Svalbard. Deep within Isfjorden at the abandoned mining town Pyramiden, British scientists made an astounding discovery. Here they uncovered the fossil roots and stems of club moss (lycopsider), an extinct type of tree. They found remains of coal, which in itself was not surprising, tons of tropical coal are shipped out from the archipelago, but the scientists came up with a new age of the layers they studied: 380 million years, or from the Devon Period. The Brits claimed, and this is a bit of a sensation, that the fossilised tropical forest in the Arctic is one of the oldest remains of forest on the earth, only beat by the 385 million year old remains of the so-called Gilboa tree which was uncovered in the state of New York. These early club moss trees which are on what is today Svalbard, were a paltry 5 metres high, but that was a start.

The once so desolate land mass was after a time covered with forest, dominated by the prehistoric tree family *Archaeopteris*, also called the "first proper tree[5]. These trees were almost 10 metres tall and had a thick wood-like, branched trunk, not unlike the trees of today. The word "peteris" means wing in Latin and refers to the fact that the tree had large wing-shaped fern-like leaves. The *Archaeopteris* fossils are among those found on Misery Mountain on Bear Island in the Arctic. Before researches knew about the movement of the continental plates, and that Arctic islands like Bear Island had been located farther south, they thought that the tree fossil belonged to a polar ecosystem. Only later did they understand that the *Archaeopteris* forest on the island intriguingly enough, had grown nearer to the equator about 360 million years ago.

A trip into this very first forest might have been a strange experience. They were pretty much silent - no buzzing of bees or chirping of birds. But down on the ground, under the debris from the trees, and among the bottom layer of small growths, tiny creatures began to grovel about. The life forms which would fill these first forests had begun very small, and long after life had already exploded in the ocean. This happened

about the same time that plants colonised the land mass. For without them - what would the animals live on?

This milestone in the earth's history, when life forms emerged from the sea onto the land is covered with veil of obscurity. The fossil finds are few, and it is as though several chapters have been torn out of our world's history book[6]. So far, the oldest fossils from a land living animals are a scant 420 million years old, such as the centipede, *Pneumodesmus newman,* a sensational discovery made by a bus driver and amateur palaeontologist in Scotland in 2004[7]. Centipedes have long been regarded as the oldest fossil of a "true" land animal. Together with other arthropods, such as springtails, spiders and scorpions, these were the creatures which dominated the earth, and later the first forests.

What would have the greatest significance for us humans and our vertebrae relatives on land, occurred in the Devon forest's swamps 375 million years ago. That is when the first transitions between fish and amphibian developed, for example, the *Tiktaalik roseae*, and followed by the large salamander-like beast, *Ichthyostega .*[8] It had a movable throat, rudimentary legs with toes and a head that resembled a crocodile's. The fact that vertebrates began to conquer the land surface at the same time the first forests established themselves was hardly a coincidence. The forest provided shelter and food, then as now, and was a prerequisite for our distant ancestors and for the development of life on land. "The clearest way into the universe is through a forest wilderness", wrote the Scottish - American writer and activist, John Muir. It is perhaps deep in the forest that the large lines can be drawn, either out into the eternal universe or back into our geological history when the first forests prevailed.

Mats and I reach the forest road and head back towards the farm. Mats is impatient and walks three steps ahead of me, as he often does when he is in a hurry. Before we can go out into the woods to look for wolf tracks, he has to check on the goats, give them food and make certain that the kids are getting milk.

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Chapter 10 Shinrin-yoku

The Japanese call it Shinrin-yoku - to bathe in the forest air. A trip into the woods has been known to decrease stress, sink blood pressure, increase the number of white blood cells and strengthen the immune system. The most important ingredients in bathing in forest air is recreation, motion, not to mention, the subtle organic substances which the trees expire. On a warm summer day especially, we can sense the pine trees oozing terpenes. These cleanses and disinfects the air, and for this reason tuberculous sanatoriums were preferably located in pine forests. Perhaps it was bathing in forest air that made the Norwegian zoologist and folktale collector, Peter Chr. Asbjørnsen pen these well-known words, repeated *ad infinitum* "When the world goes against me (...) I have found well-being by wandering in the outdoors to alleviate my worries and unrest." Or did the Danish-Norwegian author Ludvig Holberg's discouragement vanish in the large forest on Terslæsegaard on Sjælland, while in the city was a "misanthrope". The one who might have brought bathing in forest air to state of the art is the Swede, Mathias. A video clip posted online in the Swedish newspaper, *Expressen,* shows a naked young man sitting on a stone out among the birch trees[112] shaking of an orgasm he is having with forest itself. (!)

The world-renowned biologist Edward O. Wilson might have called it biophilia. In his book *Biophilia* he writes about an inherent and basic affinity towards nature and its living creatures. The history of mankind didn't begin until 10,000 years ago with agriculture and settlement in small villages. Actually, the whole thing began several millions of years ago with the origins of the human race, homo. Wilson points out that for more than 99 percent of mankind's "prehistory", we have lived as hunters and gatherers. Our ancestors were dependent upon acquiring the necessary knowledge about nature. They had to adapt to the landscape, the animals and plants in a completely different way than us: "The brain developed in a biocentric world, not in a world governed by machines ... it would have been dramatic if all this learning was deleted", concludes the evolution biologist. Without going into too much detail,

Wilson believes that a co-evolution has taken place between genes and culture which has its origins in an innate desire “to be associated with other life forms”.

Wilson’s biophili concept is disputed, and it is of course not only about a biological and genetic leaning towards nature. The British historian, Keith Thomas has described in detail how we, governed by religious, cultural and philosophical currents have altered our relationship to nature and its plants and animals. As late as the 19th century the British intelligentsia ridiculed other religions, such as Buddhism’s basic principle of respecting all forms of life. Creating parks, having pets or potted plants are relatively modern phenomenons, and is as much about culture as it is about genes.

Shinrin-yoku sounds like some sort of flippant New Age thing, but perhaps bathing in the forest has an effect. For it is just as if the forest is starting to take hold of me. Where Dante lost his way in the woods and was filled with anxiety, the woods has for me become a sanctuary, a place where I can relax, where no one expects anything of me or wants anything from me, and where the people I meet do not care about titles or careers. Where Dante was chased by an evil and hungry wolf out in the forest, the ability to come in close contact with the wolf has given me a goal for my trips into the woods, addictive as such. One year has passed since I succumbed to the forest and the wolf, and I could have quit now. The wolf was tracked, droppings collected, the wolf has sneaked up close to me, and I have heard its potent howl. Yet in order to go out on new trips, I cancel meetings, take off from work, drop training and make the wife pick up the kids at day care. It is an undefinable feeling of being hung up, a feeling that is located somewhere around the solar plexus, creating some sort of indescribable pull towards the forest. They had talked about this urge, Stefan and Claes. And as well as I know Mats, I know he also experiences this. So, when Stefan sends a text message about a new wolf excursion, I experience a new “attack of forest”. It is high season for tracking wolves, and Stefan has a better overview as to where the packs are located. Besides there are the pups, excited and curious, easy to get them howling. We will meet-up as usual: Glaskogen camping at 18.00

The next day I am on my way to Sweden, and it looks promising. It is cold, windy still and once again optimal for sounds to travel well. As a teaser Stefan has sent me a photo of a wolf pup standing out in a marsh, looking right into his camera, taken just a few days ago. And if that is not enough: I have persuaded Stefan to let Mats tag along. For me Stefan has been the autocratic authority on the wolf and the forest. Blind and pliable as a sheep, I follow his instructions and recommendations, and I nod approvingly when he lectures on the animals of the forest. Even though he is autodidact (self-taught) he seems to have a total overview; he even name-drops the names of tiny herbs and flowers with great self-assurance. My idea is that Mats, who is a capacity on the forest and its animal life, could perhaps test him a little. Mats seldom allows himself to be steered by authorities, whether they are religious or professional. A skeptic to the bone, he can, when he is in the right mood, cavil about anything.

On the way to Sweden I do not drive directly to Glaskogen. Following a tip on wolf tracks, I've taken a detour through Eidskog, in southern Hedmark. I jog from the car out into the wilderness. Winter, dressed in white, has swept through the forest leaving a thin blanket of snow. After a while I come to a small pond. The winter sky is bluish, and the woods are airy around the little pond which bends elegantly like a tiny hook and therefore is called, Kroktjern, Hook Pond. Out on the ice a wolf track turns up, and another and another, and if that is not enough: At the edge of the pond all the tracks are gathered together. In certain spots the ground is totally trampled down, as if there was some sort of yearly meeting of one wolf club or another. I expected to find wolf tracks, but not so many. Are these really wolf tracks? So many in one spot? And if so, why are they gathered here, I wonder? I call Ole Knut my experienced contact in SNO, a fellow who has even written schoolbooks on the subject. He is out of breath - also out tracking in the new snow - and he tells me that I have come upon a meeting place for wolves. When an alpha male and an alpha female mate, they often leave the wolf pack, he explains. Then the rest of the pack gathers together in an open area with a good overview, like a lake or a marsh. Before he hangs up Ole Knut asks me to look for hair and droppings, so that they can obtain the DNA of the pack. I rummage

around the pond and find several more gathering spots before the tracks disappear into the forest.

Though an open pine forest I follow the tracks farther into the wilderness. In the course of the past year I have started to get the routine; I measure the size of prints and look for droppings. Every so often I stop, look for urine markings and hair under the firs. By counting the number of lines of tracks, I arrive at the fact that a pack of five wolves has been through here. Since I have been in the area previously, I am guessing that they are pups, both last year's and this year's litter. Usually I relate to the forest and its creatures analytically and somewhat aloof - look for tracks, estimate the age of the forest and study the landscape.

But while I am walking, following a gorge through a thick spruce forest, anxiety comes creeping in, not intense or panic-stricken but diffused and undefined. Is it the knowledge that there are wolves in the woods which creates this uneasiness? Or is the density of the spruce forest with dead, greying trees effecting my mood? In the book by psychologists Kaplan and Kaplan, *The Experience of Nature,* people from completely different cultures are asked to rank various types of landscape. Dense forests were ranged low. Thousands of studies were later conducted, also in Scandinavia, and they came to the same conclusion: Dense forests and forests with dead trees were not particularly well-liked. While open, park-like woodlands with tall trees and with a visible forest floor scored very high. Why?

The glove is thrown down. The steps are counted. An academic duel ensues between biologists, social scientists and humanists about whether it is culture or genetics that govern our predilection for different landscapes, and perhaps the truth lies somewhere in-between. Certain biologists claim that, for our prehistoric relatives, it was all about seeing, but *not* being seen. One of the reasons that we prefer having an overview in the forest is that it gives a feeling of security and control. The brain awards us with good feelings and harmony, and simply stated, there is a selective genetic predisposition for open landscape, not unlike the savannah of today - and therefore it is called the savannah hypothesis.

A far more controversial and partly absurd assertion is promoted by the German forest ranger, Peter Wohlleben. In his book, *The Secret Lives of Trees* he writes that trees feel pain, expel a high frequency scream when thirsty, and raise their "tree children". The fact that we experience an uneasiness in certain woods, the German believes, is that in a tightly planted spruce forest the trees are in a constant state of readiness and excrete aromas that signalise "danger". According to the forest ranger's controversial and somewhat undocumented assertions, we feel this uneasiness because we pick up these scent molecules, which make us able to instinctively perceive the state of health of the forest, and empathise with it.[113]

We cannot avoid the topic of the much-discussed virgin forest, complex and with a great number of dead trees, both standing and lying on the ground. Photos of forests with dead trees and fallen trunks score relatively low in various surveys, a paradox considering our eagerness to preserve even more forest areas. Now it must be said: A relatively recent survey shows that photos of virgin forests with a short informative text about the significance of dead trees for a diversity of species scored significantly higher than without the text. This can mean that we can learn to appreciate certain types of forests, and with a raised consciousness about the importance of the old forest, it can appear more attractive to us than a so-called "mystical forest".

The trail ends at another pond, and there I find several more trampled gathering spots for the wolf in the snow. As I trudge across the frozen pond, fresh new wolf tracks appear. I look around, it is as if I have the feeling that I am being watched. The line of tracks transverse the small pond and disappears into the woods. I follow it a short way, but then have to give up. The forest floor is free of snow, even though it is mid-February. A red cast in the sky reminds me that it is late morning, and that I have to turn back in order to make my meet-up in Glaskogen later that day.

This time I walk back to the car over an open felling area. There are tree stubs, boughs, new shoots of pines and bushes. Even though I am not especially fond of such clear-felled fields (like many others, the surveys shows) just now it is a relief to see the forest open up. It provides air. It gives an overview. Up on a hillside I hear the comforting sounds of traffic and barking dogs. Sometimes, for me there can be a bit

too much forest, and I have not quite reached the point where I, like most hardcore woodsmen, head out into the forest for months at a time, live off fished trout and sleep in a tent. Or like Stefan and Mats, for that matter, who spend weeks on end out in the wilderness. A long day trip is enough for me. The woods can be overpowering and claustrophobic, a place where emotions can quickly get an upper hand.

After the felling field the trail goes through the dark forest and out onto Kroktjen again. Towering pines surround the ice-covered lake. The sun glows above the crowns of the trees in a clear, winter blue sky. As I walk across the pond, it is almost as if I believe the explorer and scientist Fridtjof Nansen's pathos-filled comment that "a cry from the wilderness vibrates beneath all our actions, and makes life deeper and purer and nobler."

It is 6 pm. In a kind of Norwegian-Swedish bonding, Mats, Stefan, Claes and I meet at Glaskogen camping. Night vision binoculars. Powerful flashlights. SLR Camera. Red Bull. Potato Chips. Everything is crammed into Stefan's Land Rover before we drive out into the woods.

Mats and Stefan are immediately on the same wavelength, they talk about grouse mating, chicken hawks, the amount of hares, white-back woodpeckers, bird apps, wolves and forestry. Yet even though both Mats and Stefan are woodsmen, they approach the forest in different ways. Stefan has a deep love and curiosity of life in the woods which drive him. The Swede tracks wolves, ring-marks peregrine falcons, looks for the vipers' breading grounds, searches for endangered insects and rare frogs. He also likes pristine forests, untouched by humans, and believes that parts of the woods should be left in peace. But even though Mats shares much of Stefan's interest in animals and enjoys a walk in the woods, it is not only for recreation. It is also business. Trees must be felled, small woods cleared, sheep have to graze and moose hunted. This provides the capital which is needed to run and maintain a farm. And this creates a certain tension between them as they discuss. Mats is not totally positive to the wolf, and when we pass a clear-felled field he is not as angry as Stefan, but sees the profit and the practical side of harvesting the entire forest at once.

After a while we stop at a lake, long and wide, surrounded by spruce forest. The starlit heavens arch above us, while the woods lie deep and dark before us. The procedure is the same as before. Stefan takes position, cups his hands and lets out a powerful howl across the Värmland forest. Then we are completely quite and listen. The procedure is repeated. No wolf answers. Total silence. "Listen, Stefan suddenly says. We listen. At first, I can't hear anything. Is it a weak wolf howl which Stefan has picked up with his unearthly good hearing? "A boreal owl", Stefan whispers. Boreal owls have sharp hearing, and certainly the best hearing among owls. The sound gets louder, and I hear a kind of melodic yodelling through the woods. Now Mats has also heard the boreal owl. "Oh, I hear that every morning from my bedroom, he informs us. Linné gave it the Latin name, "funereus" after the word funeral. A great deal of superstition is connected to owls - everything from being regarded the devil's messenger to being wise animals (with glasses). The Tawny Owl's screech was for example, considered a bad omen. If it continued for several minutes, it was said that someone would die.

Silence spread throughout the woods, yet in the distance we hear the sound of a motor. "Run!" Stefan shouts, as if he has seen the devil himself. So we run though the dark forest, Claes, Mats, Stefan and I. Out on the lake we see a huge four-wheel drive spinning on the ice, swerving from side to side, while a powerful light from the vehicle swipes across the water like a lighthouse on the dark sea. Out of the car window a flashlight searches along the edge of the water. "Hunters. They are looking for wolves" Stefan says, pretty stressed as we get back into the car. He revs up the engine and we race down the snow-covered forest road. I get an idea and take out a "Real men shoot wolves" sticker and slap it on the front window. Should we be stopped by some Swedish rednecks, we might be able to talk our way out of it.

What just happened? Can they really give us trouble, those hunters, here in safe and thoroughly regulated Sweden, Mats and I wonder? "They harass and threaten us", Stefan explains. "If they get a hold of a licensed plate number, they post it on a secret online forum. They look up the owner of the car and harass them and ask what they

are doing out in the woods." Stefan and Claes are what they call "wolf huggers" and certain persons in Värmland put wolf huggers in the same category as pedophiles and rapists. Stefan and Claes do not like being called that, so negative is the connotation of the term.

"Wolf huggers" are totally against wolf hunting, and we're not", Stefan points out.

"But are *you* really afraid?" I ask the Swede as we bounce along the road, the man who goes out alone, fearlessly seeking out predators. "Afraid, no I'm not afraid, but my wife is anxious. After all, I have been shot at." And so, he tells Mats the entire story, about Norwegians out hunting illegally and the shot which rang though the tree tops behind them. It was bit like the Swedish film *The Hunters (Jägarna)* where the villagers, rightly enough character stereotypes, hunt moose illegally and end up committing murder. That is not supposed to happen here in idyllic Värmland, with its tiny cottages painted in poppy red, its glittering waters and beautiful, endless forest. As Stefan tells his story the lights from the vehicle on the lake become more and more distant; luckily, it seems that they did not discover us.

We pass felling area after felling area as we head deeper into Glaskogen. Huge mounds of branches and timber are stacked up on the naked, treeless clearings. Despite the fact Värmland's municipal website promotes this area as a nature reserve with all the characteristics of a wilderness and "beautiful natural environments", the loggers have been working exceptionally hard in the forest. Reserve or not, only 125 acres of forest are protected against felling. The rest of the nature reserve's 2,200 acres is free range for loggers to harvest. That the entire Glaskogen is called a nature reserve is almost a parody. "Look here. The forest is harvested everywhere. I have been coming here since I was a child, when this was pristine woods, and 70-80-year-old spruce trees stretched into the sky. Now all that is left are flimsy sticks." Stefan complains. "Sure, there is a lot of forest. But what kind of forest is this? he asks rhetorically. "Biotrops vanish. Species vanish", he continues downheartedly. Again, Mats dares to create a balanced argument. Even though he believes that it is unfortunate to clear good, old forests and has recently protected a large area of his own

woods, he has, as a forest owner, a more practical view of it all. Clear cut harvesting is often the only possible method to achieve an acceptable profit, he says. The forest is a resource which must be used and exploited. For some, protecting a biological diversity can be viewed as a luxury.

The Swede talks about the time he was on Borneo. It was worse there. He drove past miles of palm oil plantations, hidden from the tourists behind a thin line of forest which had supplanted the rain forest. And when he traveled to Uganda and saw what harvesting had done to the rain forests, he was almost in tears, as Stefan says himself. The country's entire rain forest had vanished in the course of just two decades. When the forest was gone, the earth dried up and nothing other than grass was able to grow.

With felling areas within Glaskogen on either side of us, I refer to the book *Collapse* by the American researcher and writer Jared Diamond, and remind them of how different forest politics can have far-reaching consequences. Diamond presents two countries in the Caribbean, Haiti and The Dominican Republic which share the island, Hispaniola. When the first Europeans arrived, they spoke of rumours of the lavish forests on the island. Now much of the forest on Hispaniola is gone, and when we study the satellite photo of the borderline between the two areas, Diamond's point is made so obviously, it is almost comical: On the east side of the borderline, in The Dominican Republic, the deep furrows in the landscape have the dark green colour of the forest, while the landscape to the west, in the area controlled by Haiti, it is brown scorched and pale. While those on Haiti have preserved just one percent of forest, The Dominican Republic has preserved 28 percent. Why have these two nations acted so differently?

The answer is complex, says Diamond, but refers to Joaquin Balaguer, the former president and dictator of The Dominican Republic[114]. During his three presidential terms, (the first from 1960 and the last to 1996) he protected a large forest area, and he had no scruples about using force. When forest protection was not respected, and the wealthy landowners continually felled trees illegally within the nature reserves, he stepped in. One of the most famous actions in environmental history occurred in 1967, when Balaguer sent in the military to stop an illegal felling. The

confrontation ended with an exchange of fire, and dozens of loggers were shot. Not surprising, this had a strong preventative effect. On Haiti the infamous dictators Francois "PapaDoc" Duvalier and his son Jean Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier did not have the same appreciation for the forest, and the forest continued to be depleted.

With this story in mind, it is tempting to draw a comparison to the British historian Simon Schama's work *Landscape and Memory* where he writes about Nazi-Germany and the forest. For the Nazis the forest was part of the German identity, a symbol manifested in the battle of Teutoburger forest waged shortly after the birth of Christ. After reading about the battle I found I had to visit this forest shrouded in myth. In an airy forest of beech trees, but with a thick and bush-like under vegetation, I read about how the Germanic tribes led by the military leader, Arminius, attacked three Roman legions from the rear. The Germans who were hiding in the beechwood forest maimed and killed 40.000 Roman legionnaires.

There were many battles between the Romans and the Germans, but this battle which certain historians believe stopped the Romans from advancing farther north once and for all, later became larger than life. During the unification of Germany and for the Nazis as well, this battle became a symbol of the superiority of the German race, closely connected to unspoilt nature represented by the forest. Herman Göring himself was named *Reichforstmeister* of the newly conquered areas of Nazi Germany's Lebensraum, as for example the Bialoweiza forest in Poland where "Teutonic" species such as the eagle, moose and of course the wolf, could flourish. There the Nazis would be able to hunt, which they did in a way; thousands of Russians and Poles were executed in this forest. No government has, according to Schama, preserved the German forest more arduously than the Nazis. "Extermination of millions of lives was not at all incompatible with the passionate protection of millions of trees", he concluded.

At night the spruce trees loom as pointed, jagged teeth against a clear, starry sky. Another lake shines in the moonlight in front of us. In the distance a wispy veil of mist spreads out towards the horizon. On our way here we have seen an abundance of wolf

tracks, and Stefan is optimistic. We rustle out onto the lake and take our positions. He howls. We howl. Our howls reverberate like echos across the lake. We stand motionless. There have been so many hits and miss trips that I do not have any expectations. At first, we only hear the whispering of the forest and the gentle rustling of the tree tops. But then we hear the first weak, eerie howls spread out into the night. And then another, and another before a fourth wolf begins. Finally, two more wolves join the chorus. This is different than anything I have previously experienced. Deep howls mixed with light, almost unearthly tones. We stand solemnly during this evening mass, deep in the wilderness. Now I realise why Stefan and Claes venture out into the forest searching for wolves, night after night. This was worth all the unsuccessful trips, the ruined nights, the planning, the waiting, the hours in a car driving around in wooded areas in Sweden and Norway. This is powerful stuff, and it is easy to resort to clichés, like a meeting with raw primal nature, untarnished by humans and civilisation.

New howls travel through the night, undulating through the pitch-black forest. The pack of wolves begins again, and again. Often wolves howl before and after a night's hunt, which is a ritual for strengthening the bond of the pack. Then we hear a deep howl in the night. "That is a male, last year's pup. It is probably the baby-sitter", Stefan says. The two-year-old pups often take care of the one year olds when the parent alfa male and alfa female are out hunting or mating. They like open areas such as this, they have better control of the younger pups.

Stefan points to a promontory which stretches out into the lake, and explains that the pack is gathered behind it, perhaps only 200-300 metres from us. Light, extended howls travel across the lake, and they are coming from the one-year old pups, according to Stefan, who takes out his night vision binoculars. They are curious now, the wolves, about who is standing out here howling. The Swede bets that pack will soon come into view on the ice. This is not unusual. We are on the look-out, but the mist has spread a thick veil over the water, limiting visibility. After another break, the pack starts howling again, cacophony and psychedelic tones across the water. "They are talking to us now: How are you? Where are you?" Stefan informs us. Sixteen times we

hear the wolves' howling ring through the forest. This is the ultimate wilderness experience exclaims Mats, the otherwise extremely sober forest owner.

As we scout for the wolf pack through the green hue in the night vision binoculars, I am reminded of the philosopher, conservator, scientist and writer Aldo Leopold. In 1949 he wrote the influential best seller, *A Sand County Almanac.* In one of the book's essays, "Thinking like a Mountain", he defended life without thinking of its usefulness. During a hunting trip up in the mountains, Leopold and his fellow hunters hear a deep howl sounding like an echo between the ridges. "It is an outburst of wild defiance, sorrow and disgust for all opposition in the world" he wrote, and their eyes spotted a wolf who was looking for its pups. They let loose a shot, it fell, and when they reached the animal he saw the wolf's gaze, a "fierce green fire dying in her eyes". In his essay Leopold philosophised over that there was a hidden insight into the wolf's howl which is "long known among mountains, but seldom perceived among men". He believed it was about thinking like a mountain, and emphasised that this predator is part of a larger picture, an entirety which must not be disturbed in our short-sighted longing for security, wealth, comfort and longevity. "In wildness is the salvation of the world", concludes Leopold in his essay.

Whether or not the thought of protecting the forest and animals had sunk in when *A Sand County Alamanac* was published, Leopold's essay was regarded as one of the first written defences for the wolf - a work which paved the way for protection some decades later, and not to mention, for reintroducing wolves into Yellowstone National Park, originally a suggestion by Leopold [116]. There were, in fact at the end of the 1800s, hunters who were of the meaning that the wolf's disappearance was not entirely positive, among them the Swedish hunting legend Gustav Schröder. At first rightly enough, he was happy that the wolf had disappeared from the Swedish forests, for he could at long last let his dogs run free. But after a few years he wrote that in the absence of the wolf there were increasingly more foxes, and this impacted the birds and hares of the forest - a correlation which is still being researched. It was then Schröder wrote the unlikely words "... it would probably be best if we got the wolves back." Quite an unusual point of view at the time[117]. Although the wolf was by and large *non grate*, the

Swedes were among the first to create bear reserves, and in Sonfjëllet National Park one was already established in 1909. After the beaver was totally illuminated in Sweden, certain people were afraid the same could happen with the bear.

The wolves were quiet. Stefan howls. Claes howls. Mats howls (even though it sounds like a sick fox), and I howl (even worse than Mats). We all howl. We make repeated attempts, but they do not answer, and they do not come out onto the ice. The wolf pack is now totally silent. Perhaps they understood that it was not other wolves who were howling, Stefan guesses. We stand for a while out on the ice, feeling the forest and the darkness.

After we have bored through the forest, we are back in the parking lot at the camping grounds. The trip is over, and it feels sad. Stefan gives me a big goodbye hug, as if it is the last time we will be seeing one other. Congratulations, he says to me. He probably thinks that it is over now, that I will give up, close the book on my restless search for wolves. Stefan knows, from his 20 years of experience with wolves, that the night's encounter was unique, a rarity even for experienced woodsmen. Stefan is right. I could stop now, I also did think out in the woods, listening to the wolf concert. It fit in perfectly with my plan: One year searching for wolves is enough. This must not escalate. All the trips looking for wolves has already worn down quite enough, my family life, work and friends But as we were standing there in the parking lot, Stefan shares another powerful wilderness experience: about wolves that crept along side of him, and of the time he had been sitting alone, hiding in the forest, and after many hour's wait, finally saw a wolf. At certain times it came so close to him, he could photograph it. He has taken thousands of photos of wolves: he shows us on his cell phone a photo of a wolf with three pups, rummaging around out on a marsh at twilight.

"Let me join you when you are hiding in the woods!", blurts out of me as I get into the car, totally against my plan. I have heard the wolf - now I want to see one in the wild, even if it is just to briefly see its eyes light up in the darkness, or the tip of a tail. Stefan studies me suspiciously before he breaks out in laughter. "You have become a

wolf addict", he proclaims and thinks for a moment. "You're too impatient and restless. If you are to sit in hiding, you have to sit completely still, sometimes six to seven hours at a time. You cannot go out to pee or stretch your legs or even move your arms. You would never manage to do it".

"Sure I can." I make another attempt, laughing disarmingly, surprised that he has uncovered one of my weaknesses; restlessness. That which causes me to get irritated if my kids just dally a minute too long getting dressed in the morning, and the reason I am never invited on fishing trips with my buddies.

Stefan replies neither yes nor no, and my question is left hanging in the air. It's time to head homeward, each of us in our own car. Mats and I race along the winding forest road through Glaskogen. It is nearly midnight. I am not able to relax completely, stop thinking about the wolves and the forest. There just has to be several more wolf trips. The forest is like a drug. I have become like Mats and Stefan. I have become the forest.

The next morning I send a text message to Stefan. "The strange thing is, I wake up and my first thought is: I want to go out into the woods. I want to see the wolf."

Stefan answers. "You're hooked. HAHA"