From *The Art of Falling*

(*Kunsten å tryne*)

by Jan Tore Noreng

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Translated from the Norwegian by Alison McCullough

**Part 1**

*The way of the parkour is to continue, not to stay here.*

SÉBASTIEN FOUCAN

1

I walk into the classroom on the first day of school after the summer holiday. Everything seems just as it was before. The hum of voices. Chairs scraping against the floor. Laughter. I see Jonas’s chalk-white hair all the way at the back of the room – he’s used some kind of hair product to shape it into tall spikes. To make himself look a bit cooler now we’re back at school again, I reckon. He’s also wearing a new t-shirt. It says ‘Rancid’ on it – the name of a band I don’t really like. Jonas and I might be in our own little bubble, but we don’t share the same taste in music. He gestures to show me that he’s saving me a seat.

Anette’s eyes stick to me like Velcro as I pass her desk.

‘Hi, Samuel,’ she says.

Wait. Everything is *not* the same as it was before. Anette never usually speaks to me.

I mumble a confused greeting back at her and continue between the rows of desks. Drop my bag beside the place that Jonas has saved for me and bump my knuckles against his. Anette is still looking at me. I nod to her, and pull out the chair to sit down.

Anette nudges Helene. Helene turns around, uninterested at first, but then she follows Anette’s gaze. It’s as if they’re communicating using telepathy. Helene’s pupils widen. Sort of *ka-ching!* – like in a cartoon.

‘O…kay,’ says Helene.

Everything is most definitely *not* the way it was before. Helene hasn’t looked in my direction in years. She’s not the type to waste glances on people who don’t deserve them. Jonas and I are the nerds. Or at least we *used* to be.

Mum was right.

A few days ago, I walked into the kitchen to raid the fridge. I just happened to be bare-chested. Mum was working on the computer – her second cookbook will be coming out soon, and she’s spending a lot of time editing the text and picking out images.

She looked at me as if I was an alien from another planet.

‘What?’ I asked.

‘Oh, my boy,’ she said. ‘You’re all grown up.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Look at you!’

She got up from the kitchen table and came closer.

‘Have you been working out?’

‘Can you imagine *me* in a gym?’

‘You’ve changed over the summer.’

*It’s just me*, I wanted to say, but I didn’t. I looked down at my arms and chest. I knew what she meant.

I hadn’t given it much thought, but Jonas and I had been leaping over obstacles and hanging by our arms to our hearts’ content all summer long. It had never been so intense before, not since we first started watching parkour videos in the last year of primary school. It was as if we were obsessed. Now we were starting to get really good, and so in a way we *had* been working out. Every single evening over the past few months, in fact. It wasn’t so strange that we’d developed a few muscles.

‘Have you decided on a title?’ I asked, to change the subject.

Mum’s first book came out two years ago, and was called *Casseroles You’ll Love*. She’d been working hard on the new book, but hadn’t been able to come up with anything better than *More Casseroles You’ll Love* as a title.

Mum stared at me without answering. Then she stood up, on tiptoe, and brushed my hair out of my face – that had grown, too.

‘You got my hair,’ she said absently.

‘I might have to get it cut before school starts,’ I answered.

‘Oh, I don’t know. It suits you. And you’re so tanned.’

She sat back down.

‘Don’t be surprised if the girls look at you differently when you go back to school,’ she said, turning back to the computer screen.

‘Pfft,’ I said.

Others are looking in our direction. Some turn quickly away again, but others are openly staring. Jonas grins at me.

Here’s the thing: I don’t care about the girls in our class. Especially not Helene, even though she’s like the dream girl for most of the guys – Jonas included. My appearance might have changed, but I’m still in the little bubble with him, out of reach, totally by choice. We don’t do any of the stuff the others do, we’re only interested in our own little projects. Finding cool new runs through the playground after the kids have gone home. Climbing up onto the roof of the supermarket. That kind of thing.

*Nerd stuff*, Helene probably would have called it. In the beginning, everyone thought we were weird. But then more and more of the kids at school started to discover that there was this thing called parkour. It had become an important part of a lot of action films. We’d just got interested in it earlier than everyone else, and were motivated enough to spend loads of time practising.

Nobody in the class knew just how good at it we’d become.

Helene is still looking at me. She smiles quickly and turns away.

A smile from Helene. Jeez – now *that’s* something new.

‘Are you coming tonight then, bro?’ asks Jonas.

‘What?’

‘Fredrik’s got himself a car. We’ve been checking out new places.’

Fredrik is Jonas’s big brother. He’s eighteen. He was the one who got us into parkour, actually. He’s been saving up for a car for a long time, and it’ll give us way more options – round here, we’re limited to the playground and the supermarket. Where we live is too far from the town centre to be classed as part of the city. Too many fields, too many tractors.

Not exactly a village, but pretty close.

‘Nah – I’m just gonna watch TV,’ I say. ‘Sorry.’

Jonas laughs, the white spikes of his hair quivering.

‘Idiot,’ he says, jabbing me in the side with his elbow.

2

My mum is one of the most badass people I know.

Jonas thinks my dad is cool, just because he’s a lawyer. Sometimes I try to explain to him that Dad isn’t the kind of lawyer you see on TV, standing in a court room shouting ‘objection!’. Dad is responsible for contracts and agreements at a law firm in the city – and that’s not quite as cool. Or maybe I haven’t fully understood what he does myself. But whenever Dad tries to explain it to me, it just sounds so unbelievably boring.

But Mum is a badass – because she does what she’s afraid of.

We’re eating dinner, and she says that she wants to change some of the photographs in her forthcoming cookbook. The photographer has suggested taking some pictures of Mum cooking, surrounded by loads of ‘people’.

‘I can see what he means,’ says Dad. ‘It would make it nice and informal. No standing on ceremony, you might say.’

Mum nods.

I say nothing. Because if there’s one thing we all know for sure, it’s this: Mum hates being surrounded by lots of people. Big groups. It freaks her out.

It’s called social anxiety – and it’s no laughing matter. Mum really struggles to be out and about among people. She’d rather just stay home, pottering around with her cooking.

But she did a little book tour when her first cookbook was released.

During the run-up to the tour, things were the worst they’ve ever been at home. Mum cried every night. Said she was going to pull out – that she couldn’t do it. It was really hard to watch.

You can’t just convince people who have social anxiety. It’s no use telling them that isn’t dangerous, or asking them what’s the worst that could happen. It has nothing to do with common sense – you can’t just snap out of it.

Of course, the photographer knows nothing about Mum’s problem. He just thinks it’s a good idea to involve more people in the photo shoot.

But there’s another thing that we all know for sure – and that’s that Mum will do it. Just like she went on her book tour two years ago, even though she didn’t sleep for many nights before she left. Even though she was completely worn out by the time she came home.

She lay on the sofa for hours every day. Didn’t do any cooking or cleaning. Just lay there, regaining her strength.

That’s why I think she’s such a badass.

Everybody said it was a huge success. The local newspaper wrote about how entertaining Mum was, how good she was at explaining things and telling stories.

Only us here at home knew how much it had cost her.

‘It sounds like a good idea,’ Dad says, hesitantly. He looks at Mum across the table. Doesn’t ask her what she’s decided to do.

Mum nods again. Presses her lips together and looks down at the tabletop.

She’s going to do it.

‘Maybe you two could come?’ she asks without looking at either of us. ‘You’re “people”, after all.’

Dad frowns. Didn’t see that one coming.

‘I’ll come,’ I say. ‘No problem.’

‘Well,’ says Dad. ‘Maybe…’

‘It would help,’ Mum says. She casts a brief glance at me, then him. ‘A bit, at least.’

‘Of course,’ says Dad. ‘But let’s try to do it on an afternoon, okay?’

My parents are different to Jonas’s. My mum and dad never argue, for example, but I hear a lot of arguing when I’m at Jonas’s place. At his house, they often shout at each other.

Jonas’s parents are teachers – his mum was our form teacher when we were in primary school. His dad teaches high school.

Even though they have a different sort of relationship, I think Jonas’s parents love each other just as much as my mum and dad do. Even if it often sounds as if divorce is right around the corner.

My parents each have their own world. Dad works a lot, and tries to get out and take a run every single day. He’s extremely concerned with keeping in shape. Had he been a bit lazier, he’d probably be fat because of all Mum’s cooking, but the running helps. He runs every morning, before the rest of us get up. It probably takes quite a bit of discipline.

Mum has her little projects at home. She has a blog, in addition to the cookbooks. She likes to experiment with food, and watch others doing the same on YouTube.

And then they have a world that they share. Surprisingly often they sit on the sofa, snuggled up together like a pair of lovebirds. I think it’s a bit weird. You’d think that you’d get tired of each other in the long run – especially after fifteen or sixteen years together.

‘Well there’s a lot you don’t know,’ Mum would say. And that’s probably true.

‘I’m going out with Jonas and Fredrik,’ I call to them as I’m putting on my shoes.

‘Are you going far?’ asks Dad. He gets the picture, since I’ve mentioned Fredrik. He knows that Fredrik’s just bought himself a car.

‘No,’ I call back, without being any more specific.

Dad seems to buy it, but his grey-haired head appears in the doorway.

‘Well then don’t be too late,’ he says. ‘School tomorrow, and all that.’

I give him a thumbs up and smile.

‘And don’t break your neck,’ he adds.

‘I’ll try not to,’ I say, attempting to sound reassuring.

3

Fredrik lets Jonas play a couple of songs on his stereo system as we drive. That’s fine by me. I sit in the back and watch Jonas going crazy, playing air guitar and air drums while his big brother nods his head to the rhythm. There’s at least one big difference between the two of them – Fredrik is trying to save the world, but Jonas believes it’s already too late. We’re wearing hoodies, all three of us. It’s almost like a uniform. The one Jonas is wearing is black; Fredrik’s is grey, like mine. He often wears a dark-blue beanie as well, even if the weather is warm. I rarely take off my cap.

Outside it’s starting to get dark, but the streetlights are on. There’ll soon be more buildings to see, wider roads. We’ve left the village now and are approaching the edge of the city.

The song ends, and Fredrik signals that he needs a break from the music. Jonas turns off the stereo.

‘It’s cool that you finally got a car, Fredrik,’ I say.

‘Yeah, well,’ he answers, shaking his head slightly. He clicks on the indicator and slows down.

‘You’re polluting the air like crazy though,’ says Jonas, teasing him.

Because Fredrik hasn’t exactly bought himself an electric car – it’s an old Volkswagen Beetle. A real gem, according to Jonas and me, but of course Fredrik is worried about its emissions.

‘It’s what I could afford,’ Fredrik says. ‘But I don’t like it.’

We turn down another side road, and looking at Fredrik I can tell that we’re almost there. It seems as if he’s looking for somewhere to park.

‘Maybe you’re not so worried about the environment then, Samuel?’

I shrug my shoulders, but of course Fredrik can’t see me.

‘I dunno,’ I say.

‘You and Jonas,’ he continues from the front seat, ‘all you want to do is get better and better at parkour. Like, don’t you care about anything else?’

‘Come on,’ says Jonas, a little irritated. ‘Don’t be like that.’

‘Of course the environment is important,’ I say. ‘But you’re probably more able to do something about it.’

Fredrik takes a left, and the landscape opens up. A huge building site lies before us.

‘Well, everything’s connected,’ he says. ‘You’re probably too young to understand, but…’

He’s looking for both his words and a place to park the car. It’s as if we’re driving down a forest trail – this area is obviously intended for trucks and diggers.

‘You’re not *that* much older than us,’ laughs Jonas.

But Fredrik has a point he wants to make.

‘You know when you get from A to B, properly clean, right?’

Both Jonas and I nod. That’s the goal – to get through the course quickly and without stopping. To slip through openings, slide over obstacles – bam, bam, bam.

*Clean*. That’s what we call it.

The car stops. Fredrik twists the key in the ignition and puts his arm over the back of the seat. Looks from me to his little brother.

‘Well that’s the aim in life, too,’ he says. ‘Like, to live *clean*. To get from morning to night with the least possible emissions. Without using unnecessary plastic, without buying a load of shit just because advertising tells you that you need it. You know?’

‘Jeez,’ says Jonas.

But I know what he’s talking about. That’s how he likes to live. Me, I’m not so conscious of these things. But maybe I’ll become more aware of them over the next few years?

‘Parkour is parkour,’ says Jonas. ‘It’s not freaking philosophy.’

‘Yes it is,’ says Fredrik as he opens the door. ‘Parkour is *precisely* philosophy.’

We’ve found a place that gives us a good overview of the building site. Fredrik is still babbling on about philosophy and parkour; Jonas and I listen without interrupting. We owe Fredrik that much, at least. He’s taught us loads already. If it hadn’t been for him, we never would have got into this. And then we’d just be two losers.

‘It’s self-development – you know that,’ he says.

And we do. When I first started I was flexible, but I had no strength in my arms. I couldn’t even hold my own bodyweight for a few seconds. Now I’m like a monkey. Of course I’ve developed; made progress.

‘And you’ve learned a new way of looking at your surroundings, right? Just look at this building site.’

The building site has been closed for the day, blocked off by high fences, but is luckily well lit. Inside it, a building is taking shape. It’s four stories high, with a fifth floor that appears to have just been started. Scaffolding. Concrete. It looks as if it’s going to be a shopping centre.

‘I know what you see,’ says Fredrik. ‘Something completely different to what other people see.’

‘Everybody else just sees concrete,’ says Jonas. ‘Something unfinished. Something boring.’

‘Right,’ says Fredrik. ‘Everyone else sees obstacles. What do you see, Samuel?’

I answer without thinking: ‘Paths.’

Fredrik laughs.

‘Paths,’ he repeats. ‘Opportunities. So many paths have been created by others who have gone before us, but parkour teaches us that we choose our own path. The obstacles *are* the path. So don’t tell me that parkour isn’t philosophy!’

‘Parkour is like life – is that what you’re saying?’ I ask. As soon as I’ve spoken I can feel that it’s more complicated than that, but Fredrik agrees.

‘Parkour *is* life!’ he cries happily.

‘Well on that we damn well agree,’ says Jonas.

Jonas is obviously tired of talking about parkour instead of doing it, because he takes a run-up at the wire fence. There’s no barbed wire on top of it, but it might be a little tricky to climb over nevertheless.

If you’re an amateur, that is.

But Jonas isn’t. He takes a rattling step up onto the fence itself, then grabs hold of the top edge. In a single, fluid movement he straightens his arms and swings his feet elegantly over it. As he lands on the other side, his knees give way and he lets himself fall onto his back. He rolls around, and returns to his feet.

‘Well are you guys coming, or what?’

4

Paths.

Jonas and I are aware of this new way of looking at the world. We’ve talked about it before. We love seeing things from a different perspective than most other people.

Someone has designed our surroundings, made decisions about where people should walk and spend their time. This is our rebellion – that we don’t automatically accept these conditions, that we look for alternatives. It’s our way of living, and we’re not hurting anybody. Okay, maybe we hurt ourselves sometimes, but that generally only happens when we’re showing off what we can do. And there’s no better teacher than falling – everybody who does parkour knows that. When you fall, you become painfully aware of your own weaknesses.

And then you have something to work towards.

For us, parkour is about working together to become better at a bunch of little things that in the end will give us a huge toolbox of different skills. It’s always about teamwork, never about competition. If one of us manages to do something we’ve never done before, he has to explain it, giving the other instructions until he can do it, too. We never say, ‘first one over there’, or take the piss out of each other for things we don’t achieve.

There’s no better feeling than having practised some move or other for days, something you just can’t get right – and then suddenly it works. All of a sudden your body is on side. Your head no longer thinks, your foot simply finds exactly the right spot, and pushes off with just the right amount of force.

Along one side of our school runs a wall that we always used to balance on when we were little. I think it’s the foundation wall of a building that’s no longer there. It runs parallel to the school for a few metres, before disappearing off into a projection and a ledge a little further up. This was where Jonas and I started out.

We’d been practising – inspired by Fredrik, of course – getting up onto the ledge. One day, Jonas did a move that’s called a *tic tac*, and used the wall for support to get up there. A tic tac basically involves running across the side of the wall. It sounds pretty cool, but to see it done live is totally sick. Running along beside the wall, jumping up onto it with one foot, pushing off, and landing on the ledge.

It looked so easy when Jonas did it. He and Fredrik had probably been practising together.

The first time I tried I crashed straight into the ledge. Got a bloody nose and grazes all over my face. But Jonas looked after me. He suggested that I practise on another wall first, without trying to jump up onto anything else. Simply practise until I managed that one step on the wall.

Behind Jonas’s house it was easier to fall, and I spent a lot of time rolling around on their lawn over the next few weeks.

Jonas wasn’t very good at explaining – he could just do it. So I had to watch him do the move, over and over again, and try to find out what he was doing that I hadn’t understood.

When I finally found the right rhythm in my run-up towards the wall, it started to get better. The length of my steps and my speed were in tune with each another. I could feel that I was on the verge of a breakthrough. My training became more intense. When the movement was in my body and I no longer needed to think about it, I began to work on getting my upper body closer to the wall when I made contact with my foot. Doing this meant I got higher.

That was the solution.

Then I finally did it at school, and got my feet up onto the ledge after a little tic tac step against the adjacent wall. God – how I cheered and jumped for joy! There’s no better feeling in the world than having done something that just a few weeks earlier seemed impossible.

And Jonas was just as happy as I was. There was even a group of kindergarten kids out on a walk who had stopped to watch us. They looked at us as if we were superheroes, and we had to do the move again several times to wild applause from the kids.

Fredrik would have said that parkour isn’t about showing off. He gets irritated when me and Jonas do unnecessary backflips, just because we can. We don’t need others to watch us – the most important thing is that we feel we’re making progress.

But it was kind of fun when the little kids clapped for us.

We investigate the building site separately, see what paths we can find. There’s plenty of things to explore. Concrete elements, diggers and other vehicles, cranes, stacks of metal bars. Loads to jump over, slide under and roll past.

Every now and then, one of us shouts: ‘Hey, look at this!’ or ‘Check this out!’

Then we try, all three of us. Disappear off into the bubble. Help each other. Fail, fall, finally achieve. Jonas is a couple of metres up the solid scaffolding around the unfinished building, and does a backflip on his way down. Fredrik doesn’t tell him off, because there’s nothing wrong with the backflip in itself – it’s the showing off that’s the problem. And there’s nobody watching us here.

It’s strange, actually. We don’t think for a second about the fact that we’ve broken into a restricted area. None of us mentions that we’re not allowed to be here, that what we’re doing is forbidden. Because we’re not stealing anything. Not causing any damage. But if any adults had seen us, they’d be worried that we might hurt ourselves – guaranteed.

Grazes aren’t so bad. Breaking a bone would be much worse.

We haven’t yet moved into the building. I stop for a moment and consider what I see.

There are four fairly finished storeys – floors, without walls. And then the fifth level, which has just been started. Concrete and steel. Scaffolding with flapping tarpaulins. The skeleton of a future money drain.

Up at the top, all the way at the outermost edge of a beam, silhouetted against some pale clouds, a figure is crouching.

A small, dark shadow.

I try to concentrate. Is it really a person?

But then the figure crawls back into the shadows again, and disappears.

So there was someone watching us, after all.

5

I don’t know why, but I just start to climb – I want to know who it is. I don’t explain to the others. They didn’t see it, what I saw.

Jonas and Fredrik are down on the ground. I’m up in the scaffolding.

It’s made to be climbed on. Ladders and steps. I climb partly on the outside of the scaffolding, and partly on the inside, because I’ve got really good at hanging from my arms. Finding the next point that takes me higher.

‘Careful!’ Fredrik calls below me.

Jonas cheers.

There was someone looking at us from all the way at the top of the building. It wasn’t a grown-up. I know that it wasn’t some random security guard who wanted to check that everything was okay at the construction site – if that were the case, we’d already be on our way back to Fredrik’s car. The figure I saw was like us. Like me. Someone who didn’t want to be discovered.

I grab hold of the top metal pipe and swing myself up onto the floor of the top level. There’s nobody there.

I’m breathing heavily. Stand still for a few seconds to get my strength back.

There’s no roof up here. The view is amazing, and the wind is stronger here than down on the ground. I pull the zipper of my hoodie all the way up. Much of the floor is only steel framework and beams. I balance on one of them and peer down into the floor below, where it’s darker.

I crouch down on my haunches and can almost feel that there’s someone down there in the dark. It’s definitely not a security guard.

It’s somebody hiding.

Half a minute passes while I try to decide whether it’s just a figment of my imagination that I can hear someone breathing. Someone sitting completely still, just waiting to see what I’m going to do. I don’t want to make any sudden movements; startle them. Maybe it’s just someone else who thinks parkour is cool, too?

In the background I can hear Jonas and Fredrik shouting. That they’ve started the climb up.

‘Hello,’ I say then.

No answer.

‘My name’s Samuel. I’m not dangerous.’

A stupid thing to say. But it’s true – I’m not.

Someone moves, steps forward into the sharp light from below. I see a little of her face. Her nose, and her small mouth. The rest is hidden under her hood. She looks as if she’s from an Asian family.

‘What are you doing?’ she asks.

There’s something in her dialect that I don’t quite recognise.

‘Parkour,’ I say. ‘Isn’t that what you’re doing?’

She says nothing. Just stands there. Considering me. I can hear Jonas hollering. They’ll be here soon.

‘What’s your name?’ I ask, a little irritated that it’s so difficult to get the conversation going.

‘Parkour,’ she says.

It might be a question, or confirmation that she’s doing the same thing we are. It’s hard to say – but there’s no way that’s her name. She withdraws a little.

‘It’s only my friends who are coming,’ I say. ‘Jonas and Fredrik.’

The girl backs away, into the shadows.

‘Where are you?’ shouts Fredrik. ‘Samuel?’

He can’t see me because there’s a cement mixer in the way.

‘Here!’ I say. ‘There’s someone here.’

Steps below me. The girl takes off running. Then I hear a sound that all teenagers know far too well.

The sound of a mobile phone hitting the ground.

I drop down onto the floor below me, but the girl is gone. There’s an opening on the opposite side; I run across to it to see. She’s obviously climbed over the edge and disappeared. I’ll probably see her running from the building site as fast as she can.

Huge floodlights cast a blinding glimmer over the entire area, but I don’t see her. I hear no footsteps, just the noisy fluttering of a tarpaulin beside the opening.

She’s gone.

‘Was there somebody here?’ asks Jonas from up on the beam.

‘Yeah,’ I say, looking about me for the girl’s mobile. I clearly heard it fall.

‘Who?’ asks Fredrik.

‘Dunno. A girl.’

Did she manage to pick up the phone after all?

‘What happened? Did she run off?’

I nod. Then I see the phone. It’s lying beside a box full of big screws.

‘Was she pretty?’ laughs Jonas.

I think she was, actually, but I say nothing.

**Part 2**

*There are no limits, only obstacles, and any obstacle can be overcome.*

DAVID BELLE

6

Helene stops beside me in the corridor, outside the classroom. She has her hands in her pockets. Smiles.

There’s no doubt that Helene is insanely pretty.

‘Hi, Samuel,’ she says, fixing her big, blue eyes on me.

Jonas is sitting against the opposite wall. He becomes curious about what’s going on; takes out an ear bud and leans forward a little.

‘Hi,’ I say.

Helene has long, blonde hair, like a model. She smells pretty good, too. I’ve never noticed that before, but then I’ve never been as close to her as I am now.

She stands there for a few seconds without speaking. It’s awkward.

I cast a glance at Jonas over her shoulder. He’s grinning.

‘So, how’s it going?’ she says, after slightly too long.

She takes her hands from her pockets and grabs my hand. Strokes the back of it with her fingers. Doing this sort of thing seems to come naturally to her.

Is *this* what flirting is?

I try not to lose my head.

‘Not bad,’ I say cheekily. ‘You?’

‘Naw!’ she says, putting on a baby voice. ‘I’m good! Thanks for asking!’

Behind Helene, Jonas has to clamp a hand over his mouth. His body is shaking. I manage not to look around me, but the corridor is suddenly deathly quiet. Is everyone looking at Helene and me? What on earth is happening?

‘Can I ask you something?’ says Helene.

I nod. Can’t think of anything cool to say in response.

‘Can I watch?’

She pouts in anticipation of an answer. I have to swallow.

‘Watch?’

‘Like, sometime when it suits you.’

Her eyes are drilling into me, as if boring into my soul. Smiling, blue eyes that you could probably get addicted to. I’m sweating. Would have preferred it if Helene would leave me alone. I’m not used to this.

‘You know – when you do that sport,’ says Helene. ‘Everybody says you’re *really* good.’

‘Parkour isn’t a sport,’ Jonas mumbles behind her, loud enough for her to hear. Helene doesn’t turn around.

I clear my throat.

‘It’s not a sport, Helene,’ I repeat. ‘It’s hard to explain.’

She leans closer. Wants to tell me something. I feel her breath against my cheek.

‘I love it when you say my name,’ she whispers, so that nobody hears her but me.

‘Parkour isn’t a freaking sport,’ Jonas says to me in a low voice a bit later on.

We’re in the middle of class. The teacher has just stepped out to get some books, so the noise level in the classroom has increased.

‘I know,’ I say.

‘Sports are when you compete! Everybody misunderstands. They think what we do can be compared with… snowboarders and BMX riders! It’s not like that.’

‘I know.’

‘You’re looking really good these days, by the way.’

Jonas grins. He hasn’t bothered to do anything special with his hair today. It’s hanging down into his face, blocking his view. He has to keep brushing it aside.

‘I know,’ is all I say. I roll my eyes.

‘And Helene, no less…’

Jonas holds out his fist, presenting his knuckles to me.

‘You’re welcome to her,’ I say.

I think that’s how the expression goes.

Jonas’s fist is still there. There’s nothing I can do but bump it with my own.

He sniggers.

‘Yesterday was good, right?’

‘Very,’ I say.

I haven’t forgotten the building site and the unfinished shopping centre, but at the forefront of my mind is the unknown girl. It’s like I can’t stop thinking about her. Not even Helene’s flirting is a distraction.

‘Should we go back there?’ I ask. ‘Tonight, maybe?’

Jonas shakes his head.

‘Fredrik’s got something else on. Nature and youth, or something.’

The teacher comes in, and the classroom quietens down.

‘We could take the bus,’ says Jonas in a low voice.

‘Nah,’ I answer. ‘I should probably take a look at that Norwegian assignment.’

He jabs me in the side.

‘Nerd,’ he says, joking.

‘Yeah, right,’ I say. ‘But it’s a bit stressful at home. I’ve promised my folks that I’ll go up a grade in a subject or two. So a parkour-free day actually suits me just fine.’

‘A day without parkour is a day without meaning,’ says Jonas, mostly to himself.

Then the teacher’s eyes are on us, and we hurry to act as if we’re paying attention.

Later, when Jonas can’t see what I’m doing, I search the Internet to find ways of getting into the unknown girl’s phone.

Most of the websites are about how to get into your own mobile – when you’ve forgotten the code, that sort of thing. There are ways of restarting the phone, but then you lose all its contents. And I don’t want that to happen.

If the phone has facial recognition you might be able to use a photo of its owner to open it. But nope, that won’t work for me, either. I don’t have a photograph. And the image I have in my head doesn’t help.

On some phones, one site says, you can double-press the power button and then use the camera.

I click the next link. Come to a news article about a girl whose mobile was stolen. The thief had started to use it, taking photos and videos, but he didn’t know that the phone was connected to a cloud service. Everything was uploaded to the web, and the girl could see the photos the thief had taken on her own computer. Then it was easy to find him.

Maybe the unknown girl has one of those tracking service things? So she can see where the phone is. I’d been asked whether I wanted to activate the one on my own phone when it was new, but I hadn’t bothered.

But maybe *she* had.

7

So why didn’t I tell Jonas and Fredrik about the girl’s mobile?

I’m not entirely sure. I just stuck it in my back pocket.

It seemed as if Jonas and Fredrik doubted whether there had been anyone other than us up in the building. Maybe they thought I’d imagined it.

Had I not found the girl’s phone, I might have started to wonder myself, too.

But she had been there. It happened. She really had been standing below me, half in shadow, and asked me what we were doing. When I mentioned parkour, it seemed as if she didn’t know exactly what it was. But what else could she have been doing up there?

We haven’t spoken about her since Jonas asked me whether she was cute. But for some reason or other I just can’t stop my thoughts from returning to her.

How had she managed to disappear so quickly? ‘Like a thief in the night,’ my dad would have said.

What a weird start to the school term. And to top it all off, Helene is suddenly interested in me.

Girls have never been interested in me before, so I stopped caring about them. At least, I’m seriously tired of all the girls in my class.

But now. This girl.

There’s something different about her.

I sit in my room, reading the message I’ve just got from Jonas. He’s bored. Wonders whether he can come over.

Jonas gets bored pretty quickly.

I think about it for a while, but for once I don’t want him here. It’s as if I’ve got something totally private going on, even though I still haven’t managed to unlock the mobile phone. I so badly want to find out more about this mysterious girl. Who she sends text messages to. The kinds of photos she takes. Maybe there’ll be a selfie that confirms my suspicions – that she’s really cute?

I tell Jonas that I’m hard at work on my Norwegian assignment.

It’s a lie. I finished it earlier. The essay isn’t very good, but it’s good enough for me to hand in.

Why am I lying to my best friend?

His reply is a single word, followed by a question mark:

*Seriously?*

Some frustrated emojis.

I feel guilty.

*Later*, I write. *I’ll let you know.*

Just one emoji in response. He gives me the finger.

Jonas is annoyed with me now. I’m sure of it – that’s how well I know him.

Why don’t I want him to come over and see me?

The girl’s mobile has a white case and looks well used. It has a fingerprint sensor. The screen has a single crack, all the way at the bottom. It’s impossible to say whether that happened when she dropped it, or whether it’s been there a long time.

I put my finger on the fingerprint sensor.

The mobile refuses to let me in.

I make simple patterns between the numbers on the lock screen. None of them work.

I try a pin code. Tap out L-O-V-E. 5683.

No luck. She’s not the romantic type, then.

Is she sitting at the computer right now, looking at her phone blinking on a map? At precisely this address? Her phone, in my room. In the hand of a boy with weird, mixed feelings. Excitement, curiosity, shame.

And something else entirely. Something with a coat of soft fur.

Then I double-press the on/off button as described online, and the phone’s camera comes on. I try to select the gallery from there, but the mobile just locks again. It doesn’t want to let me see her selfies.

But they’re in there. Taken in the bathroom, in front of the mirror. Classic girl selfies. The kind that they post on social media.

Her private photos are in there, too. The ones she doesn’t show to anybody. Nudes, maybe?

I double-press again, and the camera is activated. I can see myself.

I make a face, and tap the shutter button.

If she’s got one of those cloud services, then she’ll be able to see the photo when it uploads.

I pull another face and take another photo.

And another. Make myself as cool as possible.

Another one. Like, super sexy.

Maybe it’ll make her laugh.

The video should work, too.

I turn it on. Look straight into the camera.

‘Hi,’ I say. ‘Sorry about the photos. But I found your phone.’

I’m not really sure what to say. I’m about to tap the stop button, but then more comes.

‘My name’s Samuel. You ran off so quickly, but if you want your phone back, you can just come and pick it up.’

I say my address, speaking the words and numbers clearly.

‘I’m a bit curious about whether you do parkour, too?’ I say. ‘It didn’t sound like it. But then how on earth did you get away so fast? This is my room, by the way.’

I turn the camera around so that my room is shown in the video. I’m not entirely sure why. She’s probably not in the slightest bit interested in the guitar hanging on my wall.

‘I tried to teach myself to play,’ I say. ‘I learned the chords, but then I got sick of playing everybody else’s songs. I actually wanted to write songs myself.’

I turn the camera towards me again. Make a disheartened face.

‘But I never came up with any songs, so…’

This is so stupid. Stop talking, Samuel. Now!

‘Anyway. You have my address. So just let me know. Or you can call me.’

I give her my phone number.

‘If you can borrow someone else’s phone, that is.’

I’m an idiot.

‘Okay, well, I hope you have cloud storage so you can see this.’

Stop the damn recording!

‘Maybe we could meet at the same place tomorrow, at nine o’clock. In the evening, that is. Not the morning.’

What the hell am I doing?!

‘Bye!’

That last word ends up being very abrupt.

I tap the stop button and the video is saved in the phone’s memory. Then I press the button that makes the screen go black. I just don’t want to have to look at my face on the screen any more.

Oh, no. Wait.

If I hadn’t pressed that button, I could have deleted the photos and the video!

I throw the mobile onto the bed and hide my face in my hands. This is a total disaster! Shit! She’ll think I’m a total idiot if she sees all that. I tell myself that she probably doesn’t use one of those cloud service things. That she’ll never see the photos and the video.

What a complete and utter dingbat I am!

[End of chapter]

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Contact: Rights Director Anne Cathrine Eng [anne.cathrine.eng@gyldendal.no](mailto:anne.cathrine.eng@gyldendal.no)

                 Literary Agent Nina Pedersen [nina.pedersen@gyldendal.no](mailto:nina.pedersen@gyldendal.no)