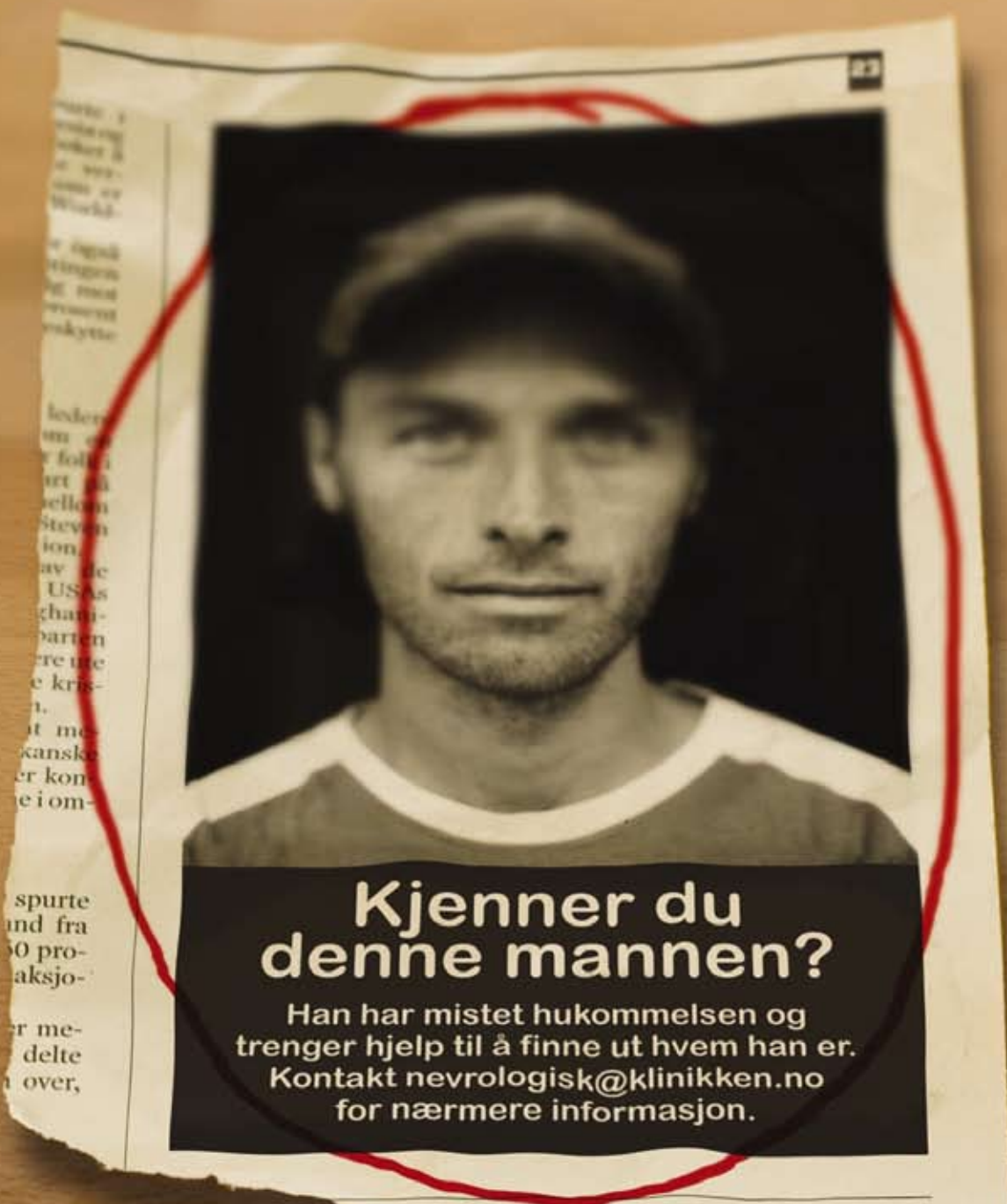


CARL FRODE TILLER

INNSIRKKLING

ASCHENHOUG



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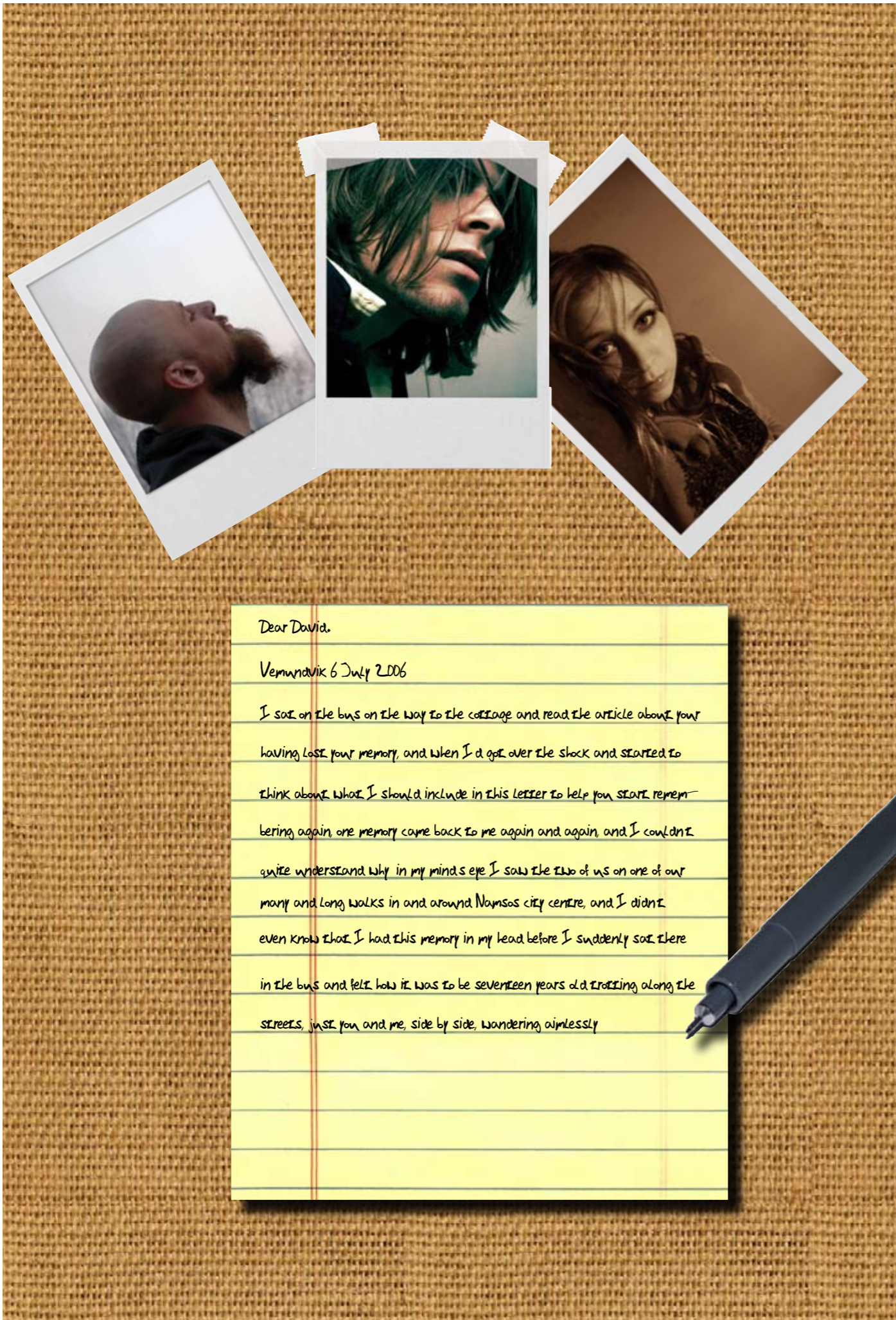
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Han varsler en mer offensiv politikk også for beltet rundt flere vassdrag.

Kjenner du denne mannen?

Han har mistet hukommelsen og trenger hjelp til å finne ut hvem han er.
Kontakt nevrologisk@klinikken.no for nærmere informasjon.



Dear David.

Vernundvik 6 July 2006

I sat on the bus on the way to the cottage and read the article about you having lost your memory, and when I'd got over the shock and started to think about what I should include in this letter to help you start remembering again, one memory came back to me again and again, and I couldn't quite understand why. In my mind's eye I saw the two of us on one of our many and long walks in and around Namsos city centre, and I didn't even know that I had this memory in my head before I suddenly saw there in the bus and felt how it was to be seventeen years old, crossing along the streets, just you and me, side by side, wandering aimlessly.

ENTANGLEMENTS

By Carl Frode Tiller

David can not remember who he is.

A notice in the newspaper encourages acquaintances and friends to write him letters so he can start remembering. The letters create a network of texts where the biography of David, the writers, and other people, are rewritten and put at stake.

The letters were written in 2006, but evolve around the past. This way, false views are created – adolescent dreams, the ambitions of artists and plans for the future. It is about what happened to one generation of Norwegians, about gender roles and the search for popularity, identity and the question: What is a life, how is a life story created under the influence of other people's story?

Carl Frode Tiller's third book might be his best so far. The writer is as always good at the surface – the dialogue that turns into quarrel, the bad conscience that surfaces when you mean well, but do not execute it.

Entanglements is a novel that covers a broad and deep spectrum, both psychologically and sociologically. The novel is cleverly composed – it changes easily between different narrators and points of view, present and now, and it uses letter form, dialogue and inner monologue.

Winner of the Brage Prize 2007

Nominated for the 2008

Nordic Councils Award

Nominated to the Critics' prize 2007



Tiller is exceptionally good at describing psychological conditions and interpersonal relationships ... also, you can't mention Entanglements without emphasising the ambitious strength of the descriptions of environments.

Vigdís Ofe, Morgenbladet

Tiller's third novel is in every way an intense experience you won't soon forget ... No matter the viewpoint, Tiller writes with a rare glow, and has a razor sharp eye for interpersonal conflicts ... Few other writers can make an argument appear as credible and burning and with such rage

Gabriel Michael Vosgraff Moro, VG

More selected reviews:

The author writes outstandingly about loneliness and interpersonal misery.

Anne Merethe K. Prinos, Aftenposten

The story is strangely thrilling, and even though the actual plot really just unfolds over a few weeks, we get to learn the story of a couple of generations of people in a much more elegant way than in the classic family chronicle. Tiller is scanty with the explanations and there is honestly not one superfluous piece of information. There are some partial repetitions, but they contribute so well in tightening the threads that they confirm the author's superior control of the material.

Katrine Strøm, Mann

Carl F. Tiller is a master at digging out dark forces in the human mind ... Tiller is at his best when he goes deeply into the tense interpersonal relations. The dialogues vibrate masterly with bitter irritation. No one can measure up to Tiller when it comes to depicting the bottled up rage or the humiliation that eventually pops out in a word that should never have been spoken.

Guri Hjulstad, Trønder-Avisa

Tiller's talent is in the portrayal of the psychological warfare of everyday life ... The description of the sore relationship between Jon and his mother and the feelings that pull the son back and forth, is masterly.

Kåre Bulie, Dagbladet

Tiller simply writes really well ... Tiller makes me believe, feel and consider. He shows real life and aching fear like few others can.

Helge Simonnes, Vårt Land

Tiller's language is gripping ... a psychological master ... while reading the first part of the book, I found myself thinking there are hardly any authors in Norway today who manage to fill every page of the book with more painful sensibility ... Tiller is getting close to something great ... In the midst of all this pain, there is also a lot of beauty, and he shows how the fierce search for identity and self-destructiveness of adolescence changes into something else. Entanglements has lots of incredibly strong moments.

Espen Suteland, Klassekampen

Carl Frode Tiller continues and challenges Norwegian realism of novels with a talent for story-telling that few of his generation can measure up to ... Tiller has [] an unusual ear for all the things that amount to the nature of realism, and he can seemingly without effort, conjure up a whole gallery of personas where each and every one of them has this undefineable quality of appearing deep and substantial – even though we know they are made out of ink ... an authorship which promise to be the best thing to happen to Norwegian realism in a very long time.

Ane Farsethås, Dagens Næringsliv

Carl Frode Tiller's third novel is magnificent and just as painfully smart as the two previous novels ... There are confrontations, disputes, cold, grief and plenty of delicate situations, but there is still a great deal of enigma and linguistic vitality in the text, which keeps the reader awake, reading until long past midnight ... with this year's novel he advances right into the elite of Norwegian and Nordic authors.

Stein Roll, Adresseavisen

Tiller simply writes really well ... Tiller makes me believe, feel and consider. He shows real life and aching fear like few others can.

Helge Simonnes, Vårt Land

Carl Frode Tiller



In 2001, historian, musician and composer Carl Frode Tiller was voted one of Norway's ten best authors under the age of 35 by the periodical *Morgenbladet*.

His critically praised first novel, *THE SLOPE* (2001), won the Tarjei Vesaas' First Book Award, and the novel was also nominated for the Brage Prize, as the first debut novel ever. To add to his laurels, a radio channel awarded him another prize, and the book was declared Book of the Year by the Norwegian authors' website, *forfatterne.net*. In September 2004, *THE SLOPE* was staged as a play in one of the main theatres in Oslo before touring the whole country.

In 2007 he launched his third novel, *Innsirkling*, and became a favourite of both the critics and readers.

Encircling

Jon

1.

We roll slowly into the city centre, if it can be called a city centre, a small roundabout with a few houses around, I lean forward in the seat, look around, not a soul to be seen, it is totally dead, silent, there aren't even any shops here, just a closed café and a grocer shop with darkened windows. Are we going to play here, it doesn't really look as if anyone lives here, I don't understand who would want to live here anyway, who would wish that on themselves. I lean back in the seat, wind down the window, and put my elbow out, feel the cool, fresh air spreading across my face, it's a good thing, good air. I lean my head back and close my eyes, I breathe in through my nose and smell, so many smells in the air when it has just rained, this smell of wet earth, smell of lilacs. I open my eyes, lean forward again, this place is bloody deserted, dead, not a damn soul to be seen, and almost not a sound to be heard, only the drone of our engine. And the sucking sound of tyres rolling across wet bitumen. Who on earth would come and live in a place like this.

A few seconds pass.

- If we'd had time before the concert, I'd have tried out the fishing, Anders says. Supposed to be a great salmon river here!

I turn around, look at him and grin, but he looks as if he means it, sits there in the backseat and looks back at me, nodding towards the right. And I crane my neck to look where he's nodding. A cardboard sign hangs in a window on the other side of the street, "Fishing licence sold here", it says, written with a black felt pen in running-writing sloping down to the right. I turn back and look out of the front window again.

- Oh well, I say. Apart from in-breeding, I suppose there's nothing else to do here but hunting and fishing and things like that.

I turn to Anders and grin again, but he has turned his face away and doesn't look back at me, it doesn't seem to have registered. I turn and look out of the windscreen again.

And sports, of course! I add. Skiing and things! But not team sports, won't be enough people here for team sports! I say.

Time passes.

Lars takes a right turn, and we roll down a gentle slope leading to the harbour, get a glimpse of the blue, shimmering sea far below, a few seagulls circling around a green container. But not a single soul to be seen, it's bloody dead everywhere, it's the middle of the day and the place is deserted, I lean forwards a little and let my eyes wander from side to side, I grin and shake my head.

- Fuck it! I say, wait for a bit, and shake my head again. Looks like the Norwegian Centre Party has quite a job ahead of it if they're going to fulfil their aim of a vigorous rural society! I say. I wait again, and then I turn to Lars, look at him and nod. If you happen to hear fast banjo music, you'd better step on it! I say, and laugh shortly. But he doesn't laugh back, he just sits there with both hands on the wheel, staring straight ahead, perhaps he hasn't seen *Deliverance*, all Lars cares about is music, has no interest in films, at least not in films like that, I turn back and look out again.

A few second pass.

- Well fuck this place, I mumble. Glad I don't live here!

Another few seconds pass.

- Here too? Lars asks, asks in a low voice and without looking at me.

- Not a damn soul to be seen! I say.

- No, he says shortly.

I look at him again, don't say anything, wait for a bit, what the hell's wrong with him, he sounds so serious, looks serious too, his face is sort of taut, closed. His eyes are rigid. I wait for a few seconds, don't take my eyes off him.

- What's wrong with you? I ask, I look at him, he doesn't answer, he sits there with straight arms and both hands on the wheel, staring stiffly ahead of him. There is total silence in the car, no one says anything, but what *is* this, Lars isn't usually like this, he's almost always in a good mood, positive and optimistic, almost always.

A few seconds pass.

- What's wrong with you? I ask again.

- With *me*? he asks, in a loud voice, and pushes his head forward a short centimetre as he speaks.

Total silence.

I stare at him, bewildered.

- I'm really sick and tired of you always being so negative! he says.

A few seconds pass.

- Negative? I mumble.

- Yes, negative! he says, stares stiffly ahead of him, waits, swallows. Every place we come to is a dump, he says. All the food we eat is terrible, all the people we meet are morons!

A few seconds pass.

I just sit and stare at him, can't get a word out, because what is he talking about, am I negative? I wait for a bit, turn around and look forward for a few seconds, turn to Lars again, can't think of anything to say, because he has never said anything about this before, this came out of the blue, that I'm negative, am I negative? A few seconds pass, and then I turn and look at Anders in the backseat. He sits and stares intently out of the window, pressing his forehead against the glass and pretending not to see me, as if he has missed everything, I look at him for a couple of seconds, and then I suddenly understand that they've talked about this, discussed this with each other, and that they agree that I'm negative. And now I feel that my heart starts to beat a little faster than usual, my pulse is racing, I stare at Anders, and feel my mouth opening of its own accord, I sit here and gape, open-mouthed, and I close my mouth again, swallow once, and once more I turn to Lars and look at him.

- You're exhausting to be with, he says. Just damn exhausting! The whole damn tour's been a strain!

He still doesn't look at me as he speaks, just sits there and stares stiffly out of the windscreen, his face is taut and white, and he swallows at short intervals. I don't take my eyes off him, but I don't say anything, don't know what to say, because this came out of the blue, I had not seen this coming, that they think I'm negative, that they agree that I'm exhausting to travel with.

- It started off badly, and it's just got worse and worse, Lars says, and then he clears his throat, still without looking at me. I don't think you understand how much effort it takes, keeping you, more or less, in a good mood, he says. You walk around pouring shit on everything and everyone, you bad-mouth everything between heaven and earth. Don't you actually see how exhausting it is for us, who have to listen to it?

I listen to what he's saying, and I understand that he has been rehearsing this, I can hear it in the way he speaks. And he actually means it, it feels as if he's pulling it out of thin air, but I can hear that he really means it, it just took me by surprise. I stare at him, wait for a bit, don't know what to say, but know I mustn't just blurt something out, must be careful with what I say, because I must put up with this, must be grown-up enough to take such criticism, not become unprofessional and just pounce on him. But it came out of the blue, I hadn't seen it coming, they've been laughing at my pessimism all along, they've been making fun of my gloom and doom and my harsh comments, I've often made myself seem gloomier and more pessimistic than I really am, been more sour and sarcastic to make them laugh, have all the time believed that everything was as it should be, that they enjoyed my company as much as I enjoyed theirs, that they liked me as much as I liked them, because I like them a lot, don't think I've ever felt so much at home in a band before, neither musically nor socially.

A short time passes. I turn slowly to the right, rest my head in my right hand, and look out of the open window, lift the other hand, and scratch the bridge of my nose, a short second passes,

and then I suddenly start to cry, it just comes, as if there are cracks in an internal dam I didn't know about, my eyes fill and tears start to run, cold tears stream down my cheeks, I turn my head a little more to the right, dry my tears, swallow. But what the hell is this, I sit here and cry, what the hell's wrong with me, haven't cried for I don't know how long, and now I sit here and cry, start to cry for a trifle like this, because they tell me I'm negative, what the hell's wrong with me, it's so stupid it's laughable. A couple of seconds pass, and then I suddenly start to laugh, it just comes, a guffaw escapes, I roar with laughter, I'm making a sort of effort to laugh at how ridiculous this is, it's just a ridiculous little thing, and I'm sort of laughing away the tears, but I can't do it, the tears keep running and running, and now I sit here and both laugh and cry, sit here like a hysterical woman, I sound totally mad, sound as if I'm about to lose my mind, and the others don't say a word, I suppose they've no idea what's up with me, because this isn't me, it's so unlike me as it could possibly be, and now I must pull myself together, this won't do.

I wipe my nose with a finger, I sniffle, clench my teeth and stop laughing, cough a little, I'm not laughing any longer, but I can't stop crying, I just sit here and cry silently, my lips are wet from tears, and the taste of salt stings my tongue.

Total silence.

- Where's this cultural centre then? Anders suddenly asks. Wasn't it supposed to be outside the city centre? he says, trying to change the subject, he sits there and pretends nothing's happened, wanting to give me some time and a chance to dry my tears and pull myself together, so I won't lose face more than I already have. Well, I don't know about city centre, who can say what's the city centre in a place like this, he continues, trying to agree with me now, to agree that this place is a hole, as if that would make things better.

Another silence.

I just sit and cry, and Anders and Lars don't say a word, they don't understand this anymore than I do, because this is so unlike me as it is possible to be, I feel empty, feel numb, as if all strength has been sucked from my body, I'm just more and more exhausting to be with, Lars said, sour and negative. But why haven't they said anything about this before, they've always joked about my pessimism, always laughed at my sarcasms, how can I change when they never say anything, when they just play along instead of saying something, could've given me a hint or two at least, all this time I thought they liked me as much as I like them, and all this time they thought that I was exhausting to be with, negative. I twist my head even further to the right, press my lips together, and swallow.

- Stop the car! I suddenly hear myself say, hear how sour I sound. I put my hand on the seatbelt latch, push down the red button, undo the belt, staring straight ahead as I'm doing it.

- Please Jon! Lars says, says it with a pleading voice.

- Stop the car! I say.

- Now listen! Lars says.

I turn to him, stare at him.

- Stop the car, damn it! I say loudly.

Total silence. A second passes, then Lars brakes, carefully, pulls over and stops at the curb.

- Please Jon! Anders says.

But I open the door, climb out.

- Listen! Anders pleads.

- Jon! Lars says.

But I slam the door, and start to walk, walk fast and straight ahead, don't look back, don't know where I'm going, only that I need to get away, disappear.

(Letter from Jon, first part)

Dear David.

Vemundvik 6 July 2006

I sat on the bus on the way to the cottage and read the article about your having lost your memory, and when I'd got over the shock and started to think about what I should include in this letter to help you start remembering again, one memory came back to me again and again, and I couldn't quite understand why; in my mind's eye I saw the two of us on one of our many and long walks in and around Namsos city centre, and I didn't even know that I had this memory in my head before I suddenly sat there in the bus and felt how it was to be seventeen years old trotting along the streets, just you and me, side by side, wandering aimlessly. I seemed to remember that we had a sort of notion that we set out on these trips because we were bored and didn't have anything else to do with our evenings, but when I think back on the discussions we had, how much we had to talk to each other about, how engrossed and engaged we could become and how we used to hurry off in another direction when we saw someone we otherwise would've had to stop and talk to, I think it must be obvious that we regarded our walks as something meaningful in themselves as well. If we didn't think about them as meaningful, we surely had to experience them as such.

And perhaps it's this kind of unconscious experience of meaning which is the reason for a fairly undramatic and ordinary memory popping up first and shining the brightest when I read the article and saw the picture of you. I don't know, but quite a lot of what I'm referring to in this letter, opinions you had, for instance, descriptions of events that took place without me, or of people you knew but whom I never met, I learnt from our discussions.

When we were in primary school, I didn't know much more about you than that you were the stepson of a pastor, that you played football and that you could throw a ball the furthest when it was sports day at school. I don't quite know why I noticed the two last things, perhaps because I myself was so bad at throwing ball and playing football. I used a girlie underarm when I was throwing ball, and I had a reputation for being the first and, for the time being, the last in Namsos Secondary School to do a throw-in when awarded a penalty kick, a reputation I otherwise claimed to be proud of when I got to know you.

Our friendship started in the first year of senior high-school. There was a kind of demonstration against drugs in the gym hall, and I'd decided to wag school. I had adopted a sort of anarchic and freakish image at that time, and I tried to convince everyone, myself included, that it was the anarchist's free-thinking view of what the leftist, anarchist magazine 'Gateavisa' had taught me to call "consciousness-expanding tactics" that made me throw my bag over my shoulder and walk towards the exit, if not demonstratively, at least with the cruising gait and the kind of phoney indifference and artificially lethargic body language that teenage boys often adopt to hide how insecure they really are. It wasn't that. Dad was in prison with a drug conviction around that time, and it was misguided loyalty to him that made me refuse to take part in the demonstration, and when the headmaster suddenly called my name and told me to come back at once and sit down, and when everyone turned around and stared at me, I was suddenly overcome by all the emotions I until then had managed to keep more or less in check, and I started to cry in front of the whole school. Most of you knew that my Dad was in prison and what he'd done, but there and then you were the only one who understood

the connection between this and my totally unexpected breakdown, and after a few seconds of utter silence, with the teachers and the more than three hundred students staring at me, astonished, I heard you ask the headmaster, loudly and clearly, "How would you like to take part in a demonstration against your own father?"

Later, after I had fallen in love with you, and my feelings had edited my memory, I saw you in my mind's eye as a kind of James Dean when you said this. I thought I remembered you sprawling on one of the benches, your elbows stuck between the wall bars behind you, and that you smiled while you looked straight at the headmaster with calm and confident eyes. Today this image has faded, of course. All I know for sure is that you said what you said.

In the beginning I felt that you had exposed me in a way, and I was furious with you for that, but the more distance I got to what had happened, the more grateful I felt, and soon I was almost touched because you had defended me in that way. I admired you for the courage and the sense of justice you had shown, and in the period before we became friends and began to meet regularly, I made sure I turned up in places I knew you would be. But at the same time I tried to hold on to some sort of dignity. I kept my distance and was never pushy, I smiled and said hi when we met, but I never dared to start a conversation, and considering that you were the kind of tough, silent type who only said the bare essentials, and rarely anything else, I can hardly understand how we came to talk to each other at all. But we must have, because before the year was over, we were inseparable.

In the hallway at your place hung an aerial photo of a white house nestling among the rocks on the shore of Otter Island. Before Berit got married to Arvid and they moved into his parsonage in Namsos, you'd lived in this house with her and your grandfather, a man I only know from an old black and white photo which shows him as a young, sturdily built road worker with rumpled hair, broad, round shoulders and a black and ample moustache that protruded like pigtails from both sides of his face.

Berit had acted as housekeeper for your grandfather since your grandmother died some time at the beginning of the sixties. When she was seventeen or eighteen, she moved into a bed-sitter in Namsos and started nursing school with my mum, but she got pregnant with you after barely a year, and so she was forced to leave school and move back to Otter Island. No one knew who your dad was. For some reason, Berit refused to tell, and she kept it a secret for as long as she lived, from you as well.

My mum used to tell me about Berit from this period, and she described a thin and pale young woman with red hair, freckles and a small turned-up nose. She talked about how shy and lost she looked, and about how surprised she was when she turned out to be exactly the opposite. Like so many who have survived a tough childhood, she had been hardened, and according to my mother she was totally unafraid and not the least bit shy, the way people from the country often were when they came to the city to get an education. She had a glib mouth and talked when she breathed in as well as out, she didn't mince her words, no matter whom she was speaking to, and if someone did her an injustice, she could be mercilessly impudent, and she knew no bounds when it came to hurting and humiliating the guilty. Physical flaws, speech impediments, a shady past; she allowed herself to mock everything, and she was so pertinent and eloquent that the listeners couldn't help but laugh, no matter how much they tried not to. And if the victims gave as good as they got and commented on her bad teeth, for instance, she

would just grin shamelessly. Self-pity and sentimentality were luxuries she could never afford, and she didn't let anything upset her. "Yes, if someone had told me at the time that that girl would find herself a clergyman, I would've died laughing!" my mum used to say.

Your grandfather also had problems getting used to his daughter marrying a pastor. According to you, he was an atheist and a dyed-in-the-wool Moscow communist to the day he died, he shook his head and chuckled at much of what Arvid believed in and stood for, and he never seemed to tire of asking for tangible descriptions or rational explanations of various miracles and wonders described in the Bible. "Can you explain that thing about the virgin birth so that a simple man from Otter Island can understand it?" he would say, and if Arvid ignored the ironic undertone he knew was there and answered seriously, your grandfather sat and listened with a smirk on his face, and when Arvid had finished talking, he would chortle and shake his head condescendingly; "Yes, those were the times!" he would say. "Things like that don't happen these days, that's for sure!"

These conversations were like party games to him, you told me, and he would tease Berit in a similar way by reminding her of what sort of family and what sort of social environment she hailed from. When they met up, his language would be even a little juicier and coarser than it normally was, and he often just accidentally remembered episodes from the old days that all had one thing in common - they were inappropriate in the Christian environment Berit was trying to fit into and become part of. "What about that New Year's Eve you drank all the men under the table," he could say, while he laughed loudly and heartily, and when your mum didn't react the same way, he would play surprised and puzzled. "But don't you remember?" he would ask, and while he sat there and gloated and waited for an answer, Berit's face was white with fury.

You used to chuckle when you told me all this, but when it happened, you felt uncomfortable and uncertain. Again, Arvid tried to pretend he didn't let it upset him. According to you he could become bitter, frustrated and angry, but he would convince you and your mother that it was beneath his dignity to let himself become agitated and distressed by things like that, and so he just sat there and smiled and exercised infinite patience and tolerance. Actually, this fits with how I experienced him as a human being after you and I became friends, and I began to spend time at your place. It's possible that the memories from that time are coloured by the fact that I learnt later that he developed psychological problems after your mother died, but I still seem to remember that he appeared to be of the type who always tries to conceal a chaotic inner life with a calm and steady exterior, and who, without knowing it himself, exaggerates and therefore, in the end, seems scary. He had a smile that was so mild and good-natured that it was difficult to believe in the love it was meant to radiate, and he talked so slowly and subdued and sincerely, that I, at least, felt nervous around him and not calm, the way he meant me to feel.

Many misinterpreted this kind of behaviour, however, and took it as proof that the stereotype of the somewhat self-righteous pastor who took himself a little too seriously was right. "It's easy to be mild and good and bear over with people when you are convinced that you yourself are going to heaven and everyone else to hell!" as mum said. But none of us who really knew Arvid thought of him as self-righteous or as someone who took himself too seriously. On the contrary, it felt as if he had a sincere wish to be, and be perceived as, an ordinary man who happened to be a pastor, a man most people regarded as one of their own. True, he didn't succeed in this. When he who otherwise was so calm, donned the blue and white football scarf and stood in the stands and yelled when Namsos played, he made a lot of people laugh and look at him with the same contempt they

reserved for politicians who behaved in this way. They interpreted it as an act and an effort to court the man in the street. In addition, Arvid, like so many clergymen, had a tendency to steer every conversation into a discussion about God, and this often created a distance to people and made them feel uncomfortable. If we sat on your stairs on a winter's night and admired the starry sky, for instance, I could be sure that he, as if accidentally, would start to talk about the star of Bethlehem, and if there was a nature program on television that showed how well some animal species had adjusted to their environment, I just sat and waited for him to express astonishment at the existence of people who in all seriousness believed that something as fantastic as that could happen by accident.

You said yourself that you hated that particular side of him. When you were younger, you often experienced how the atmosphere changed when he entered a room. He could silence a loud and lively discussion just by showing up, and an uncertain and slightly nervous mood would settle over the people who were present. There were always those who made a point of talking and acting normally, but they were in such a minority and hence so visible that the effort was almost always more forced and embarrassing than heroic, and they either gave up and fell silent, or they did like everyone else; they began to talk about things they thought it was safe to talk about with a pastor in the room. They reeled off trivialities about the weather and expounded theories that no one with half a brain could disagree with. And while you sat there, hot from shame, Arvid noticed nothing of what was going on around him, according to you. Today I'm not so sure that you were right. I remember Arvid as both intelligent and attentive, and I can see that these situations must have been just as painful and unpleasant for him as they were for you.

The uncertain, slightly nervous atmosphere caused by Arvid's entrance, was also to a degree present in your home, I noticed. There was something a bit stiff and forced in the way you talked and behaved. It was as if the ostensible calm that Arvid radiated was a model of behaviour and an ideal to aspire to for the whole family, yes, not only the family, but friends of the family as well. It was as if most people in this Christian environment strived to appear as mild and kind and charitable as possible, it was as if they at all costs had to remind each other of how much they loved each other all the time. When I was at your place, I always had a feeling that although you could disagree about things, you mustn't start to argue, it was alright to be irritated and annoyed, but it was frowned upon to raise your voice. All the mood swings and temperature changes were supposed to be hushed up and glossed over, not just the troughs but also the peaks. It was wonderful to be happy, but you didn't have to be ecstatic, a smile would suffice. And if someone still should let themselves get carried away, the others would be demonstratively silent for a few seconds, or they would smile mildly, only to start talking about something else altogether.

But despite, or perhaps rather because of this unspoken demand of always being in control of oneself, intense and emotional eruptions happened now and again. I remember one time I had come back to your house, your mum had just washed the floors, and Arvid came trampling in with his boots full of blue clay, and then I witnessed an outburst that showed me a little of the Berit my mum had described to me. True, it was not a trivial thing for her that someone walked in with dirty boots just after she had cleaned the house. Where our mothers come from, a housewife could demand respect for keeping a nice and clean house, and much of their self-esteem depended on their husbands and neighbours bestowing such respect on them. When mum had cleaned the house, for instance, she never tidied the squeegee and the bucket and

the washrag away in the cupboard where they belonged, she always put the squeegee against the wall in the hallway, placed the bucket next to it and hung the wet washrag over the rim, and there they remained until the next day, so no one who dropped by would forget to comment on the fresh smell of green-soap or offer other comments that showed their appreciation of mum as a dutiful and hard-working woman. Not to take your shoes off when you came in was in that sense a gross insult, you might just as well have told her that she was worthless.

But the fury Berit released when Arvid came in with his dirty boots, was still disproportionate to the violation he was guilty of. "You bloody pig!" she screamed at him; and just to hear someone use that voice and those words in your home, startled me so much that I sat there with open mouth. Her sweeping everything off the kitchen bench made an even stronger impression. Her underarm moved like a scythe over the bench top, cups and plates and glasses and cutlery hit the floor with a deafening racket, and when a terrified Arvid had pulled himself together enough to ask what on earth was wrong with her, she hit out with both hands and grinned hysterically; "I'm just being like you, I'm making sure I've enough to do all evening," she said, and then she burst into tears.

I never heard, nor can I imagine, similar outbursts from you. When you were at school or with friends, you acted, as I've mentioned, the somewhat tough, silent type, and at home you pushed this image even further and assumed a hard, almost callous manner, especially towards Arvid. You weren't directly hostile, it was more as if you took the rule to be in control to the extreme, it was as if you had decided not to express any emotions at all, and you often acted in a mechanical, almost bureaucratic manner. If Arvid asked you to do him a favour, for instance, you did what he asked without grumbling, you didn't answer when he asked, you didn't even look at him, you just got up and did exactly what he asked of you, and then you went back to where you had been before he asked. You behaved as if he was your boss and not your stepfather. And when he talked to you and tried to get a conversation going, you often answered with words of one syllable, and in an indifferent and monotonous tone of voice. "Good", you would say when he asked how one of our trips to the cottage had been. "No!" you would say if he asked whether we'd caught any fish.

In such situations I often felt sorry for him. He smiled and pretended it didn't hurt him, but I could see that it was painful for him that you were so dismissive. When I confronted you with it on one of our walks, you were surprisingly short-tempered, I remember. You couldn't stand the friendship and the boundless patience he showed you, you told me, you didn't believe in the love all this was supposed to prove, and you didn't know how to defend yourself against it. You could also pity him, and be overcome with bad conscience when he tried to smother you with his goodness, and you often felt pressured to be good to him, but you didn't want to be, you said, not because he was married to your mum and because that still made you jealous, the way it had when you were a little boy, but because being friendly to him filled you with a feeling of losing yourself and becoming just the way he wanted you to be. You felt that he was consciously trying to shape you and raise you the way he wanted, he always had, you said, he had just changed tactics and become more sophisticated than before. When you were younger he used to read to you and tell you stories from the Bible, he subscribed to a Christian children's magazine for you, he took you to church with him and to Sunday school, and he frightened you with Satan and eternal damnation when you prayed together in the evenings. He did everything he could to lead you along what he thought was the right and proper path, but nothing made the slightest difference, and instead, he consciously put all his energy into using the power of example and

into ingratiating himself. He was friendly and loving because he thought that was the only way to win you over; you said, not only he, but the whole Christian environment your family was part of, was engaged in this conversion project, they prayed for you, they tried to persuade Berit to be more persistent when it came to getting you involved in the Christian youth scene (especially the choir; as you were not at all a bad singer), and they were close to shameless in their efforts to make it seem idyllic, living the life of a Christian.

Even if I thought you did Arvid an injustice when you were so dismissive towards him, I was impressed with the strength you showed towards him and the rest of the Christian environment. They'd managed "to tame" your mum, as my mum expressed it. To be sure, she was a secret smoker (I remember the floating, half dissolved butts in the toilet bowl and the tobacco breath she tried to camouflage with the help of chewing gum, usually the Toy brand, but now and then it was Sorbits, and you suspected that she let loose a little of her old self when she on a rare occasion visited her old girlfriends out on Otter Island, but that she'd changed her lifestyle and truly received Jesus, no one doubted for a minute. For a period of time she even agreed to come to the get-togethers at an aunt of Arvid's, but that became too much. She couldn't stand sitting for hours embroidering prizes for the next charity bazaar, while she drank coffee, ate homemade waffles and listened to women twenty and thirty years older than her laughing their heads off and feeling naughty when they mentioned the word "fart", as she said.

But no matter how hard Arvid and all the others tried, they didn't manage to "tame" you. On the contrary, the more they tried, the further they drove you away, and in that period of time when they were at their most persistent, you referred to Arvid and his circle of acquaintances in hateful terms. You tried to assume an ironic and slightly indifferent tone, but behind the grin and the laughter lay hidden fury, frustration and grief, and you spent many long evenings at my place because you didn't want to go home until you were sure that Arvid had gone to bed. We never talked about the fact that this was the reason the clock turned eleven and twelve and even twelve thirty before you began to yawn and say that tomorrow was another school day, but I understood it, and you knew that I understood it, and I could see that you appreciated that I was there for you without asking any questions. For me it was a totally natural thing to do, and I knew that you would do the same, the day I needed someone to be there for me.