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Author: Lars Lenth

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About the author:

Lars Lenth (b. 1966) is Norway's undisputed number one when it comes to fly fishing for trout. His literary debut came with the novel *The same river*in 2007, a fly fishing novel following a young man's experiences through a season of fishing at the river Skrukkedalsrenna. *The Norwegian patient*was his second novel, introducing the lawyer Leonard Vangen and the criminal Rino Gulliksen, two characters who readers have grown fond of. Leo and Rino reappear in Lenth's next novels, *The Vega Brothers*, *Men who hate wolves* and now in *Gimme Shelter*. In all four novels there's a deep felt tension between man and nature. Lenth names Elmore Leonard, James Lee Burke, Carl Hiassen, Nick Hornby, Knut Hamsun and the Coen-brothers as his main influences.

About the book:

***King Lear* meets *Pulp Fiction*: A love story set in a coastal landscape featuring windmills, racism, dark secrets and Rolling Stones. A family drama from a windswept corner of Stadlandet, a peninsula in western Norway – Lars Lenth is back with an engaging and ever surprising fairy tale of what modern Norway is really like.**

Lawyer Leo Vangen is in love. Anita Fostervold from Stadt seems to be everything he has ever dreamed of until he meets her mother, 84-year-old Agnes Fostervold – former academic, avid racist and Mick Jagger-fan. She runs a wind farm in the Hoddevik Mountains and a refugee centre in the old family hotel in Selje. Now the refugee centre stands empty. The authorities have cut off the supply. The matriarch wants to sell both hotel and wind farm. Her three damaged children — Anita, Bill and Charlie — jostle for position. But first Agnes must get rid of the Afghan family hiding in the basement and the uncooperative, bare-chested tenant residing in the stone cottage on the neighbouring lot.*Gimme Shelter* drills deep into Western Norway's nature, but even deeper into human nature.

"A climate change denier running a wind park and a racist running a refugee centre." Leo raised his beer bottle. "Colourful family you've got there. Cheers!

Gimme Shelter

1.

Gentle Breeze

At eight o'clock in the morning on Friday 1st October, a large man with narrow shoulders and broad hips climbed out of a red Toyota HiAce and opened the gates of Blåfjell Wind Farm on the south-west of Stadlandet in the county of Sogn og Fjordane. The man was wearing green wellingtons, pale-blue jeans and a brown oilskin jacket with bird crap on the corduroy collar. On his head was a tight-fitting black ski helmet with a white stripe down the middle. A scattering of clouds sailed across the sky. It was an almost windless day; the sea lay down below like a swaying mirror – a rarity on this windswept peninsula that spread out into the Atlantic like a malignant tumour.

Charlie Fostervold hawked and spat when he spotted the broken padlock in the heather, clipped off by the eco-socialist who had broken into the place the week before, putting one of the windmills out of action.

He picked up the padlock, flung it out into a boggy tarn on the other side of the service road then stood there for a few seconds watching the rings spread across the surface as he thought about Leeds United and how life as he knew it was over.

Then he trudged back to the car, parked in his regular spot beneath windmill number one, "John", clambered out of the vehicle, slammed the door shut, grabbed his pitchfork from the truck bed and made a start on his inspection round.

Before the sabotage, he used to come up here once a week max, usually on Sundays after church. That was the brilliant thing about a modern wind farm: everything was computerized, so it practically ran itself and required minimal maintenance, monitoring and checking. But lately he'd been here every day. He had no choice. The eco-terrorist could come back any time.

Charlie Fostervold wandered slowly around "John", pitchfork resting on his shoulder, peering up into the air, keeping an eye out for diving arctic terns. The aggressive seabirds liked nesting high up in the wind farm, and these kamikaze pilots would do whatever it took to protect their newborn chicks.

Two hundred metres further on he passed windmill number two, "Bartholomew"; he walked around it in a circle and scrutinized it myopically before stomping onward to number three, "Philip", his personal favourite, which was mounted on a little hummock slightly above the other eleven.

His wife Oda was the one who'd insisted on naming the twelve windmills after Jesus's disciples. Surprisingly enough, Mum the control freak had raised no objections.

When he reached windmill number four, "Judas Iscariot", he stood and stared up at the massive construction with clenched teeth, the muscles in his cheeks bulging like marbles beneath the skin. The terrorist had hacked into the control system and left the windmill running riot in a severe gale. The Danish windmill technicians concluded that they were damned lucky the rotor and turbine housing hadn't come loose, but that they would have to replace a lot of parts; the repairs would take time and would be expensive as hell.

Charlie Fostervold didn't have an instant's doubt about who had hacked into the system and unlocked the windmill the night the storm was raging.

It stank of Børre Fink from a mile off.

His old primary school science teacher – a fanatical conservationist in his old age – was running around claiming the windmills were "killing machines" that murdered birds and ruined Stadt's undefiled nature. "Visual pollution," he called it.

From the very moment the initial plans were on the table, Fink had fought tooth and nail against the wind farm. "A scandal" he hissed in the local newspaper on the day the concession was in the bag. "Corruption!" he bellowed into his orange loudhailer on the day of the grand opening seven years ago, until police chief Sylte and another officer clapped him in handcuffs and led him away.

Old Fink wanted light and heat in his house; he wanted electricity for his record player, his answer machine and his hairdryer, but was he willing to sacrifice anything for it?

Of course he wasn't.

And this so-called bird death? How many birds were involved anyway? A couple of white-tailed eagles a year, a few migrating mallards, the odd Eurasian eagle owl, perhaps a razorbill every leap year?

He peered up at the mill, which stood stock-still in the gentle breeze, caressing it with melancholy eyes. The three rotor blades were sixty metres long – a wingspan of 125 metres, equivalent to four full-grown blue whales.

Charlie Fostervold liked to measure things in blue whales, the biggest animal that had ever lived.

The blue whale had stayed with him ever since the science lesson in fourth grade at Selje primary school when Mr Fink took the whole class out into the schoolyard, drew a chalk line on the asphalt, paced out thirty metres, then drew

another line on the asphalt, pointed at the ground and solemnly declared: “That is how big a blue whale is.”

Bigger than a house; almost as big as the hotel.

Charlie trudged onwards through the gently rolling, treeless landscape following the path he himself had trampled out over seven years. He liked to walk along it. It was his own creation and gave him a vague sense of having left a trace of himself behind.

A breath of wind wafted in from the sea and set the angel-white rotor blades in motion.

The wounds in nature caused by the operations of diggers and heavy machinery were in the process of healing. Grass, flowers and other plants had begun to peek out on the heaps of earth and stone. This was what those damned prophets of doom refused to see: nature would always repair herself, adapt, strike back in new and unexpected ways. People were also part of nature – just as much as the birds, the bogs, the small rodents and the endangered yarrow – and the windmills were the human animal at its very pinnacle of achievement. They were engineering art, brooding symbols of humanity’s superiority, its taming and exploitation of merciless nature up here in Northern Europe, on the very margins of civilisation.

Now Mum wanted to sell the wind farm. After everything he’d done and sacrificed, that little tyrant was threatening to sell his entire life’s work to a bunch of Danes.

What the hell was she thinking of?

By windmill number seven, “Matthew”, which stood closest to the sea, Charlie Fostervold spied a dark patch at the very end of one of the stick-thin rotor

blades. He felt his autonomic nervous system kick in, the way it always did when something unexpected happened: the adrenalin seeping out into his body, the tingling on the soles of his feet and the backs of his knees, the prickling of his scalp beneath the helmet, the clammy palms and the belly that started to rumble and produce gas.

He staggered closer, gaze directed upwards; leaning on his pitchfork, he stood beneath the windmill and squinted up at the dark area, which was now at the very highest point – a hundred and fifty metres above the ground.

There was something there. But what?

The tower housing gave a gentle creak, and the west wind rustled in the heather, increasing the speed of the turbine blades. Low, chalk-white clouds came drifting in from the sea, round as cotton wool balls, and briefly concealed the bundle up there before vanishing again as if they had never existed.

Slowly but surely, the object came closer. Charlie's short-sighted eyes did their best to outperform.

As the blade neared the horizontal position, his ears registered a sound – something other than the hissing of waves, the creaking of the windmill or the "tip-tip-tip" of the arctic tern. It was a whining, barely audible but nonetheless distinct, like a dog dying by strangulation – like that time he gave a chicken thigh to little brother Bill's Labrador and found it lying dead by the front door the next day.

He pried off his helmet and dropped it in the heather.

The whining became ever more distinct and as the bundle approached its lowest point, thirty metres above the ground, he saw what it was.

It was a human being.

A person with long black hair was tethered firmly to the rotor blade with silver gaffer tape.

Charlie Fostervold noticed he had lost all feeling in his legs as the whining grew fainter and fainter, and the man on the mill slowly ascended into the air again. Charlie sank to his knees open-mouthed, staring at the figure. Then he fell forward, breaking his fall with numb hands and, kneeling on all fours, he threw up his breakfast: eight rashers of bacon, four soft-boiled eggs and five slices of bread with peanut butter.

He pushed himself back up onto his knees again, tilted his head backwards, drew a forearm over his wet lips and squinted at the person high up there in the sky. With trembling fingers, he fished his phone out of his jacket pocket, coughing and spitting as he stared at the display.

Should he call the police?

Of course he shouldn't ring the police. Mum didn't like the police.

Should he ring the Tjøstheim twins? Oda? Bill? He opened his frequent contacts list, drew the breath deep into his lungs, held it there, counted to five and pressed Mum's number.

Two weeks earlier

2

"I've decided to sell the wind farm," said the slightly built old woman, using a knitting needle to scratch the scalp beneath grey-white curls that looked like cotton grass.

"What the hell?" The lanky man standing before her made a half-hearted gesture with his arms. He was dressed in a long-sleeved Stoke City jersey and filthy jeans with a hole in the knees, sockless feet in a pair of yellow Crocs. His pale greasy hair was gathered in a ponytail that caressed the collar of his soccer shirt. His right hand held a stripy woollen hat. Bill Fostervold battled heroically to appear shocked but was well aware that his swimming eyes would convince nobody.

"Dong Energy has made a bid," Agnes Fostervold said. She sat one leg crossed over the other on a brown wooden chair with a tall leather-upholstered back. Her milk-white arms lay on armrests with dragon carvings.

"Dong?" said Bill Fostervold, wrinkling his aquiline nose, which had matched the rest of his face perfectly well in his youth but had now become an excessively dominant feature.

"From China." She placed an index finger in the corner of each eye, pushed the elastic skin at the side of her eyes upwards: "Chinese." She pulled the skin down. "Japanese." Then she pointed to her chest: "What are these?"

Bill chuckled without smiling, letting his gaze wander around the large room; it swept over the dark red wallpaper and the brown velour curtains that had shut out the light for as long as he could remember. Small shafts of daylight

sneaked in through holes in the fabric, like spotlights that revealed the dust motes floating around in the room.

Rolling Stones on the stereo, always the Stones. “Love in Vain” from *Let It Bleed*, turned down low.

A fire crackled in the slate-clad fireplace at the other end of the room. The smell of burning birch blended in with the scent of old leather furniture, raspberry drops and the lit cigarillo that rested in the ashtray on the glass table. On the floor by the fireplace sat a man with a full beard in a brightly coloured tunic wearing a beige turban on his head.

“How much will they pay?” Bill asked.

“Ninety million kroner,” Agnes replied.

Bill felt a hot jolt run through his body, fought to maintain his mask. “What about Charlie?”

“I haven’t said anything to Charlie.”

“He’ll have a heart attack.”

“Or a stroke.” Agnes picked her cigarillo up out of the ashtray, took a deep drag on it, speaking as she inhaled. “Your big brother doesn’t have voting rights. I’m the one who owns the farm.”

Bill nodded. “He acts as if he owns it though.”

“He’s living in a dream world.” She blew the smoke out through her nostrils. “He always has.”

Agnes Fostervold had a flat, wrinkled face with a short, broad snub nose, high cheekbones, narrow lips and green eyes. Everything about her was small apart from her hands, ears and nose, which seemed far too big for the rest of her body.

"This stays between us." She took a gulp of pale brown sherry from a stemmed glass. "If you blab, I'll set the Tjøstheim twins on you."

"When will you sell?" Bill said, keen to press on.

"As quickly as possible. There's only one snag." She straightened up in her chair and removed a bit of tobacco from her tongue with an index finger. "Dong really mean business. Their condition is that they get to buy or rent the neighbouring land too, the Hoddevik lot – the one with the dilapidated stone cottage on the west side. They want to build the biggest windmill farm in Northern Europe."

"But that land isn't ours, is it?"

Agnes Fostervold smiled. "You are quite right about that, my boy."

"How can we give them something that isn't ours?"

"I shall have to ensure that they get access – I've promised them that. It seems old Jarle Hoddevik has rented it out to some good-for-nothing from eastern Norway. Absolutely refuses to throw him out, says he promised to let him rent it for two years; they shook hands on it."

Bill had seen the guy from a distance, a big bastard. "Is that binding?"

"Of course not, but Hoddevik always has been a stickler for principles."

"Won't he earn a lot more from renting to Dong?"

"Ten times as much at least, but he doesn't want to breach his agreement with the charlatan who's living there now."

"Who is he?"

"That's where you come in." Agnes leaned to one side, an agonised expression on her face, and released a bit of gas – it made a sound like somebody unscrewing a bicycle valve – then stubbed out her cigarillo. "The Tjøstheim twins

were out there last week and tried to persuade him to move. He laughed in their faces."

A tiny smile played at the corners of Bill's mouth. "He laughed in the Tjøstheim twins' faces?"

Agnes nodded. "So they say."

"What's the guy called?"

"That's what I want you to find out for me. Can you do that for Mum?"

"Why me?" He flung out his arms. "Why not Per and Pål?"

"That didn't work. I fancy trying *the soft approach*," she said, pronouncing the phrase in an exaggerated Oxford accent. Bill thought she'd watched a few too many episodes of Downton Abbey, or was it Brideshead Revisited? "If I send the twins back out there, somebody might get hurt. You know how enthusiastic the Tjøstheim boys can get."

She took a fresh slurp of her fortified wine, draining the glass and sucking the liquid through her front teeth before swallowing it.

"We have everything to gain from ensuring that this is done in a civilised fashion. Too much of a hullabaloo and Ching Chong Chinaman might pull out of the deal altogether."

"Why not Charlie?"

"Charlie is pure. We cannot taint him with this. As a drug addict and former criminal, you know how these things work."

"Cut it out," Bill said. "That was ages ago."

"You don't fool me. Once an addict always an addict." Agnes Fostervold smiled. "But you know I love you. Always, no matter what?"

Bill stared down at the carpet, rocking back and forth on his Crocs.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Pay him a visit." She folded her hands then placed them on her knee. "Make him an offer he can't refuse."

"What does that mean?" Bill asked.

"You will offer him a hundred thousand kroner and alternative housing in Leikanger."

Bill felt a wave of nausea wash over him and regretted smoking that joint with breakfast.

Mum threw a glance at the figure beside the hearth. "Usman! Can't you see the fire is about to go out?"

The man in the turban opened his eyes and got up slowly, running a hand over his coal-black beard. Then he put two new logs on the fire, got down on all fours and blew on the embers until the flames caught on the wood, lighting up the room. Flickering shadows danced over the stuffed birds and small rodents, and the oil paintings on the walls.

"Careful with your turban," Agnes Fostervold said. "It could catch fire."

The man brushed off his hands and clothes, settled back into the lotus position and closed his eyes without saying a word.

"Dong have given me a deadline – 10th October. That's four weeks away. Everything must be in order by then. They say it's only a matter of time before the national framework programme for wind power comes into effect, and that will set totally new limits."

Bill nodded even though he'd never heard anything about a national framework programme before. What was clear was that big brother Charlie's

world would crumble to dust and the thought of that gave him a little boost. “I’ll take a trip out there on Monday.”

Agnes nodded. “Not a word about this to Charlie or Oda.”

“My lips are sealed like seven sails.”

“With seven seals,” she said. “This has nothing to do with sailing.”

“With seven seals,” Bill muttered.

Agnes picked up a silver bell from a side table and shook it frenetically. A young girl clad in traditional Norwegian garb appeared in the doorway.

“Yes, Mum?” The girl said with a curtsey.

“Fill up my glass won’t you, Sari?”

The girl stole over to the sideboard and fetched the silver tray with its bottle of Del Duque, then, just as noiselessly, slunk over and filled Agnes’s glass to the brim before replacing the bottle and slipping out the same way she had come in.

Glass in hand, Agnes rose laboriously from her throne, swayed over to her son, oblivious to the drop she spilt on the carpet, and stroked him over the cheek with the back of a hand, scrutinising him as if he were some monstrosity in a glass case at a museum. “I must admit I am a tiny bit worried about you, my boy.”

“About me?” Her cold hand sent shudders down his spine. She was standing close now, her breath a blend of raspberries, alcohol and Cuban tobacco.

“How will you get by?”

Bill stared straight ahead at a painting on the wall, waves crashing against cliffs; its frame was broken and one corner of the canvas was curling. “What do you mean?”

“When I’m gone, what will become of you?”

"What are you talking about?" He shifted his gaze to his mother. "Are you planning on leaving us?"

"I have decided to sell everything." She limped back to her chair and sat down. "Lock, stock and barrel. Move to Oslo."

Silence in the room, except for Mick Jagger wailing in the background like a wounded alligator.

"Are you going to sell the hotel too?" Bill asked.

"It isn't a hotel any more."

"Are you going to *sell* the refugee centre?"

"The authorities have turned off the tap. Hadn't you noticed?" Agnes Fostervold tilted her head back, nostrils aquiver. "My contract with the municipality runs out at New Year. This is a sinking ship."

"You can't do that," Bill squeaked. "The hotel has been in this family for over a hundred years."

"Not in my family." She took a swig of sherry then set the glass down on the table with a faint bang. "I have to do it before it's too late. Get back to civilisation. Buy myself a flat in Oslo with stuccowork on the ceilings, one of those fancy new Japanese toilets and chestnut trees blossoming outside the window. I have no desire to die in this wind-swept, godforsaken place."

"But you always said I would inherit it!"

"I have never promised anything whatsoever." She shook her head slowly and squeezed her eyes shut tightly several times.

"I thought it was on the cards," Bill flung out his arms. "I thought we didn't need to spell it out."

"Just how old are you now, my boy? Thirty-five?"

"Forty-one."

"How time flies." She tilted her head up and down. "You youngsters think life will last forever but before you know it, you are a bitter old fool who will soon be dead."

Silence.

"I thought we had an agreement," Bill said.

"You know I am fond of you, my boy, but when I am gone, you will have to make a life of your own. This is in your best interests."

Bill scraped the tip of his yellow plastic shoe against the rug. There was so much he felt like saying, but he said nothing.

"Do you know what?" Mum straightened up and clapped her palms together. "If you clear up this mess with the wind farm, I will reconsider what I'm going to do with this old ruin." She swept the room with a dissatisfied gaze.

"So if I get him to move out and the contract goes through, I'll inherit the hotel?" A glimpse of hope in his voice, a spark of optimism in his watery eyes.

"Then at least you will have made an effort to earn it."

Bill stopped by the door and peered over at the man by the fire.

"Usman," he said. "What was it you needed?"

"Just the usual things, "the chap in the headdress whispered.

"What is he saying?" Agnes yelled.

"They need toilet paper, rat poison, flour, salt, sugar – the usual stuff. If you transfer a thousand I'll sort it out, okay?"

"You will get eight hundred and fifty," Agnes said. "And it will last the month."

"Old cunt," muttered Bill, too quietly for his mother to hear.

The man in the turban smiled, eyes shut.

"There's gratitude for you," Agnes said gravely, as if this were an expression she had invented there and then. "Coming here of their own free will and expecting hotel standards." She got up, grabbed hold of the walking cane leaning against the little table, waddled across the room to the fireplace, looked down at Usman and prodded him lightly on the side with the cane. "It never ceases to amaze me how demanding they are."

Bill stared at the man in lotus position, who opened his huge peepers and gazed up at Mum.

"Don't want to live in Afghanistan, don't want to live in Pakistan, don't want to live in Greece, nor Paris. Stadt isn't good enough. It's probably too windy." She rapped the floor with the stick. "I simply cannot understand them."

"They are from a totally different culture, after all," Bill said.

"Culture?" Agnes turned on her heel abruptly. "What the devil do you know about culture?"

Bill stared down at the rug.

"Do you know the definition?"

He shook his head.

"Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

"Okay Mum," Bill mumbled, vanishing out of the door.

3

Two days later, lawyer Leo Vangen was sitting in a stripy deckchair on the decking outside his house on the little island of Gåsøya in Bærum, dressed in

turquoise shorts and a white T-shirt. Through the big round sunglasses his mother had bought in Mallorca in 1982, he cast stolen glances at the woman who lay sunning herself stark naked just a couple of metres away as he sipped on a bottle of melon-flavoured mineral water. Leo liked to sit this way and look at her on the sly, especially when, as now, she was lying belly-down on the newly varnished planks; a waft of fresh varnish in the air recalled more or less successful experiments with drugs in his youth. She kept her body in trim, but not in the puritanical Norwegian way that involved endless running and cross-country skiing sessions. No, with her, it was badminton three times a week with a girlfriend, half an hour of yoga a day, and a few sit-ups morning and night.

On only their third date, she took him along to the nudist beach at Huk without prior warning – all she said was that they were going to Huk. Normally, Leo would have steered well clear of the nudists and contented himself with the ordinary beach, casting a few sneaky glances at the people who insisted on wandering around without their clothes on – maybe offering a few caustic observations about nudism in general and this nudist beach in particular. This time, he didn't say a word but simply removed all his clothes, sat down naked on the woollen blanket, placed a copy of Fly Fisherman in his lap, leaned back on his arms and turned his face up to the sun, trying to banish the thought that the former Bishop of Oslo, Per Lønning, was a keen naturist.

The hoarse voice of Alabama troubadour Jason Isbell crept out through the gap in the sliding doors – a song about the elephant in the room that everybody pretends isn't there. In this instance, the world's biggest land-based mammal was a metaphor for death and disease.

Leo closed his eyes behind the scratched sunglasses, thinking how great he felt, much better than for a long time. Anita's strict regime was good for him. Less wine and meat, more mineral water and fish. Less TV, more books, paddling around Gåsøya three times a week – good for his core muscles, good for his head. His daughter Siri had left her bed, started to eat almost normally again, was studying nursing and had got herself a boyfriend. His son Willy had found his niche in life as a masters student at the Norwegian Business School and bass player in a rock band – a mysterious combination that Leo had resigned himself to accepting he would never understand.

Now and then he almost felt a vague sense of gratitude, something resembling the fundamental joy of simply getting to live a life.

He opened his eyes and shook his head to reel himself in. Perhaps he had just got a bit better at not giving a damn about the elephant – was it as simple as that? "We just try to ignore the elephant somehow," Jason Isbell sang.

Leo repeated the line in a low voice.

"Elephant?" Anita Fostervold said without moving a muscle in her face. "What are you babbling about?"

"Forget it," said Leo. He raised his gaze to the white clouds in the west: soft, gentle formations that presaged nothing other than more lazy late summer days. A gentle breeze came in from the fjord, hastening the sailboats out there. The wind made it pleasantly cool in the sunshine. "Shall we do something nice this weekend?"

"What did you have in mind?"

"We could see a musical, go to the opera – or how about a show at Wallmans Salonger?"

"You just can't stop yourself."

"Stop myself doing what?" Leo slurped his fizzy water.

"Running things down. You do it all the time."

"I don't."

"Yes you do. You just don't notice it any more."

The smell of burnt meat came drifting along on the wind. It was Falch-Jensen in the black modernist house barbecuing rib-eye steak on his terrace. Always rib-eye steak.

"Isn't there a ban on barbecues?" Leo asked as he thought about what she'd said. "One little spark could set the whole damned island ablaze."

"Since when have you been so interested in rules and regulations?"

He didn't answer. She was right. It wasn't about the barbecuing; he just thought the neighbour was a pretentious jerk.

"All I'm doing is punching up," Leo said. "There's a fundamental difference between punching up and punching down."

"Nonsense," said Anita, pushing her sunglasses up onto her forehead. "Wallmans isn't pompous; it's just folksy."

Leo shrugged. "I have to be true to myself."

"You're stuck in a rut."

"Okay," he chuckled. "What do you want me to be like?"

"Waste less energy on things you don't like; accept that people are different; suggest something you really think is nice and stop giving the impression that you know how everything fits together because that's just crap. And buy yourself some new sunglasses."

"Now you're pushing it," Leo said.

Anita sat up in the lotus position, her nakedness a little more conspicuous now. Her black pubic hair was shaved into a small upturned rectangle maybe two centimetres wide and four high. She cocked her head so her sun-bleached hair fell over her face and hid her green eyes. “You do know what you’re doing don’t you?”

“Drinking fizzy water?”

“You’re setting yourself above ordinary people, trying to convince yourself that you’re smarter than them and that you’ve understood things they haven’t. I believe it’s down to some kind of profound insecurity.”

Leo noticed yesterday’s wine, a tiny lapse, making its presence felt beneath his forehead.

“You’re turning into a grumpy old git.”

“I’ve been that way since I was sixteen,” Leo said.

“You’ve aged at least five years in the twelve months I’ve known you.”

“That’s only because I’ve finally worked up the courage to show you my true colours.”

Anita smiled and shook her head. “I got a call yesterday.”

She reached for a grey T-shirt with the Amnesty logo on.

“Yeah?” Leo said.

“From Bill. My screwed-up youngest brother.” She put on her T-shirt and pulled it down over her knees.

“I didn’t think you spoke to your family.”

“He rings me when he’s scared.”

“What’s he scared about now?”

"Mum is threatening to sell the wind farm on Stadlandet. And there was some nonsense about the neighbouring lot too – some tenant who won't move out."

Leo ran a hand through his short dark hair, which had turned grey on the sides, and felt the blood rise to his head, the old quivering start up in his arms and legs.

Was it Rino? Had Rino Gulliksen got up to some devilry?

He stood up, putting a hand on his hip, felt the wind in his hair and breathed from deep down in his belly. "I thought your oldest brother was the one who owned the park?"

"Are you crazy?" Anita lowered her sunglasses to her eyes. "It's Mum. It's all Mum."

"Go on."

"Charlie owned the land – he came into it when Daddy gave us an advance on our inheritance – but Mum was the one who sorted out the financing for the windmills in exchange for ownership of the wind farm. She was the one who pushed through the contracts with the banks. She ensured that Google and the municipality committed to buying all the power the farm produced for the first ten years. Charlie just works there. She gives him some pitiful annual salary." She lay down on her back again. Arms straight out. "She totally screwed over her own son."

"But why's Bill bothered?" Leo found his way back to his deck chair. "I thought he didn't care about the park."

"Apparently she's threatening to sell the hotel too."

"The refugee centre?"

She nodded. "Selje Fjord Hotel – my childhood home, the jewel of Stadt."

"I thought it was bonanza times in the asylum sector."

"Not any more."

Leo devoured her with his eyes: with or without clothes, he could have sat and gazed at her until the wind calmed. He had met her at the seaplane harbour pub exactly one year ago. Quite by chance. They were sitting side by side, the low sun slap bang in their faces, both struggling to eat mussels in tomato sauce with a modicum of dignity. She said something funny about the mess she was making and he said something brilliantly self-mocking as he wiped greasy sauce off his nose with a serviette. She was a trained social worker who taught young immigrants with behavioural problems, 38 years old. A woman like her would normally have come trailing something he couldn't have coped with: sceptical kids from a previous relationship, forthright opinions about how "the good life" should be lived, an ex-husband with a full beard and barely suppressed anger lurking in the wings. But Anita wasn't like that. No weighty baggage apparently. "I've made a few mistakes," she replied when he asked her about previous partners. That was that. They had been living together on Gåsøya for four months.

So far, cohabitation had exceeded all expectations. But how well does anybody actually know another person? As he sat watching her, it struck him that he didn't know her at all.

"There was a mega-boom in the sector, "Anita mumbled. "Linked to the war in Syria and the refugee crisis. But now it's quietened down – for the time being."

"Did the Progress Party put their foot down?"

She shook her head. "The refugees are being held in camps in North Africa and Turkey. The ones who are captured or rescued in the Mediterranean are sent

back to where they came from. The number of asylum seekers in Norway has nosedived. The centres are empty."

"Damned shame for the asylum barons… and baronesses."

"There you go again."

"What?"

"Running other people down."

"Surely I'm allowed to make fun of opportunists who earn a fortune off the back of other people's misfortune?"

Anita sat up. With the flat of her hand, she crushed a horsefly that had landed on her cheek. She placed the squashed insect in her hand and examined it before flicking it away with her middle finger.

"Other people would say they're helping the authorities to solve an acute problem."

"Do you think your mother is sacrificing herself to help others?"

"Far from it. She's a fucking racist."

"Aha. Playing the racist card, are you?"

She snickered. "I just feel sorry for Bill. He hasn't had such an easy time of it. He's always dreamed of taking over the hotel. The old junkie dreams of refurbishing it from the bottom up – restoring it to its former glory."

"Can he afford to buy you out?"

Anita looked at him, lowering her well-groomed eyebrows. "This isn't about money."

"Of course not."

"The wind farm is worth hundreds of times more than the hotel."

"So if she sells the farm, it's actually a good thing?"

"I don't give a damn."

"And who does your brother think will stay at the hotel?"

"I don't know, but Stadlandet is an incredible place."

"I thought you hated Stadt."

"I don't hate Stadt." Anita put her sunglasses on again and lay down on her back. "I hate my mother."

Her voice was flat. She struggled to find a comfortable position to lie in. The sun vanished behind a cloud – the decking was suddenly chillier. Leo's belly rumbled. He fidgeted in his deckchair to camouflage the bodily noise.

"Have you been out there since last Christmas?" Leo asked.

She shook her head.

"Why not? It was so nice, after all."

Anita suddenly sat up. "Can't you talk seriously about anything?"

"I'm just trying to lighten the mood."

"Even your sunglasses are ironic."

"I inherited them from my mother."

"You've got sweaty underarms."

"So I have," Leo said, sniffing his armpits.

The intro to "No Expectations" by the Rolling Stones stole out through the sliding doors with Brian Jones on slide guitar – one of the last things he did before kicking the bucket.

"Stones?" Anita said, sticking out her tongue. "I hate the Stones."

Leo chuckled, tilted his head back against his deck chair and stared up at the sky.

What the hell had he been thinking of? Why had he tipped Rino Gulliksen off about the stone cottage on the land beside the wind farm? Why had he consciously placed a walking disaster so close to Anita's family?

He zoomed in on a flock of birds that was circling around up there. He thought they must be gulls and the reason they were there must be either food, flight or fornication. That's what everything in nature boiled down to: food, avoiding becoming food for other animals and reproduction. If it was food, what could possibly be edible so high up in the sky? If it was insects, were they also there because of food or reproduction, or had they fled there to avoid being eaten? His own existence was boiling down more and more to food and less and less to reproduction, although he had thought a bit more about reproduction since meeting Anita. They hadn't said a word about children, which he assumed meant she had dismissed the thought.

"Up for yoga tonight?" Anita said.

"I'm always up for naked yoga," Leo said, getting up out of his deckchair.

4

As Leo and Anita sat chatting in the sun in Bærum, former primary school teacher Børre Fink was making his way steadily up the hills from Selje en route to his new comrade in the stone cottage beside the wind turbines on Hoddevik Mountain. It was only eleven kilometres as the crow flies from Fink's apartment, but the road snaked to and fro, back and forth across Stadlandet like a wiggling earthworm, for a total of twenty-two kilometres.

The only reason the retired science teacher was able to keep up such a brisk pace through the Western Norwegian rain forest was the electric motor mounted on the back wheel of his bike. It was a concession, no doubt about it. Batteries were the devil's work – cobalt and lithium dug up from mines in the Congo by children's hands – but it was still better than the petrol-fuelled Vespa he had sold last year. A regular bike would have been preferable but he would rather spend his time and energy finding more birds, rescuing more of those that were stunned and giving the dead a dignified burial.

Fink was small of stature and thin as a pin with a coal-black goatee and a grey mane that danced on his shoulders in the wind. He was clad in beige corduroy knickerbockers with white woollen socks, a red Norrøna anorak with fur around the hood and newly impregnated hiking boots. Perched on his head was a motorbike helmet – a silver bucket with suede sides – which warmed his ears nicely and gave him the air of a London dandy from 1968, Swinging London, from back in the days when he was studying African history at King's College, worshipping the Beatles and life seemed uncomplicated.

For many years he had fought a lonely battle. He often felt he was the only person in the whole wide world who understood the importance of the struggle against the windmills on Stadlandet. Now he had acquired a potential henchman, his very own Sancho Panza, in the war against the Fostervold clan and the windmills.

The man who called himself Even. The chap in the stone cottage.

It was time for action. Somebody had to stop those monsters of cast iron and carbon-fibre-reinforced plastic that sullied the virgin coastline and were claiming the lives of heaps of innocent feathered friends every year.

The local birders were only bothered about the iconic species – the white-tailed eagle, the golden eagle and the Eurasian eagle owl. Børre Fink wanted to strike a blow for the toilers – the gulls, terns and geese. The anonymous species also had a right to live fully fledged lives without flying into rotor blades and being mangled by humanity's greed. This summer had been particularly bad. Fog or low clouds every damned day. So far he had found more than forty dead birds, and had saved at least thirty unconscious wretches from being eaten by minks, foxes or hungry members of their own species.

When he came up onto the plateau and set out across the treeless landscape, the wind and drizzle slapped him about the chops, millions of tiny darts of rain stinging his skin. He hunched over his seat, humming "Your Mother Should Know" as he kept one hand on the handlebars and the other in front of his face to protect the prominent aquiline nose he had burnt when he climbed to the summit of Kilimanjaro in seventy-nine.

The process surrounding the mills had been a parody. When the Norwegian energy directorate handed the concession to the Fostervold clan, the birders

opposed the decision. He still remembered the paltry response from the authorities:

"After thorough consideration, the department has concluded that the consequences for birds are of insufficient magnitude to hinder the construction of wind turbines in these places."

They even had the insolence to claim that the windmills stood in a remote area and would be invisible from Stadt's main settlements.

Stuff and damned nonsense.

The hundred and fifty metre high windmills were fully visible from Selje, even from the living room window of his beachside apartment. They stood there on the horizon, waving their long pointy arms and claiming all the attention, like abominations from another planet.

The smell of damp pine forest and rotten seaweed tickled his nose as he trundled down the hills on the northern side of the peninsula, between the dense coniferous forest, past the deer farm and down to the Vanylv Fjord, where the road swung outwards, west along the cost.

This was his favourite stretch, nice and sheltered, protected from the biting wind off the open sea.

Low tide now. Big black stones exposed themselves, covered in pale brown seaweed reminiscent of pubic hair grown wild, just the way he liked it, the way it was in the seventies when "natural" wasn't an insult.

When he reached Leikanger, he parked his electric bike outside the Korsen Pub and Café, hung his silver helmet on the handlebars, drew a red comb from his back pocket and ran it through his generous mane of hair. Then he swaggered into the pub, went over to the bar and ordered a half-litre of canned Guinness. He

stared at the creamy grey foam as he slowly poured the dark liquid into a half-litre glass, thinking that this Irish beer was outrageously expensive – twice the shop price – but at least the money was going to a good cause.

"How did it go with Galatasaray this weekend?" he asked Hakan, the Turkish owner who did his best to keep the little pub going.

"0-2 away against Alanyaspor. A damned shame," Hakan said. "It was obvious we were the best team."

"The ball is round," said Fink, downing half his glass in a single gulp.

"Not in rugby," Hakan said. "Maybe I'll start watching rugby instead."

Fink laughed. Not because he thought it was funny but so that Hakan wouldn't feel discriminated against. "What about Erdogan? Has he been raising any hell lately?"

"He's a crook," Hakan said. "A disaster for my country."

"Better days will come," Fink said and drained his glass.

He went outside, mounted his electric bike and continued his journey southwards, passing the identikit houses on the slope and the huge stone cross up on the top of Dragseidet, a monument to Olav Tryggvason and the Christianisation of four counties in the year 997.

This isthmus was where the Vikings had dragged their ships across the land – five kilometres with horses – when it was blowing so hard that the violent peasants dared not cross the open sea. Now they were planning to build a ship tunnel from Eide at the far end of the Molde Fjord to Kjødepollen at the far end of the Vanylv Fjord, at the point where the peninsula of Stadlandet was narrowest.

Now and then Fink thought the big boss himself had sent the man who called himself Even; that it was the result of divine intervention.

The giant had come upon him one evening as he sat burying a puffin beneath the windmills in the setting sun. The big bare-chested man had invited him into the stone cottage for self-caught trout and rhubarb wine. “You can call me Even,” he replied when Fink asked his name. He didn’t like to talk about himself; the only thing he gave away was that he needed a spot of peace and quiet, liked to hunt and fish, loved the sea and mountains and animals, and was sick to death of people.

Never a word about where he came from.

He didn’t have a mobile phone, didn’t have an internet connection, had no electricity or running water – lived in the primitive stone cottage as if it were 1840.

The giant had run away from something, that much seemed clear. Everything he said and did was coloured by an underlying tone of defeatism suggestive of a man processing some great grief, perhaps the loss of a wife or a child. But beneath his resigned surface, Fink sensed something wild and alive, something merciless and murky that meant he could play a decisive role in the battle against the capitalists.

Even was ready to rumble. He just needed to be tickled in the right places.

Up on the mountain plateau, Fink upped his pace. He wondered whether trees had ever grown up here; whether the Vikings or some other short-sighted idiots had chopped the lot of them down to build houses and boats, or whether it was nature itself: maybe it was too windy, maybe the trees needed so many calm days a year in order to put down roots and grow tall.

Just before the descent to Hoddevika, he turned left onto the service road, passing the transformer station that collected all the electricity from the wind

farm and sent it onwards to Germany. On his way up the hillside he could enjoy the view of the familiar surfing beach, the endless ocean to the west and, to the east, the island of Selje with its monastery, part-hidden behind the windmills.

At least the rest of Europe had the wit to place its windmills on cultivated land. In Norway, they built them in unspoilt nature. Area after area of natural beauty was converted into industrial parks. Digging machines and bulldozers blasted their way through mountains and plains, leaving roads and roadcuts behind them like open wounds.

In thirty years, the windmills would stand there like gigantic rusting monuments to the victory over common sense of a bunch of greedy charlatans and slick lobbyists.

When he reached the parking bay in the gravel road on the other side of the dam lake, Fink climbed off his electric bike, leaned it up against the stone wall and strutted the two hundred metres to the turf-roofed cottage.

Smoke streamed out of the crooked chimney, dissolved and vanished on the wind.

He turned and cast a glance to the east, in the direction of the monsters, which turned slowly in the gentle breeze. He felt the blood rise to his head, drew the breath in through his nostrils, deep into his belly, and held it down there as he counted to ten before calmly releasing the air through his mouth. He repeated the procedure a few times then straightened up, drew a hand through his Edvard Grieg mane and knocked on the door.