

Three Metres with a Knife

by
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Sample Translation

Pages 6–13

Suddenly he's standing there. He's walking. Simeon. On the pavement on the other side of the road. He's in Class B but I know exactly who he is. He's a swimmer who hangs out with Kristian, Eskild and Hamza. I remember sometimes noticing not seeing them in the schoolyard at recess and wondering what they do or where they go. I don't know where they live. Probably on the other side of the school towards the cell tower. I don't know Simeon but I've seen him at year group gatherings. All the way through primary and secondary school. His lips move when he sings but I can never tell if he's just miming, like so many people in our year do, or whether he's actually singing aloud. I think he's one of the boys who climbed up on the roof of the school. He's strong enough to get there by himself without anybody having to pull him up. Maybe he stands there sometimes, keeping a lookout. He's always dressed in jeans and Vans with a black T-shirt or a woollen jumper in winter. He never wears gloves or a hat, no matter how cold it is.

One time when our teacher was sick, we had to do PE on the soccer field with Class B. I could see that the cold had turned Simeon's hands purple. His ears were bright red and I thought he ought to start dressing up better. Maybe if I'd been standing closer, I could've seen that the skin on his hands was already

cracked, with dried blood on. We were running across the field and I could feel the frosty turf made of plastic and shredded tyres crunch underneath the soles of my shoes. It was way too cold to play football. I didn't have football boots either and my trainers were way too slippery, so I was running around in Doc Martens like an idiot. We'd been split into four teams and my team never got to play against Simeon's but we got to watch the other teams play when we had a break. That way he had to watch me too. One time, the ball barrelled all the way to the edge of the pitch at top speed and somebody – I can't remember who – called out "Run, Lykke". And so I ran. All the way out to the right-hand side and the moment I managed to shoot the ball back, I saw him standing there. On the edge of the pitch. Simeon wasn't looking at me. Instead, he was watching what was happening beyond me, closer to the goal, cold hands in the pockets of his sweatpants. I zoned out for a moment and just stood there gazing at him. He looked focused and serious, but all of a sudden he opened his mouth, drew in a breath then pulled his hands out of his pockets and threw his arms in the air, whooping for joy. He laughed and clenched his fists. Hamza had scored. I remember thinking he didn't seem like a football hooligan, with a brutal deep voice and desperate eyes. Simeon was genuinely happy for his friend's success. I wondered if he was like this at the swimming pool too, cheering on his teammates in his Speedos. Is he one of those people who want the best for everybody around him? Even if it makes those cold dry hands of his crack up even more. Sara and Marius were annoyed that Simeon was cheering on the other team and told him to shut up. Simeon grinned and kept his eyes on Hamza. Hamza turned towards him and smiled when Simeon gave him the thumbs up and then he ran onward. I'd already moved away so the others would think I was

still part of the game and was actually invested in what was happening on the pitch.

Suddenly Simeon crosses the street at a place where there's no pedestrian crossing. I don't think he's seen me or Lena but now he comes straight towards us and starts walking slightly behind us. We've never spoken, but I've heard his voice plenty of times.

"Hi," Simeon says suddenly.

I turn around but by then he's already gone past us and is heading away. We carry on walking behind him all the way to the crossroads by the petrol station. He walks with a straight back, not in that gangly way the other boys in my class do. He looks strong. He doesn't turn around but I wonder if he can sense me walking behind him.

"Who's that?" Lena asks, pointing at Simeon.

"It's rude to point," I say, pulling her arm down.

When we get home, Mum and Dad are cleaning house. Mum is hoovering and Dad's in the bathroom with a bucket and mop. There's a smell of Pine-Sol mingled with potato dumplings. My favourite smell.

"Good timing," Mum says when she sees us.

I smile, thinking we'll all go inside and eat.

"I think we need to give you a round of lice treatment. Dad and I have already sorted ourselves out."

Mum yells over the racket from the Hoover. She stamps down hard on the button to switch it off. Her slippers slide over the plastic a couple of times before she manages it.

"I'm not itchy," I say.

"Me neither," says Lena. "And I haven't shared a hat or a hairbrush with anybody this time either."

Lena doesn't realise it sounds more suspicious when she puts it like that. Sometimes, it isn't so smart to over-explain. Dad taught me that.

"It's a good idea to do it anyway. I've been scratching and it's so easy to catch them," Mum says, smiling.

"But food's ready. Can it wait until after supper?" Dad asks.

"No, it'll be too late then. That's enough, now."

Her smile vanishes and she grabs hold of Lena and marches her up the stairs to the bathroom even though Lena's still wearing her winter boots. I can see bits of dry leaf-mould dropping off and getting mixed up with the bubbles from the Pine-Sol, which hasn't dried yet. I know Dad will have to wash the stairs again later.

An acrid smell of lice shampoo drifts out of the bathroom. Lena and I both hate that little comb with its tiny teeth. They feel like sharp little knives scraping my head. Supper is on the table when we come back down. Mum tucks her hair behind her ears and lets out a loud sigh of relief. She compliments dad on the food. I sit wondering if I can heat up the cold dumplings on the stove without anybody noticing.

We're doing orienteering with our year group in Sørmarka woods. Spring is in the air, our teachers say. I think spring is on the ground. It's usually soggy everywhere, so it's impossible not to slide around in the moss and leaves, but now it hasn't rained for several days. The forest floor is a patchwork of sunlight and the undersides of all the leaves are dark shadows beneath the sky. It's dead quiet all around me. I'm buzzing. I've got separated from my group. We weren't allowed to choose groups ourselves and I had to team up with a bunch of fucking idiots. It's wonderful to get a little lost. Oh my God, I'm so sorry – I ran the wrong way, I'll say, even though I could have found them again ages ago if I'd really wanted to. I think. I no longer have that winter breathing or the taste of blood in my mouth. Sometimes, silence settles in the body but most of all in the air and on the lips. It tickles a bit and I can almost feel the taste of it. I shut my eyes but still see the patches of light and shade. I breathe calmly, as a cool wind strokes my hair away from my face.

He's standing there again. Has he lost his orienteering group too?

"Hi," Simeon says, walking slowly towards me.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

Suddenly it feels like somebody grabs hold of me and drags me towards him. I raise my hand and stroke the blond hair out of his eyes. Simeon reaches out and puts his arms around me. Then he lets go and I run off. Across the stream, up the hill to the tower and down the path to the others. Sometimes I just have to run. I have to. It isn't because I'm late for anything. Sometimes I pretend that's what it is. I just shout *shit* and run.

On Sundays, I clean the bathroom. I've done it for ages. To start off with, when I was ten, I got 40 kroner a week. I'd spend it on sweets at Dropsen. The shop's shelves were piled high with sweets in all the colours of the rainbow as well as the biggest chocolate figures I'd ever seen. I spent weeks and weeks saving up for a chocolate mobile phone with an antenna. Crazy embarrassing to think of it now. I bought silky scarves and incense at Scorpius, a shop Dad told me not to go into. It was for dopeheads and Buddhists, he said. They sold hash pipes in there – he'd seen it for himself. I bought Mum's birthday presents there for years. Scarves, incense, thin silver rings, tea-light holders, plastic flower garlands. She put them all in a drawer in her bedroom, so it worked as my own personal supply. Pretty smart, I thought. I could just help myself whenever I felt like it. She'd never notice. After a while, I stopped spending my money on that. Now I was more interested in buying a couple of cigarettes and booze from some guys who hang around outside the supermarket. The stuff they sell us is just liquor they've found at home. Me, Ceyda and Annika mix it with orange soda or 7up. We go to parties at Ullandhaug cell tower, in the allotment gardens or in the bunker in the woods.

I decide to go to the swimming pool. I meant to go straight after school finished, but I have some science and religion homework to hand in the next day. The teachers usually spread our homework out over the week, so I can't see why I should have two pieces of homework at once on today of all days. Both of them take a lot longer than expected. By the time I'm done, Lena, Mum and Dad have all come home. I've packed my swimming gear. I hadn't planned on making a big deal out of where I was going, but when Mum asks I don't want to lie.

"Can you take Lena with you?" Mum asks.

"No," I reply, hurrying out of the front door before she can say another word.

I always take Lena with me everywhere. I really don't want to have her tagging along again if I happen to meet Simeon. I don't know when he has swimming practice but I know it's almost every day, so I'd be really unlucky not to see him. I cycle down the hill but realise I forgot to bring my bike lock. I lay the bike behind a rhododendron bush in the bed by the steps at the back of the swimming pool. It'll probably be fine. It's always fine.

I'm standing stark naked in the girls' shower at the swimming pool. There's congealed soap on the showerhead, along the wall and on the shelves. Sperm. Masses of hair in the plughole. Different coloured hair that all tangles up into the same dark colour on the wet tiles. The water runs down the drain with a gurgling sound and I think about all the rats that live under here.

Bodies look different in the mirror. Mine looks like it doesn't really belong to me. A lump, with feet and arms on the sides. The mirror shows a whole person. I can't feel my own body unless I hit myself or feel some kind of pain. Dad's

probably right: we humans mostly think about what hurts us. You hardly notice a quiet breath or heartbeat. Most of the girls in my class shower in their underwear after gym or don't shower at all. They take along their hairspray and Victoria's Secret body spray and smear a new layer of makeup on top of the layer that was already there. I've always found it really weird. Are they really that embarrassed? Most of them go around wearing push-up bras with huge cleavages the whole time but the minute we have to shower together it's like some big thing. Of course, Mum got totally fixated on this as soon as I mentioned it. I talk about loads of stuff with Mum. The only trouble is it normally ends up backfiring on me one way or another. She either rings other parents or Grandma or the school. In this case she rang the school and gave my teachers a telling-off. According to her, if the girls couldn't all shower together the school was contributing to body-image pressure. Besides, it was extremely unhygienic. There were repercussions for a while, but luckily nobody wondered why our teacher had suddenly become so passionately interested in showering. It lasted a couple of weeks and then all the knickers went back on again.

Ceyda showered the way she always had: in the teachers' changing room separately from the rest of us. She has to save her body for marriage and that also applied to the gaze of other girls.

I stand there for ages with the hot water trickling down my body. I look at the other bodies around me: old women and little boys in the changing room with their mums.

“Look at my pee-pee, Mum – it’s different from yours!” yells a boy in water wings, surrounded by female bodies.

I put on my swimming costume. It gets stuck on my hips and rolls itself up like a bit of plastic wrap. I have to tug hard on the material to stretch it out and pull it up over my body. The straps press down on my shoulders. Two women talk to each other across the room.

“Are you going to the swimming meet this weekend?” one of them asks, shaking soap out of a bottle.

It’s so foamy I can hardly see her body hair.

“Yes, I suppose I must. It’ll be exciting to see how Nicolai does this time. He’s hoping for a new personal best, of course. He was a bit disappointed last time.”

“How old is he now?” asks the woman with the soap.

“Fifteen in May,” the other one replies.

She bends down, head lowered, and dries herself off briskly with the towel, in that way only people at swimming pools do. I see the strong, well-defined muscles on her back and think she must have been a swimmer too. Maybe Simeon will be at that meet as well? I know swimmers have to train pretty hard for those meets.

Pages 13–16

I hold my swimming goggles in my hand as I step carefully through the door and out into the pool area. It’s damp between my toes and I wonder how easily you can catch athlete’s foot at a public swimming pool. There’s a framed poster on the wall that reads “Circuit Championships”. Below the heading is a list of names and previous times. I feel like somebody’s grabbed hold of me with both hands,

lifting me way up high, beneath the ceiling, beneath the glass dome of the swimming pool. Simeon's name is on the list. *400m crawl: 04:15.870*. Is that good? I don't know, but I reckon it's pretty good and find myself feeling proud. He's probably here today. If he sees me, I wonder if he'll even recognise me because everybody looks so weird here. It's like a whole new world. People behave totally differently too – as if something changes the minute you put on a swimming cap and some synthetic fabric. I can understand kids going wild in the water – even Lena does that, which I'd never have believed. What does amaze me is the grown-ups. They bring along all kinds of foam mattresses, throw them in the water and jump in after them, shrieking with joy.

I sit on the edge and hold on firmly as I slowly lower myself into the water. It's shallow. I stand there totally calm and suddenly notice there's a girl standing on my flippers. She doesn't realise I can see her and seems amazed that the flippers aren't a part of me. It's as if she's doing something forbidden. Like that time I picked my nose and threw it behind the sofa when I was at somebody else's house. Or when I licked my index finger and dipped it in the sugar and Grandma said: "What are you doing? All right, just this once you daft girl", but I did it five or six or seven times when she was looking the other way. I don't mind that the girl's treading on me, but she pulls back her foot when she realises I can see what she's up to. She shouts out "Dad!" and lifts up the rope of red and white plastic balls that separates the swimming lanes and quickly swims away. As quickly as she can.

I try to do the crawl, clumsily. I can't remember when I last came to the swimming pool but probably not since swimming lessons in Year 6. The ceiling is high but the air is heavy and presses down on my head. The light from the glass dome in the ceiling feels very remote to me, down here in all this concrete. I stretch out an arm and breathe to the side the way I think you're meant to. Chlorinated water fills my mouth and for a second I feel like I'm going to drown but I cough the water out and carry on. Thick spit and a few little air bubbles mingle with the chlorine. I know I'm not drowning – it was just water going down the wrong way. I get the same feeling when I drink alcohol. It burns and rips and grabs at me. Devil's juice, Grandma calls it. She's really hung up on the devil.

I sit on the edge and feel the water from the tiled floor seeping into the fabric of my swimming costume. It'd be easy to wet yourself here without anyone even noticing. My fingers are all wrinkled from the chlorine and I can tell that my swimming goggles have left red marks around my eyes. I dangle my flippers in the warm water. An old woman lies on her back, swimming with slow strokes. She puts her arms out to stop herself when she reaches the edge, then floats there upright, looking at me. Old people stare and queue-jump. They go around with their mouths open when the wind's against them as if they can taste something they don't like. Their faces get all twisted up and I wonder if it's the body's way of checking that the muscles are in working order – for now at least. I just look. I don't stare. I look for Simeon.

He's nowhere to be seen. I've been all over the pool and peered across it from every angle. I've checked underwater with my swimming goggles on too. I'm sure I'd recognise Simeon whatever he was wearing. I get hot all over when I walk out

into the schoolyard at break time. I find myself wondering if Simeon will be standing right outside, if he'll see me the second I walk through the door. Simeon sends me little messages. He often stands in a way that means I can pass really close by him without looking at him and without it being weird. It's like he's telling me to do it and I'm reading his thoughts. I don't feel anything now, though. Maybe he saw me when I was on my way to the pool and he was heading for the changing rooms. Maybe he thought: What the hell's she doing here? Or: Couldn't you have come a bit earlier, Lykke? I hope it's the second one.

I'm cold and I can't stand the smell here any more. I hoist my legs out of the pool, get up and leave. I could have used the ladder on the other side but I like hoisting myself up on the side where it's deepest. I spend ages in the shower. Simeon has probably never been in the girls' changing room here. But the shower in the boys' changing room is probably the same, I guess. It's the same water in the pipes. He can hear the same noises faintly through the heavy concrete door between the changing room and the swimming pool. Maybe the shower works the same way. You have to tug pretty hard on the metal knob then quickly dodge out of the way of the first, cold jet of water. Simeon probably uses different soap than me but maybe the rest is the same: the way the water trickles down his body and into the plughole, and the smell of chlorine and the taste of blood in his mouth and the blocked ears. Maybe he spits masses into the plughole, the way boys do. Simeon's a swimmer, so he's used to all that and doesn't give it much thought or get particularly bothered about it. Maybe he doesn't spend much time in the shower. Maybe he stands with his back to the other cubicles to try and hide the fact that he's having a wee. Or maybe he looks at his own body and gets

so hot and horny that he has to really pull himself together because it's so much more obvious with boys than girls. Maybe you can lock the sauna from the inside – with a key only Simeon knows how to find because he once saw where a cleaning woman left it. That way, we could arrange for me to come here after Simeon's done with training. I could just stand at the end of the corridor where nobody would notice me. Or I could say I was waiting for someone. Maybe I could say "good evening" in a quiet, polite voice. Without looking down at the ground. Then the people who worked here would know they didn't need to worry about me. Then I could meet Simeon in the sauna and then we'd lock it from the inside and hide the key and just lie in there for a while. Together. Totally naked maybe or wrapped in towels. Maybe we'd laugh, the pair of us, and he'd say, "Shit. Oh my God." Whatever, Simeon would be wearing nothing but his Speedos because he'd have come straight from training. Maybe they felt sweaty from the pool or icky and clammy, or maybe they got rucked up so he decided he might as well take them off. Right in front of me. And it didn't mean anything, even though it meant everything and more than anything else. Maybe I should have brought Lena along with me after all. Maybe she's my lucky amulet or amethyst or crystal. Because she was with me the last time I saw him. Fuck.

[31-37]

I put up my hand and say I need the toilet. I've buttoned up the cardigan Mum bought all the way to the top. I'm wearing a T-shirt underneath that's way too big for the tight arms. I don't know if Mum will even notice I'm wearing it. In the corridor, I walk slowly past the coat pegs to the place where I know Simeon's jacket will be hanging. A worn blue denim jacket. The others have bomber

jackets but not him. I grab the collar and lean forward. I knock an umbrella and some waterproof trousers off another peg but that doesn't matter. The jacket smells sweet and warm.

Annika, Ceyda and I hang out on the soccer pitch after school. We sit on the grass by the edge, almost where Simeon was standing that time we played football in the winter in the frost and the last patches of snow. Annika has some smokes even though it isn't Saturday or a party. Ceyda asks if she can have one and Annika pulls one out of the packet with her lips and gives it to her. I ask if I can have one too and it takes a second before Annika repeats the same movement, giving me a weird look. As if only Ceyda's allowed to ask for a cigarette, not me. I try not to make a big thing out of it but I know how much I brood over looks like that. Before I go to bed at night, I always think about what's been said and done that day – about whether there's anything I regret or could have done differently. So I know Annika's look will come back to haunt me and I'll lie there worrying about it so much that I'll have to get up for a wee or a glass of water.

“I didn't know you smoked, Lykke,” Simeon says.

I jump and start to cough. Suddenly he's standing behind me. I thought I'd always sense it no matter what. That he was close by.

“Not all that much,” I say.

“Give me a puff.”

I hand him the cigarette. Eskild, Kristian and Hamza are slightly further back.

“What are you playing at? You know swimmers aren't supposed to smoke,” Eskild says, smiling.

He has a puff too. They sit down beside us. Simeon sits closest to me but not so close I can smell or feel him in any way. Eskild messes about with Annika, whispering stuff in her ear and licking her neck so she shrieks “Stop”. I don’t like her shrieking that way. She reminds me of those girls in our class who sit on the football dudes’ laps. Simeon, Eskild, Hamza and Kristian aren’t football dudes, so just stop shrieking! It feels like Simeon has moved closer to me now, or else the patch of grass between us has shrunk. He asks how my Norwegian test went and talks about the sociology test they’re having next week.

“Crazy stressful,” he says. “Crazy stressful.”

I wonder if he’s good at school. I want him to ask if we can revise together. We can help each other practice for the next test. He talks about how he’s going to see a band he loves called DIIV. He says he tried to teach himself guitar but it takes so much time and his parents want him to focus on school and swimming right now. He’s wondering whether to start at Wang Sports College after Year 10. He’s best at the crawl.

“Breast stroke’s tricky,” he says.

“I’m best at doggy paddle,” I say.

He laughs. More than I would have expected. I didn’t think it was all that funny but I laugh more because Simeon’s laughing. He throws back his hair like a girl and laughs loudly. I like it that he’s laughing so loudly. I want everybody sitting around here to notice that I’m the one who made him laugh. Because I’m the funny one.

“What do *your* parents say? I mean, where do they want you to go?” Simeon asks.

“I don’t know,” I say. “I haven’t decided. We haven’t talked about it.”

“Hey – was it your mum who rang the school and told the teachers to go in the changing rooms and make sure everybody showered naked?” Simeon asks and laughs.

“Ha ha, no,” I say.

“No, I guess not. Somebody said she was a real psycho,” Simeon says and laughs.

“Ha ha,” I say and laugh. It feels good.

A football comes rolling along out of nowhere and Hamza starts kicking it about. The speeding ball hits Kristian’s upper arm. He’s sitting with his back to me and turns towards me crossly. Then he sees Hamza standing further off and runs after him. Some other people in our year are playing soccer on the pitch beside us and Simeon grabs my hand and pulls me up so we can run after them. The local sports club doesn’t have training at this time of year so the pitch is free. We play on half the pitch, which is a big relief because it means I don’t have to run all that far. I know I’m useless, so I just hurl myself into it and even when I slip on the gravel and really hurt myself, I carry on running. It’s easier this time without my Doc Martens. Nobody has purple and blue hands any more. It isn’t so important to get near the ball. Simeon runs fast. I wonder if he’s good at everything he does. He shoves Eskild out of the way, making him curse. Simeon scores. I run over to him because Kristian does and because we’re on the same team and they’re cheering so I can cheer with them. Simeon picks me up and hugs me.

“Did you see, Lykke? Did you see me?” he says.

“Yes, I saw you,” I say. “Gorgeous,” I say it so quietly that Simeon probably doesn’t hear me, although I wonder if he did after all because when I turn around

I see that he's smiling at me again and I think that this evening is the very best evening I've had in all the years I've been going to Auglend Primary School and Ullandhaug Secondary School put together.

We're in the bunker in the woods. I don't know who first broke in here or who set up the heat lamps and the fairy lights, but I think it must have happened a pretty long time ago. I think it's fairly soundproof and it's quite a long way to the nearest neighbours anyway, so there's nobody to complain. And I don't know if that's why the municipality has never been here to clear it up or whether they just can't be bothered or think it's fine to let us be. Maybe they keep an eye on us and know perfectly well where we are and we just don't realise it. Maybe there's some poor municipal employee whose real job is bookkeeping but who has to wander around the woods here at weekends, checking the bunker and the cell tower and the seashore. He's probably responsible for putting out disposable barbecues that people have left burning as well, and maybe for picking up a bit of plastic. In the end he gets to enjoy it and can't wait for Friday to come around, so he can head out after work to wander around, plastic bags and disposable gloves at the ready.

"You coming for a payday pint?" asks one of his colleagues.

"No point asking Arne - he's on litter duty," says one of the others and laughs himself silly in that way only old men can.

By then Arne's probably already on his way out of the office door. He has his raincoat and wellington boots with him and he doesn't mind the laughter or the comments because he's on a mission from the municipality that's just as important as bookkeeping. Besides, it's nice to be outside. When Arne checks the bunker he thinks: these kids, they can look after themselves.

Annika's brought some beer for me. There's been no sign of the boys we usually buy it from lately. If Annika hadn't sorted out drinks for me, I wouldn't have had anything at all. Sometimes she makes a big deal out of it, out of doing me a favour. Poor Lykke, she thinks. What would you do without me? Now she's standing by the dark damp concrete wall with Eskild. Simeon and Hamza are nowhere to be seen. Despite the music on the sound system and all the yells echoing off the walls I know what she's saying. Lykke's mum is fucked up, she's saying. Eskild laughs. His laughter stops abruptly when he catches sight of me. I can see it takes a moment for Annika to realise why. She looks at me too and smiles. They probably think I wasn't standing near enough to hear what they said. I don't know what to do and I think about how the sweater I'm wearing feels all wrong now. I laugh too. What else can I do?

It's darker now and I see the wet droplets on the concrete walls glittering in the shimmer of the fairy lights that hang from the ceiling, fastened to screws or bolts or rusty pipes I can barely see. I like to narrow my eyes until they're almost shut and look at these drops. If I slowly tilt my head back and forth, they twinkle like stars in the night sky. Everything else around me goes dark and I remember the first time we came here. Back then I thought it was way too dark, way too cold and damp and icky. It still feels that way and yet it's familiar to me now. And we're all here together. There's nobody here I don't know, so I feel like nothing bad can happen. We dance and we drink and eventually I decide to go home. I can go with Eskild, Kristian and Annika. We're all going the same way.

"Have you lot revised for tomorrow?" Eskild asks.

"Huh?" Annika asks.

“We’re resitting the Norwegian test,” Eskild says. “We got a message about it on Friday.”

“I didn’t get any message!” I say.

I didn’t know it was even allowed. Not to send a message about something like that. Maybe our own teacher is trying to sabotage us? She’s been really cross with us lately.

“It was somebody in Class B who cheated last time,” Eskild says.

“Who was it? And how?” I ask.

“I don’t know. Nobody knows.”

Eskild looks away and I wonder whether he does know really. I don’t believe it was Simeon. I don’t quite see how it’s possible to cheat in Norwegian. I guess you’d have to copy a paper you got from a pupil at another school so you wouldn’t get caught. Simeon probably knows who it was. The teachers are a bit thick. They can’t seem to work with the other schools in the municipality to make sure everybody takes their Norwegian tests at the same time. Some schools always end up being ahead of the rest.

The woods get thicker and I see a dark shadow further in and think it’s a bit weird for somebody to be wandering around out here now, but the person shouts hi and walks towards us and then I see it’s Simeon. I’ve never seen him in the woods. I have no idea where he’s come from but he has a bag and he’s wheeling a grey bike. I wonder if I’ll be able to recognise it at school so I can park mine beside it. And maybe when the bell goes at the end of the afternoon, I can run over as quickly as possible so Simeon and I can unlock our bikes together.

“Is it you I’ve been waiting for all this time?” Simeon asks as he wheels his bike along beside me.

The others are walking a bit ahead of us and laughing so loudly at something that I don't think they pick up what he says. At first I think he means: I've been waiting for you all this time. Like, he's been waiting for me this evening, tonight, in the darkness of the woods. Or he's been hoping to see me again. And that would have been wonderful. But what he actually says is even better. I don't realise what it is until I'm back home, undressed and under my duvet, trying to get to sleep. What he asked was if it was me he'd been waiting for all this time. All his life. He'd been waiting all his life to meet me. To have that feeling. That desire. For me. Just me. And he asked me because he couldn't believe it himself. That now I was here at last. With him. That we'd gone all the way through primary school and secondary school together but had only found our way to each other now. Properly. The headlights of cars driving through the night turn my windows into huge shadows on the grey-painted walls of my bedroom and I think how in this light, in this night, the pale grey colour looks darker, like the colour of Simeon's bike. I'll see if I can spot that bike tomorrow.