

*Berit Rødstøl*

*THE AFTERMATH (Etter punktum)*

Sample translation

STINE

MAY 2017

My stomach gets a sinking feeling as I drive onto the ferry. As if something has come loose and is falling slowly to the bottom. I switch off the engine and sit there with quivering hands. I stare up at the mountains, which loom over me as we travel closer. I don't remember them towering so ominously when I was last here. They seem so *insistent*, dripping with water as if they had just climbed out of the sea. I check the handbrake several times to make sure it's on. The cable won't pull any tighter, but it still surrenders a few little creaks. I wring my hands together in my lap and prepare to jump out of the car at any moment. The boat shakes with every metre of the fjord we put behind us.

On the opposite shore, I can see the village sprawling out between the mountain and the fjord. Hundreds of houses, filled with sons, daughters, siblings and grandparents. Filled with relatives being born, growing up and dying. The only thing I have left in this village is four graves in the cemetery and an unoccupied farm, filled with memories that I don't want. This farm of mine is right at the edge of the pine forest, surrounded by fields and the land itself is overgrown with apple trees and berry bushes.

The nausea begins to take hold in my throat. I loosen my belt and stretch a little as the last, flat dregs of Coke roll onto the floor. In the rear view mirror I can see the ferry conductor bending down to peer through car windows. His oversized

orange trousers barely stay up. In one hand he has a card reader, and in the other he's holding a wad of plastic tickets which depletes with each car he passes. While the ferry is sluggishly gliding across the fjord, he works methodically through his workload until at last it is my turn. He taps on the window with a tired expression and a ticket. I rummage through the little compartment behind the handbrake for my bank card. Turn on the ignition and wind down the window.

"Oh crap, it's you," says Peter, with the same mischievous look on his face he had back in middle school. I remember how he used to leer at the girls during breaktime. He moved to the village with a sense of self-confidence from nobody knew where.

"Car's full," he deduces, nodding towards my boxes in the backseat.

"Sure is," I reply, holding out my card.

"Oh, DNB, is it? So you've changed banks, then," he says, staring at my breasts.

I nod. His stare makes me feel queasy.

"I hear you're moving home," he says.

I nod again. It's easy to imagine the talk of the town. All these rumours that will become true the moment I set foot in the village.

"I can't believe anyone could bring themselves to live in Oslo."

"It's no worse than anywhere else," I reply.

"Nah, there's so much traffic and pollution. It's good you've come to your senses," he declares, handing me my ticket. "Sad to hear about your mum, by the way."

"Thanks."

"Let me know if you fancy a pint later this evening. I've got the kids every other week."

"Alright."

I'm relieved to be invited, even though I know nothing will come of it.

Stine

October 1995

Chapter 13

The weekend arrived with a cutting breeze and soon the peaks were freshly covered with snow, threatening winter. I hadn't worn enough layers, and cold was setting into my bones. Knots formed in my throat and I began to shiver. I was bedridden with a throat infection while my football team was out trying to win the cup. I cried because I missed it. It was something I had really been looking forward to. Thought about the last training session and the new anthem we had come up with. Kaia had been hoping to see Andreas from Ørsta once again.

Since dad was working at the garage to get some money on the side and was the only one of the dads who could drive buses, he had to take the team even though I was sick. I could hear mum and dad speaking in the hallway before he left. Mum was asking whether he really had to go. Shouldn't he make the most of the weekend to herd the sheep instead? Dad promised he wouldn't be away longer than he had to. He just couldn't disappoint the girls. They had been looking forward to this for so long. Then I heard him coming up the stairs.

"It won't feel like the big game without you," he said, stroking my red-hot forehead. "My little top scorer."

"Just don't yell from the sidelines like you normally do," I replied, getting a chuckle out of him.

"I'll tape my mouth shut," he laughed, then disappeared out the door.

My body was burning away beneath the duvet. My tonsils felt like potatoes in my throat. The most I could manage to swallow was the cup of hot chocolate mum had made for me. She sat on the edge of the bed and told me that Dad had just been on the phone:

“They lost every game.”

I pictured my friends on the pitch. Marthe must have forgotten to look upfield, Annbjørg would have shot the second she got the ball - not out of ego, but out of fear - Kaia would have been sticking in defence like a leech. I started feeling rotten about not having been there. We never normally lost. Then sleep took a hold of me and I was racked with restless dreams while the fever ravaged my body.

I was awoken by a scream that sounded shrill and piercing, like squawking. Maybe a magpie was annoying the cat, or a raven circling over a dead sheep. I clambered to my feet and stood there swaying as sweat poured down my back. I crept out into the corridor and found my way down the stairs, holding on tight to the banisters.

Mum was sitting in the hallway with a blank, open stare. The orange phone was still dangling in her hand. Her face looked so pale and frightened. As I asked what had happened, I could hear how frail and feverish my voice sounded.

“There’s been an accident,” Mum whimpered.

The cold raced through my body. I collapsed, hands gripping the banisters. There I stayed until I heard the voices of Ann-Mari and Åsmund. Ann-Mari picked me up and put me back to bed. Tucked me in and ran a cool hand across my forehead.

“Poor child.”

Mum and Åsmund vanished out the front door and were gone until it was dark outside. The silence crept over me, and even though I could feel the warmth from Ann-Mari at the edge of the bed, it made me feel lonesome. She didn’t know

what she could do to help. But I didn't want anything. I just wanted to know what had happened.

"I don't know, Stine. We'll find out when the others get back."

It was pitch black outside when they finally pulled into the yard. I had moved down to the sofa to watch TV, without taking anything in whatsoever. Mum came through first, then Åsmund, then Dad. I forced my feverish body up from the sofa and threw my arms around his neck, but he seemed to slip through my fingers.

"What have I done," Dad began to cry. "I'm sorry, Stine. I'm so sorry."

Then he sank into Mum's arms. I gazed around at all these grown-ups, noticing all of the looks they thought I couldn't see.

"Come here, Stine," said Åsmund. "Sit down on the sofa." The relief over Dad being okay was now mixed up with my feelings of fear about whatever must have happened. Their words echoed towards me from somewhere far away. The bus had rolled off the ferry and into the sea with Kaia onboard. The words are still ringing out in my mind.

"Kaia is dead."

"And the others?"

Åsmund could hardly bring herself to get the message across.

"They're alive. They were in the ferry when it happened. Kaia was the only one sitting on the bus."