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Chapter 1: “Mathias Rust Band”

Okay: It's not called the EU, it's not called Russia, and there is no Either you're with us or you're with the terrorists. There's no war in the Gulf, there's no genocide in the Balkans, and there aren't yet any dead ten year olds from LSD. E-mail is science fiction, the Internet's a theory, and nobodies burning CD's. No one has heard Kurt Cobain sing "Smells like teen spirit", there is no grunge hype, and no one's yet read the news that Cobain is dead from an overdose. The world has not been served the Spice Girls, Boyzone, or Destiny's Child. Bono hasn't talked with any prominent world leaders on a live tour, and Blur hasn't fought with Oasis over whose leading this burgeoning wave of brit pop. Keanu Reeves hasn't repelled gravity in *The Matrix*, no one's seen Ernst-Hugo Järegård stand on the roof on Riget in Køben, shaking his fist against the Baltic Sea screaming "Fuck the Danes!" and Ross, Monica, Chandler, Rachel, Phoebe and Joey haven't yet gotten all the 20 and 30 year olds to stay home every Thursday evening. Nobody talks about web design, and SMS is nothing anyone's heard of. Bill Clinton hasn't been made to confess, in tears at a press conference, that he has “had relations” with an intern, Princess Diana has not yet been portrayed as an anorexic on TV, and she isn't dead. Greta Garbo isn't dead. Astrid Lindgren isn't dead. Pol Pot isn't dead, and King Olav isn't dead. The little British boys Robert Thompson and Jon Venables have not murdered two year old James Bulger via train tracks in Manchester and eighteen year old Eric Harris and seventeen year old Dylan Klebold haven't shot twelve students and a teacher at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado.

Can you imagine it, that none of this has happened?

Does it sound good to you? Before all of this?

If you think about it, do you miss it? Could you be just as well without it?

Can you see your life without these moments you've lived through,? The good and the bad? Shall we say goodbye to it, all the same? To Slobodan Milosevic and the raze on the

Balkans? To Leonardo Di Caprio and Kate Winslet on board the Titanic? To Gary Barlow, Robbie Williams and the others in Take That?

What with the rest then, yeah? Your own life? The day you, a few years ago, wondering through the woods, suddenly realized, "fucking hell, it's a teacher I'm gonna end up being, not an actor." Or the day you come home from holiday with your friend in Sicily and your mother meets you with the words "You're father and I are getting divorced, are you going to want to live with him or me?" How about the day at Roskilde Festival, that time you smoked pot until your insides were warm and glowing, watching Primal Scream late into the night in that orange tent, while you try to get off with that girl from Malmö, whom you'd forever be cursed to forget the name of?

Can you abandon all that? Your mother, who's been dead for a few years, whom you were so close to, who boiled carrots till they became soft as bananas, whom had a big garden where thousands of daisies grew that you used to pick when you were little? Can you imagine your life without missing her? Can you?

Okay: so it's not called the EU, and it's not called Russia, and there is no Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.

It's called the EF, and we're against it. It's called the Soviet Union and it's transforming everyday, it's called Perestroika, disarmament, and Glasnost. American troops have been planted to take out Panama's dictator Manuel Noriega. The intifada on the West Bank and in Gaza is two years old, and there are no longer Chinese militias driving tanks into Tiananmen Square with teargas, deadly ammunition, opening fire to reap down thousands of demonstrators. We don't have cell phones, but there are those well furnished individuals whose cars are equipped with portable telephones and who own computers at home, though they're hardly anything to play with. There are people who have begun to exchange their typewriters out at work and are going to EDB classes at night, and folks are beginning to exchange their record collection for CD's. Bruce Springsteen is a name to count on, twenty year old Celine Dion from Canada has just won Eurovision, and R.E.M. is on the way to becoming known beyond a circle of indierockers.

We go around in dark coats and Palestinian scarves and naturally we're on the Left. The rest of society holds tight to what seems the permanent fashion: hockey jerseys, skinny jeans, mustaches, and wide belts. There isn't a soul who hasn't seen *The Last Emperor*, and everyone is in agreement that Tom Cruise was wicked in *Born on the Fourth of July*, and Pelle Erobreren is a

complete triumph for Scandinavian cinema. Margaret Thatcher is the sitting prime minister for Great Britain for the 10th year in a row, Mikhail Gorbachev is talking to the UN security council, saying that the Cold War is over, and he's going around the world talking about disarmament and he's about to be elected the man of the decade by the Times. Feelings of nationalism begin to grow in small enclaves while the Baltic republics fight for independence, establishing that the communist states will more or less painlessly surrender to capitalism and parliamentary democracy. Reform fever slams across the Eastern Bloc and neither Politburo, Stasi, Ceausescu, Egon Krenz, the Warsaw Pact, or the massive 28 year old Berlin Wall can avoid the infection. A whole world, a whole mindset, a whole, short 100 years, just crumbling in front of our eyes without anyone knowing what's to be done with the gravel. Nature does what it likes. Hurricane Hugo devastates regions in the USA and the Caribbean. Reagan gives his last speech in front of Congress, where he says he's proud of his contribution to the reestablishment of American pride and George Bush holds a conference where he expresses a wish to return to a gentler, friendlier nation- with more cooperation, greater amity, deeper loyalty, and better morals. In Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland turns 50 and there is a new unemployment record. In Sweden's prisons, 42 year old Christer Petterson is locked away for life after murdering state minister Olof Palme, but is acquitted a few months later. Life is good, too good many suspect. There is a hole growing in the ozone layer and that's our fault. The youth begin to announce their commitment to Nature and Life and they write on brown, speckled, recycled paper from Hippopotami, and begin to reeducate their parents on the importance of reduce, re-use, recycle. *You need to sort and separate them out, Mom, and see how this here hangs to dry, we can reuse them then.* Christ, how egotistical are we gonna get?

Is it going all to hell or is it actually going quite well?

Give up and let dad keep the motor running in the morning during winter even on the blackout dates that are destroying the environment? Should he sell car number two and start biking to work? Optimists say we can be saved when we finally and maturely assess everything we've been doing wrong: contaminating the environment, the spread of AIDS, the Cold War and Communism, and pessimists see the ozone layer opening up into an enormous wound, but see how everything balances out- yeah that's my creditor on the phone and here are the bills that must be paid and admitting one's fault on the deathbed helps nothing and nobody.

And me?

I'm just another guy from a little country, scarcely now a man- I'll soon be seventeen, 5'7, 152 pounds without clothes in the morning, I tend to break out around my mouth and neck, and I have a slight crookedness in my right foot, and a girlfriend for five months. I live in Stavanger, Norway's oil capital, the little trading town which has well enriched itself off the tears and sorrow the oil industry brings. Many of my acquaintances have parents either in oil or trade and drive two cars and have at least one cabin in the countryside and probably a boat down by the harbor in Southland. In Stavanger is an atmosphere that's just as bewildered as everywhere else. A grave scent of apocalypse accompanied indefigably by the current investment-delight syndrome, where those with money about to earn more money from that money see a future without fear. Outside the Kulturhuset downtown stand a recently laid-off public servant and his son. They carry signs and protest every day, proclaiming the end of time, Jesus is coming soon, just like they did last year and the year before. In the same square, a new hotel is being built which should be regal enough in the chance Jesus does actually decide to visit next year.

I live in Bjergsted, but my mom is divorced from my dad, and I go to high school in the town's oldest school, Kongsgård, in the center of downtown. My name is Jarle Klepp- Klepp is my mother's maiden name, the name of the people who come from Jæren. The local mythology says that our people shall be meek, reflective, and profound. But none of us, neither Mom nor I, have ever been to Jæren and I don't feel any of that in me. I'm impatient and relatively impulsive, I work hard but often have to be pressured. Ask me how I have it, and I'd say good. I'm a little restless, probably, rather tired of school. I'm anti a lot of things, but still. It's going well, that's what I'd say.

Wouldn't I?

Yeah I have a girlfriend, and friends, and plans, interests and ambitions. Don't I have it pretty good? I've got a mother and a father and they share a dreadful alliance that fortunately is preserved if they want any kind of diplomacy to communicate with each other on account of me. So I have it good, and I'm growing right well in this world, in an era my history teacher is calling "exceptional" and I'm more or less aware of it. He teaches contemporary history and he loves to predict the future. The next big event to fall, he says, will be in the Balkans.

And me, Jarle Klepp, has everything, right? Is there anything I'm missing?

The future. As usual. That what hasn't happened. The consequent results of things which have long already been written.

There are things I must now whisper out, to try to be back there again: It's winter, newly January in 1990, and I have begun my second semester at Kongsgård. I have my girl, my arrogance, and I intend to know the most about everything, and it seems clear I'm above at least 80% of my peers, who are either imbeciles, conservatives, or ignorant idiots. There are the things I'm against, like the EF. There are the things I don't like, such as Christianization and chiefly those Ten-Sing people, and there are the things I hate- like commercialism, the lack of environmental-consciousness, mindless pop music, and capitalism.

I tend to like people others don't. I enjoy all too much getting a new record, for example something from R.E.M. or The Cure. Though you can be sure that Jarle Klepp thinks those bands were better before. Now they have completely lost it. People who go against convention, that's what I respect. Those who do what others won't.

Mathias Rust, for example, does anyone remember him?

The nineteen year old who landed a Cessna just outside the Kremlin and Red Square in Moscow? Rust flew from Hamburg in a rickety little plane, made an intermediate landing both in Norway and Helsingfor, before he set his course towards the Soviet Union. Incredibly enough, he managed to arrive in Soviet territory and land right in the heart of communism. I remember I saw him on TV in 1987. I was 15 and he seemed to me the epitome of freedom. He looked like a completely ordinary young man. A few months after arrest, he was refashioned for the Soviet court. Wearing glasses, a blue vest and necktie, he asserted that the flight and landing in Moscow was an action of peace to arouse world opinion. I cut out pictures of him and put them on my wall. Who is that? asked Mamma. That's Mathias Rust. It seemed to me he was above them all. He was a true independent. He was sentenced to four years in a labor camp in the USSR. But shit, he was awesome. The flight resulted in the firing of the Soviet Defense minister and the head of Air Defense. Is that cool or what? He became an icon for me. I idolized him and the entire ideology he came to represent along the lines of other dissidents in my gallery: Che, Bakunin, Marx, Arafat. Yeah, those are my kinda people.

I said to my best friend, once at the end of the 80's while we sat drinking beer in the Ullandhaug forest (we were hardly sixteen and freshmen in high school): "Fucking hell, Helge" I said, "if we ever start a band, we'd have to name ourselves after Mathias Rust."

"We are not starting any fucking band," answered Helge. "We can't play anything."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," I said. "But it's a good idea anyway. The Mathias Rust Band."

"Or how about The Devil's Cunt's Anarchist Kommandos?"

"No, Hegga. I mean it."

"What?"

"We should do what he did, you know? Just set off right into the Soviet Union."

"Hmm," said Helge opening up a new beer, "That was just shit, he could've damn well flown that Cessna into the White House and left the communists in peace."

I never did anything like Mathias Rust, but Helge and I did go to some protests, and I bought myself a guitar. Now it was winter in Stavanger, school had just started up again after Christmas and there was a genuine world out there with scary stuff happening: Oil prices rose above their previous record, Samuel Beckett died, unemployment increased, Ceaucescu was executed in Romania, Vaclav Havel was elected president of Czechoslovakia, the GDR was on its way to becoming history after the Berlin Wall opened on November 9th, and it was a powerful many who believed that now, now everything is going to pieces at an atrociously fast pace, so fast that we must buy a new car, and the others, like my history teacher, simply relished the time we were living in.

All that hasn't happened, yet- our future. It's 1990- can you picture it?

It's early on a Friday morning: 19 January 1990, and I'm riding my bike in the rain to school. In a few seconds my life will change forever.

Chapter 4: "Sunday. 20 January 1990"

I was like a machine. No other considerations touched me, only the conviction of how brilliant my plan was. I remember the bizarreness of that morning, the enormous distance between that mania inside me and myself. I know it was me that opened the refrigerator and took out the milk carton, I know it was me that sliced the toast, I know it was me that did everything so methodically before I went out to the garage to get my bike, yet it wasn't me. I would accomplish an impressive series of idiotic and shameless deeds in the following weeks, the majority of them to be carried out with much more misfortune than this, and all directed against poor Yngve, beautiful Yngve, but I was never as deliberate as that morning. My subsequent attempts to reach Yngve would at least contain a bit of acumen, a hint of shame here and there. But not that morning. Had I been commanded by terrorists to kill the town's mayor and his family, none of them would be alive today. I would have murdered them all, Sunday, January 20th 1990, swiftly and efficiently. I would have been arrested immediately to be sure (right after I had tried to escape and shot a couple of policemen) I would have been dragged off to prison. 21 years to life, maximum security. January 20th 1990 would be a day to remember, the day Jarle Klepp was somebody else.

Now it is only me, and perhaps Yngve, who remembers that day. I remember it vividly, with a mixture of shock and wonder. What Yngve thinks, I don't know.

Mom came into the kitchen as I sat eating breakfast. She was startled and looked surprised at me.

"I thought I heard you! You're up so early!"

I nodded, "Yeah, I'm going out."

She smiled and ran her hand through my hair. I pulled myself away, worried that she would mess up my carefully combed hair.

“How nice you look today!” she said.

She turned around, getting ready to leave. “Well, I’m just going for the shopping. What are you up to then?”

“I’m going skating.” I said. “Down at the rink. At Ishallen.”

Mom began to laugh. “You’re going to Ishallen?”

“Yeah. Something wrong with that?”

“No, no, not at all. It’s just, I mean, you’ve never gone skating before. What skates are you going to use?”

“You can rent them there,” I said.

She nodded, “Well, all right then. Skating. Sounds good.”

“Go to the store!” I said, laughing.

“Fine. But,” she said turning, “you’ve never really liked sports. And *ice skating*?”

“Yeah I know, but now I feel like it.” I said.

The night before Mom and I had avoided watching ice hockey, which was all over TV, on account of Dad, but now I was going to go out skating. Mom wrinkled her nose.

“Are you riding your bike in this weather?”

I nodded.

Mom remained standing and looked at me for a few seconds. Then she ran her hand through my hair again, said I was her Jarle dear, and gave me 100 kroners for the skates.

“I’m going to the movies with Ragnhild this evening.” She said on her way out.

Ragnhild was Mom's friend from her schooldays. She was a tall, elegant woman who smoked thirty a day, and who I had only seen from old photos before Christmas of 1987, that's when Mom divorced Dad, and when she came into Mom's life again. The two friends hadn't seen each other for nearly fifteen years and in the meantime had taken rather different paths. While Ragnhild had been politically active and broken up from a turbulent marriage, Mom had disappeared into the middle-class's sheltered lifestyle. It didn't help either that Dad constantly referred to her as "that commie woman-person" and so Ragnhild had kept her distance. But then she suddenly showed up again. When I was fourteen, she began to come more and more often for visits, and she became that person again whom Mom could depend on.

After breakfast I waited over an hour as the ice rink was not open yet. I could have just pretended to go skating, I could have just packed some things and biked around and used it as an excuse to go out. But I wanted not only to say I was going to do this, but actually do it. I convinced myself that this was entirely natural, that the new Jarle did things such as this: Get up early on a Sunday, shower meticulously, put on clean clothes, and go out to exercise. Alone.

An ordinary Sunday would have looked completely different. I would have slept late, awakened by a hangover from the previous night's excesses. I would have dragged myself down for breakfast, and Mom would have long while returned from shopping. Later on I would have spent some time reading the poetry of Walt Whitman, Charles Bukowski or Jan Erik Vold, or perhaps flipped through some newsletter from Amnesty International or *NO to the EU*, while listening to music like The Smiths, Pere Ubu, and other bands I was into at the time. If I were to be precise, I would say that there was a good chance that I listened to some albums I figured were good from '88 and '89, for example Elvis Costello's *Spike*, R.E.M.'s *Green*, Billy Bragg's *Worker's Playtime*, The Charlatan's 12" "The only one I know", XTC's *Orange and Lemons*, or

Hjernen er alene from deLillos. I would have played one of the albums I had gotten for Christmas from Uncle Steinar, like the Pixie's *Doolittle*, or my latest discovery, Camper Von Beethoven, a band no one else had heard of. By that very fact, that no one else heard of them, and that both their last two albums: *Our Beloved Revolutionary Sweetheart* and *Key Lime Pie* were difficult to get a hold of, they became all the more coveted by me in my attempt to differentiate myself. CVB were a good band and sure I liked their songs, but no band is ever so good as it is when you are the only one who adores them. I had just begun to buy CDs at that time, and the division between CDs and vinyl was beginning to grow. Helge was a vinyl-junkie, much more hardcore than me in his musical tastes. He thought most of what I listened to was too sweet. "I don't feel it in my gut", he would say when I played CVB for him; "Do I need to turn up the bass or...?" I would ask in an effort to get him to feel it. To my satisfaction, we both liked the Pixies and early Imperiet, and most of all Ebba Grön. Helge cautiously approved of Hüsker-Dü, Nomeansno, the Clash, the Sex Pistols, and some other punk bands. He was one of those who indignantly scoffed "third rate rip off" picking up the Pixie's *Surfer Rosa* when Nirvana came along. It was as if Helge was personally offended that people could find Nirvana so "ground-breaking". He was cynical kid, well-read, artful, and occasionally unbearable. Katrine thought that everything Helge listened to was nothing but screaming noise. Katrine liked classic rock, jazz, and female singer songwriters. On account of our relationship I had to suffer through copious amounts of Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Cat Stevens, Tracy Chapman, Tanita Tikaram, and Suzanne Vega, plus a considerable dose of Chet Baker, Radka Toneff and Miles Davis. We didn't agree all the time, Katrine and I, but we were in love. If I wanted to play something from the 60's, I'd put on the Kinks, the Beatles, or the Yard Byrds, but Katrine would only play Dylan. But we were in love. I never wanted to hurt Katrine. If it had been a normal Sunday in

January 1990, I would have been thinking of her, although the thought of her probably wouldn't have gotten me to stand in front of those big living room windows, as I did then, like an obsessed weatherman studying the rain waiting for the ice rink to open. No, but I would have thought of her. We had had sex, as she was my girlfriend, and she was beautiful and intelligent, and she wasn't like the other girls, and we had it good together.

Later on in the course of my typical Sunday I would have called her up or Helge to figure out what the plan was for the night. First we would have tried Folken or Checkpoint Charlie, where we were usually turned away. After that we would have tried to get into some other bars, till at last we would gather at Korvetten, frozen and irritated after a whole night out in the cold. There we would be let in by the door man who knew perfectly well we were only seventeen and pretended to buy the story that we had left our IDs at home. Later in the night we would end up drunk at a party where we would fashionably judge all the other guests to hell. Then Katrine and I would leave to go back to her place and have intoxicated sex. (Luckily her house was empty as her parents spent the weekends at their cottage in Sirdalen.) After we'd had sex, we would listen to Lou Reed's "Perfect Day". We always did that. Fuck, smoke Marlboros, and listen to that damned song.

But it wasn't to be so that Sunday.

The new Jarle stood in the garage and pumped up the bike in the pouring rain. I wasn't thinking about Helge, I wasn't thinking about Katrine, or music, or getting wasted later on, or sex. I was thinking about Yngve. There was a coldness in my hands. I shivered. I finished pumping up the tires, closed the garage door behind me, and rode my bike towards the ice rink.

There, I skated in large circles. I felt heavy, especially in my ankles, but I didn't fall much more than a few times, and I think I got the hang of it quite well, and it seemed to get

easier with each turn. It was fun trying to slide over the ice in perfect circles. It surprised me too that I acutely felt a kind of joy, as I detested all sports as activities that belonged to somebody else: the yuppies, the preps, the Christians. But now I saw it as belonging only to Yngve: this, gliding over the ice, was part of his world. Iceskating Yngve.

I monitored the clock in even intervals. The rink was not very crowded, just a couple of pre-teens and some younger kids, a woman with her son. I skated rhythmically while I waited. Waited for what? I didn't know. I knew I should skate for one hour, until 12:00, and then it would be time to go see Yngve. Yes, that would happen at 12:00 and I must skate for an hour. There was a deep compulsion under all of this. I acted according to my own inscrutable rules, and I would not break them.

At 12:00 I left the ice, a little frozen. At 12:05 I unlocked my bike. It was still raining hard, which annoyed me as I had just fixed my hair in the checkroom where I had returned the skates.

I biked back over to Tjensvoll and made my way to Tennisveien. How was I actually going to do this? Should I just ring the doorbell? And then what? Would Yngve answer, be standing there in front of me, like some god dressed in a many-colored coat fastened at the waist with a gemstoned belt, and take me in his open arms, carry me into the house, which would be like a paradise, some Hellenic palace, an otherworldly light flashing against glossy terracotta walls, lilies and roses in crystal vases, every corner of the room guarded by glorious statues of half gods and mystic beasts?

Number 44. Number 46. Number 48. I stopped. Tennisveien was a street with low flats on each side. I got off my bike. I went towards the house and peeked through the window. I remember this moment clearly, looking inside Yngve's home. A man in an umbrella was

walking on the street behind me. He stopped and starred up at me strangely. I nodded politely towards him. Through the window I saw the living room at an angle, probably leading towards the kitchen. I saw a staircase and a small entrance hall to the other side. In the back I could see a garden.

I had gotten a real overview of how Yngve lived, how his home looked. I went back to my bike and rested it against a street sign along the sidewalk.

How peaceful I was! It was as if I was still gliding around in circles across the ice, one after the other. I locked up my bike. I noticed a weak heartbeat, of pure gladness, for now I would get to see Yngve again. Finally. I read the name plate.

Here lives Unni, Steinar, and Yngve Lima.

It was as I had thought, he is an only child. I don't know how I knew that. Yngve was their only one.

I rang the bell.

Shit! You just rang the doorbell.

After a few seconds, I heard footsteps. Suddenly I became gripped by a stark pain of realism. I saw where I was, who I was, and what I was actually doing. I began to sweat. I understood that I hadn't the slightest idea of what I would say, what in all the world I would do once the door was opened. What if it wasn't Yngve who answered, a thought which hadn't occurred to me before, what if it was his mother or father? What if they were in the middle of company, having a visit from aunts and uncles and cousins from Haugesund? And what if Yngve wasn't home at all? How would I explain to them who I was?

Shit, shit! I thought. What the fuck am I doing?

The door opened, in front of me stood a man in a white collared shirt and jeans. Steinar, probably. He looked tersely at me.

“Yes?”

My breath rattled in my throat.

“Is, does Yngve live here?”

“Yeah?” he seemed suspicious. “Yeah.”

“Right, I-”

He turned right around and yelled “Yngve! There’s someone here!” and walked away.

My breath became calmer. I crossed over the threshold. Yngve was home. I waited. A woman walked into the hall, Yngve’s mom, I thought. She smiled at me. Perhaps this will go well, I thought, relieved that the father hadn’t thrown me out, relieved that they hadn’t seen through me, seen who I really was: a mad, crazy boy who was in love with their son and not some sweet girl, but a boy who would do anything just to be in the presence of him.

Again I heard footsteps. It must be Yngve.

He came up from the cellar. He looked at me and stopped, hesitant. But at the same time he came into view that clutch of petrified realism fell away, and I became my new, unrealistic self again. I smiled. Yngve walked over to the door and stopped in front of me.

It was glorious to see him like this, in his own private environment, wearing simple blue jeans and a green striped shirt. Just himself. Just Yngve.

“Hey?” he said surprised.

“Hey,” I said.

What should I say? I just wanted to see him. I thought I had planned this, but now that I stood there, in front of him, I just wanted to see him.

Yngve looked at me. My stomach knotted. I felt both wonderful and sick.

“Do you live around here?” asked Yngve.

“No,” I said.

“Oh. Well, then, what, um?” he began. “Would you like to come in?”

That was all I wanted.

“Yeah, okay.” I said.

I took off my shoes, hung up my rain coat, and tried to speak naturally, all the while becoming convinced of what I was saying was true.

“I was just out skating, you see, as I usually do training every Sunday, ride my bike to the rink and skate. I work out a lot, you see. And Sunday is the day for skating. And so then I thought I would ride my bike over to where my dad lives, in Forus, and so I was on my way to see him, when I saw that you live here. At number 56. On Tennisveien.”

Yngve looked skeptically at me. My explanation did have some sense to it though, even if it was just on the edge of believability.

“So,” I continued. “I know it probably seems a little weird of me to just knock on your door like this, but I thought, fuck it, why the hell not?”

His mother came into the hall again. Yngve turned towards her.

“Mom, this is, um, Jarle,” he said. “From school. I met him last time.”

She shook my hand. Her hand had the same warm feel as her son. This is Yngve’s mom, I thought, and I began to cherish her.

“That’s really nice,” she said. “You said you hadn’t really met anyone,” she said, turning to Yngve.

“No, yeah. I forgot,” he said and laughed. “Let’s go up to my room then.”

“I’ll bring you all some coffee,” she said. “Do you drink coffee, Jarle?”

I nodded, smiling at her.

She is a good person, I thought. I see how she cares for him, how she takes care of this home. I admired her instantly. I looked around again and peered into the living room where I could see “Steinar” sitting on the sofa watching sports on TV. It all looked so bourgeois and innocent at the Lima’s home. Ordinary things around. A sparsely filled bookshelf. A fire place. Dishes on the table. Bad paintings on the wall. A lot of family photos around. A lot of small things overall, decorations, I guess. All so ordinary and splendid. Not that our house wasn’t ordinary too. Mom was after all neither a hardcore feminist nor a political radical, but the Lima’s home looked completely normal in a whole different way. It was *Norway*, and I loved that. Unexpectedly and suddenly I loved it and took it all in, and I wanted to make it mine.

“Shall we see EM then?” asked Yngve.

“Huh?”

“The game on TV. It starts soon, I think. But that’s fine, we don’t need to.”

“Okay. I prefer to skate myself anyways than watch it on TV.” I said.

We went to his room. Walking up the stairs, I noticed how slender and tall he was. I marveled at how he had bought my explanation of why I was here. This shocked me. I wasn’t used to having friends with such little suspicion.

I quickly noticed that Yngve and I were very different, but the new Jarle didn’t have a problem with it. In fact it suited him well. Yngve would be like a strange land. He would be everything new, everything otherwise disrupting my former life, for this is what he really was to me: everything I hadn’t seen before, everything I had never thought of before. An unknown rich culture, a perfect state.

The walls in his rooms had no posters of bands or musicians, and there were no cut-outs of Mathias Rust or Che Guevara. His bulletin board wasn't full of flyers for NEI or other causes, like mine. Above his desk was a large map of the world. There was a poster of a tennis player hanging on the door. On the floor lay a tennis racket and some sneakers. Had I seen this at anyone else's house, I would have immediately judged them another conformist tool. But here inside was Yngve, and this was his beautiful world. I was in love with it as I was in love with him. The first thing I did the next Monday was buy a big map of the world at Berge & Tjelflaat to put on my wall, taking down a poster of The Smiths instead.

I looked at the tennis racket. "You play?"

"Yeah, some," said Yngve.

I saw him in front of me in a white T-shirt, white shorts, and white sneakers. Yngve playing tennis, throwing the ball up in the air, his back stretching in a smooth arch, his head tilted upwards, right hand rising to meet the ball.

I could start playing tennis.

"That's cool," I said, pointing to the poster on the door.

"That's Becker when he beat Edberg."

"Yeah," I nodded. I had no idea who Becker or Edberg were.

At the beginning our conversation was a little stilted. We talked about school, a little on the differences between Haugesund and Stavanger, of what we thought about doing in the future. Yngve said he might like to be an archeologist, or perhaps a geologist. "Or maybe just a gardener", he said and laughed. I thought it seemed intriguing, searching for signs of ancient cultures in a site of ruin, and it would suit him, digging in the earth with those long narrow fingers of his.

Literature? Perhaps we could talk about books? I thought. Tarjei Vesaas, maybe he's read *The Birds*? Stig Dagerman, he must have read *To Kill a Child*, everyone's read that. Albert Camus? No, maybe not. Jan Erik Vold in any case, he's really popular. Dostoevsky? Could he have read *Crime and Punishment* and then proclaimed his life changed? No? Ingvar Ambjørnsen then?

I thought about different writers we could talk about, but I became unsure. "Steinar" had radiated something I took as antagonistic to literature. No, that wouldn't be a good topic for us, not to begin with at least. Yngve didn't have many books in his room anyways. There were only some sports magazines and comic books on the desk.

Films then! Everyone watches movies after all. *Robbery*, he would like that I think. *Heaven over Berlin*, that's a classic, maybe *The Wall* or *Down by Law*. Or what about some Woody Allen, he's everyone's favorite, right? But I quickly saw that none of this was true. Mom always pointed this out for me, especially on the rare occasions we went to the movies together to see the new Wenders, Tarkovskij or Jarmusch. What I stated "everyone" must like in reality was what "almost no one" liked.

No, I thought looking at Yngve. We can talk about music. I saw he had a little cassette player with a radio on his desk. I tried to see what tapes he listened to. DeLillos? Or U2? Maybe Prince, Madonna, Whitney Houston? Is he one of *those*?

"What do you listen to?" I asked and pointed to the cassette player.

"Huh? Oh that. The radio mostly."

"There are no bands you like?"

"Mmm, no." he sighed. "Not so much. I got a cassette of Sting for Christmas though. It's pretty good."

“Hmm,” I said. “But there must be some bands you like better than others?”

Yngve thought for a moment.

“Wait a moment,” he said and smiled. “Let me show you something.”

He went to the shelf next to the door and got a box. It seemed to be filled with paper and bits of trash. He took out a rose colored notebook. “Scrapbook for Yngve age 12” was written on the cover, which had “1984” inscribed on it. It was decorated with pictures of famous places: Big Ben, the leaning tower of Piza, a pyramid, the Great Wall of China.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Here, wait, wait. Let me find it.” Yngve flipped through the pages.

I could see train tickets, movie stubs, pages cut out from magazines, some photos.

“Here you will see me and music,” he said.

I expected to see a picture of Yngve with a clarinet or maybe the trumpet, playing with the school band or something. Then he showed it to me. It was a Polaroid photograph, showing a much smaller Yngve, with light blond hair, twelve years old, in 1984. He had a big smile and was standing next to a man in front of what looked like a shopping center.

“Well?” he turned excitedly towards me. “You see who it is?”

I looked closer. The photo was a little blurry. Wait- was there something familiar about that man? Had I seen him before? Then I understood who it was. I hadn’t only seen this man before, I had spent many hours of my childhood with him.

“Yeah, what do you think?” he pointed at the picture.

Oh god...

“That’s me, and that’s Simon Le Bon. He’s in Duran Duran.”

I stared at the picture. It was one of these amateur photographs I saw so often in music magazines when I was little: a smiling girl pictured with her arm around Nik Kershaw, a boy with acne standing side by side with Nena at a gas station outside Köln, two girls, one on each side of Lionel Richie in Spain. Pictures people send in to *Topp*, *Smash Hits*, or *Okay*. And here too was Yngve, with Simon Le Bon, the lead singer of Duran Duran in 1984. Yngve had obviously met Le Bon in the middle of an ordinary work day, he didn't look at all like the star I remembered him to be. He seemed a little overweight and blotchy, and his clothes didn't really fit right.

“Oh, wow!” I said and slapped Yngve on the thigh. “Is that him? Is that really him?”

“Yeah! It was in Birmingham! We were on a ferry trip to England in '84, and, yeah, I just ran into him by chance at this mall, outside a clothing shop. It's true!”

“Oh, wow.” I said again. “That's great. That is really cool. 'Ole Duran Duran! What did you say, I mean, you just went up to him and said you were Yngve from Norway, like? 'Hallo! like?”

“Yeah!”

Yngve beamed when he told the story.

“Yeah, I did just that! I remember I just saw him there, he was with this woman, and I guess he was just standing in front of the store waiting for her, and I was there too with my mom and dad, it was the last day of the ferry trip, and we were already tired, and Dad was upset because we had stopped in Birmingham, which was an ugly British city he said, and we didn't know what to do with the little bit of pounds we had left so we went to this shopping mall, and then I just suddenly saw him, Simon Le Bon. So, I went up to him and said who I was. 'Hallo, I am Yngve. I come from Norway' or something like that. I asked him if I could take a picture of

him and me. Mom got all embarrassed, because she had to take the picture, I remember how she tried to apologize to Le Bon, something with ‘oh kids, you know’, as if he was this really important man, abashed over who he was.”

“And of course he wasn’t, right?” I said and laughed. “I bet he loved it!”

“Yeah, of course!”

“Oh my god,” I said and looked at the photo again. “That is really cool.”

“Yeah?”

In 1990 Jarle was long over his childhood’s fascination with bands like Duran Duran. This Jarle, who sat on the sofa with Yngve, hadn’t given a thought for any of those 80’s pop groups in many years (and if I had, it would have only been with cringes of disgust). So when I saw one of the premier representatives of that era, which I now considered to be music’s low water mark, nothing but brutally immoral capitalist decadence, glued into Yngve’s scrap book, I wasn’t sure how to tackle it.

“Duran Duran,” I said again. “God, I liked them too. Awesome.”

Yngve looked hesitantly at me. “Yeah... they are good, huh?”

I looked at him, and then I understood. This was not some funny, quirky incident he was recalling, showing off the photo, in order to tell a good story. He was sharing with pride that he had met a musician he still considered to be in his prime.

“Yeah, they are one of the few that have really lasted from that time.” I said quickly as to not disappoint him, but at the same moment I also began to believe it. Shouldn’t I listen to a little Duran Duran now and again? Had I actually even heard them in the last few years? Did I actually know what I was talking about when I said I didn’t like them?

“I mean,” I said while looking at the photo of Le Bon and Yngve, “you remember ‘New Moon on Monday’?”

Yngve didn’t exactly recall that song, and confused it with another of Duran’s hits, “New Religion.”

“I liked ‘The Reflex’ the best,” he said. “But that’s probably only because it was the first one I got. I got the single actually then when we were in Birmingham. Mom and Dad bought it for me right after we met him, at the same mall actually! We found it at a HMV. I know I have it here somewhere... it’s a yellow or beige color with lines on the side, and a concert photo on the back.”

I also remembered “The Reflex.” It had been one of my favorites as a kid, just like “The Wild Boys” and all the Mad Max movies.

My singles, I thought, those old singles of mine. While other 12 year olds spent their allowance money on comic books or baseball cards, I used mine to buy 7”s. I had a rather presentable collection of 7”s from the 80’s, and like many other kids I was victim of collecting, as they say if you have one you must have them all. I ended up having, what, ten, twelve, (even fifteen?) Duran Duran singles somewhere, as well as all the 7” of Frankie Goes to Hollywood, and somewhere else a picture disc of “Two Tribes”, I remember I was quite proud of that in 1984. I had a considerable collection of Depeche Mode singles too, a good deal of Madonna, and a pile of individual hit songs from the golden years: Mike Oldfield’s “Moonlight Shadow”, Alphaville’s “Forever Young”, Tear for Fears’ “Shout”, Nena’s “99 Luftballons” and an array of more or less miserable songs.

Or, were they so miserable?

In 1990 there were still many years before I could begin to reassess the 80's and see that a lot of it, for example Duran Duran, yeah, first and foremost Duran Duran, were actually pretty good, and had both a progressive and simple quality to it.

“ ‘The Reflex’, yeah.” I said. “ ‘flex-flex-flex’, that was it.”

“Look at me though,” Yngve said and pointed at the picture again. “I look so daft.”

I looked at the picture. Yngve didn't look daft. In fact, if there was anyone who looked like a prick, it was Le Bon.

“You look fine.” I said. “You look great.” I already had on the tip of my tongue other examples of popular music ready to talk about. I was in Yngve's world, and this consisted of a couple of cassettes he had gotten for Christmas and birthdays, a radio that stood in the background, and one grand old memory. One love. Duran Duran. I was in this world, as it was Yngve's. And he was sharing it with me.

Yngve shut the scrapbook.

“No, show me more.” I said.

“Nah,” he said and smiled. “It's pretty lame. You've seen it, me and music.”

He then rummaged around under his bed and pulled out an old shoebox. It was full of old cassettes: Pat Benatar, Dio, Twisted Sister, obviously he had gone through a little heavy metal period, Madonna, Prince, Bananarama. And then he found what he was looking for. He held it up and smiled. “Okay,” he said, “Let's see if it still plays.”

It was *Arena*, Duran Duran's live recording from 1984. It was the first time I had heard Duran Duran for four years. Dramatic, proud pop music with infectious, captivating refrains and euphonious synth. *Shall I enjoy this? Saxophone solo and everything?* Yngve sung weakly to the

refrain of “Planet Earth”, but he didn’t remember all of the words. To my own shock, I could remember them all. Yngve had a nice singing voice.

This here is nice, I thought. I went with it. When I got home later I found my old 7”s and played them covertly, keeping guard against accidentally leaving them out in the open. It would take a few years before I could understand what Yngve showed me that Sunday in 1990. That some things are good which fall outside of our individual taste.

“I play in a band too.” I said and regretted it the second I had spoken it. Was it necessary? Drag him into all that, something he hadn’t a clue of, something he could never be a part of?

Yngve smiled. “Oh, cool! What is it?”

“No, it’s just. We play, just, rock music, I guess. We’re called, um, the Mathias Rust Band.”

“What’s that?”

“Um, the Mathias Rust Band.” I repeated. “It’s like, um.”

Yngve interrupted me. “Are you all going to make a record?”

“No, or, yeah. I mean, sometime maybe.”

“Have you all played concerts?”

“No, not yet.” I said. “But soon, though.”

“Then I could come and see you all,” Yngve said smiling. “That is so cool,” he continued.

“No,” I said. “It’s nothing special, really.”

Reclining in my chair I noticed this poster that hung above Yngve’s bed. He, meanwhile, half lay, half sat up in his bed, with his long fingers under his chin, the whole time he had that particular smile on his lips.

“What is that?” I asked, pointing at the poster.

Yngve stretched his neck around to see.

“Cheops Pyramid.”

“Hmm,” I said. “Cheops pyramid.”

“Yeah,”

“But, what for. I mean, why do you have it?”

Yngve shrugged his shoulders. “It’s just, I don’t know. I just like it. I like pyramids,” he added, and I could see that he was a tiny bit embarrassed that I had touched upon his private interest. Everyone has such things, I thought, especially boys. Those silly little things one becomes unintelligibly overtaken with in late childhood: cars, airplanes, or WWII. Or pyramids.

I tried to get him to feel comfortable. “That is really cool.” I said.

Yngve brightened up. “Yeah, you think?”

So then he told me all about Cheops pyramid. He sat right up in his bed and began to narrate. He took out several books about pyramids from his little book shelf, and asked me to come closer to see as he pointed and explained.

Had it been anyone other than Yngve I wouldn’t have cared less. I had surely seen such pictures before. It wasn’t that it wasn’t interesting, I just didn’t find it relevant, not for today’s political situation, and not for my alternative interests. And if I hadn’t discovered something myself, (and that was something I always hated, not being the first one to discover something that was worth caring about), then it wasn’t something I could necessarily get myself to care about. But this was coming from Yngve.

“There are many pyramids in Egypt, of course. But Cheops pyramid is like the main, chief pyramid,” he said. “It comes from the 4th dynasty, was probably build around 2550 years

before Christ. It was originally 146.5 meters high, but now it's only like 136," he said and looked almost sad that it had sunk to the height it was now. "And think," said Yngve and looked straight at me, "it was built from around 2.3 million stone blocks. Can you imagine that? 2.3 million! With a weight of 2.6 tons! Can you imagine it?"

Yngve glowed when he spoke.

I was suddenly just as captivated as he, realizing just how unbelievable that many stones it actually was.

"No," I said looking him in the eyes. "I cannot imagine."

"No, yeah? And it was built in 23 year, with around 100,000 men. I just don't get it."

I was under a spell the entire time Yngve spoke of "Eternity's house", as he called the pyramid. "You know they were trying to conquer death?" he said as he began to put his books back into the shelf.

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"Yngve?"

We both sat up. His mother came in carrying a coffee pot on a tray with two cups. She stopped in the doorway, cast an urgent glance at the Egypt books which lay on the bed and gave Yngve a look. He turned his eyes to the floor.

"Everything going alright, Yngve?"

"Fine, Mom," he said.

She looked relieved. What was she afraid of? She set the tray on the desk.

"Good," she said and smiled.

There seemed to be something a little strange, the way they spoke. But I didn't think much of it at the time. Yngve nodded towards the door as she closed it behind her. I took a sip of the coffee.

"What do you mean?" I repeated.

"Hmm?"

"No, I mean, about Enternity's House and all that."

Yngve came back into focus. It was as if someone dragged him into the light he wished to be in. He returned his gaze back to me and spoke:

"The Egyptians, you know, they couldn't handle death. Pyramids were a shelter from it. They embalmed themselves, you know, in order to live forever. And they made all those temples, mastabas, sacrifices. Imagine, to live your whole life, everything you do, preparing for death. You build your own tomb, and, and, I just don't get it," he sighed dreamily.

"But it's really cool, yeah?"

"Hmm," I said, just as astonished over Yngve as he was over the Egyptians.

Who are you, Yngve?

"I think I probably wanna be an Egyptologist," he said, as if the idea had just occurred to him. "There is something called that. Eypthology. It's when someone works only on ancient Egypt. I would like that."

Again I whispered, "Oh."

Who are you?

Then I put my hand on his thigh.

I looked at him in the eyes, and I kept my right hand still. I felt his muscles stiffen under my palm, and his smile disappeared.

It was only for a few seconds. His thigh under my fingers, outstretched and tense over his muscles and tendons. I shut my mouth, felt a knot in my stomach, and a throb in my groin.

And then it happened. It was as if Yngve disappeared. There was no expression on his face. His eyes casted over, as if he had gone away on a long trip, a trip that crossed time, mountains, and rivers, and completely swept him away.

Then I took my hand away. It was over. Whatever had happened was over. But I got the feeling that whatever that was, was essential to Yngve; as if wherever that trip was to, was the real Yngve. He simply wasn't here any longer. His body was still beside me, but Yngve was no longer here. I remember I intuitively understood this: Yngve isn't here and I must get him back.

Yngve smiled again and stood up.

I got up too and felt it was time to leave. I won't press this, I thought. I don't want to ruin this. I'll go home, I shall leave this here for today, I'll get on my bike and I shall go home.

"Egypt," I whispered.

He nodded. "Yeah, that'll be my thing. And you then?"

I shook my head. "No, I don't know. I'll... study something, I guess."

I got my raincoat and we said good-bye to one another in the hallway. He opened the door for me, and said it was unbelievably cool that I had dropped by. "I would never have dared to do that," he said. "I mean, if it were I who had barely talked to the new kid in school."

"Ah," I said and I remember I blushed. "You go back to Simon Le Bon, then."

Yngve laughed. "I'm not twelve years old anymore."

Yngve's mother came out to say good-bye too. I could just detect his father, "Steinar", still in the living room. I was glad he hadn't come out to say good-bye.

Can I hug him now? I thought, and felt how strongly I wished to feel Yngve's skin against mine.

"Well, see you then," he said.

I smiled and walked away. The rain fell sharply against my neck as I kneeled over to unlock my bike.

Can he see me here, standing in the rain?

Do you see me, Yngve?

"Are you going to your dad's now then?" I heard his voice behind me.

I turned around.

"Oh, um, no. I'm just gonna go home, I think."

"Yngve! Are we going to watch the Thorstvedt match or what?" I heard his father call from inside the house.

"Yeah, just a second," he called back. He looked back at me. "Are you going to watch?"

"What's that?"

"Thorstvedt," he said, as if it were obvious. "The match, Tottenham versus Arsenal."

"Oh right. I don't know, maybe."

Yngve smiled at me.

I rode my bike in the rain back through Tjensvoll. I was completely soaked but hardly even noticed.

Football. Tennis. Egypt. A whole new world.

When I passed Wilberg street, it genuinely occurred to me for the first time and it terrified me: *I'm in love. With Yngve. A boy.*

My head snapped up and the rain got in my eyes. I was getting wetter and wetter, and I remembered I had left my gloves at Yngve's house and I started thinking how he would come up to me at school on Monday and give them to me, revealing for Helge and Katrine what I had actually done on Sunday, gone to visit him, the one I was in love with. I pushed on the pedals with all my might, sweat ran down despite the cold, and I felt completely miserable. What the fuck is this? What in the fucking hell sort of sick shit is this? What are riding your bike for, you fool, you faggot, you disgusting idiot, who the fuck do you think you are? I was raging. Tennis? Football? Egypt? Control yourself, Jarle. Fucking mind yourself! Yngve is a loser.

Fucking, fucking, Yngve. Goddamned forsaken Yngve.

But right when I got home and walked through our front door, it was over. I began to calm down. I tried to smile. For goodness's sake, I told myself, you have a new friend, that's all. You've met someone new you think is cool. What is there to panic about?

In the kitchen I saw a note from Mom. It said she was going to the movies with Ragnhild and would be home late.

I called Helge.

"Where the hell have you been all day?" he asked. "Wanna do something later, or?"

"Yeah, of course." I said. "A show, or something. There's gotta be something going on."

"Okay, cool," he said. "Have you been shopping?"

He was referring to beer, of course. I had to admit that I had forgotten, and I told him I had been up to my neck working at my dad's all day long. Helge laughed and said that I should have snatched some liquor from my dad's cabinet while I was there. I laughed too.

"Fine, fine," he said. "Only I've been the one getting the beer for the last four times now. But, fine, no problemo."

I called Katrine right after. I longed to hear her voice. I felt it all over me, how much I needed to see her, to take her. And I told her that. It felt like it had been ages. “Damn, Katri” I said. “I need to see you tonight. Do you want to come out?” She was smiling brightly now, I could hear it.

“Yeah, of course,” she said. “Mamma and papa are away. We can come here. Of course I want to see you.”

It was a hell of an evening, but it was just what I needed to be the old Jarle again. It would become a rhythm for me during that time, shifting between the old and new Jarle, going from the one to the other and back again without warning. At first it rarely caused problems, I was unbelievably good at it, like that evening. Unyielding in my partying, we made the rounds to all the usual places, ending up at the Folken. We moshed like crazy to Bever, Sild Krokodill and the Saltpastill, and Helvetes Forgård, and all the bands gave everything they had that night. The singer of Sild Krokodill came out on stage wearing a mailbag, and they played “Runkesangen” and we screamed along. The bassist of Bever bashed the microphone into the head of the singer while he sang “Pieces of our Face” and he bled like a pig from his forehead before leaping off the stage to get toilet paper for his head, which he wore for the remainder of the set. Then Helvetes Forgård came on. I stagedived into the sea of people beneath me and Helge and I decided what the hell did we need with foreign bands when we had this insane Oslo shit right here? And we promised each other in our concert bliss and drunkenness that now it was time for our band to make its grand debut. “We can do this, easy!” yelled Helge. “Yeah!” I screamed back, trying to make myself heard over the music. Afterwards we went to a party where there seemed to be an inordinate amount of people vomiting, and then finally Katrine and I went home and I fucked her like never before. First, a little awkwardly against the bathroom wall, then on

the living room floor before we finished on her parents bed. Later in the night she sucked me off, I felt her hair tickling my stomach while her tongue and lips caressed me, and I laid my fingers on her cheeks. I loved her that night. And that is true. I loved her that night, with power from Yngve.

After, we laid draped over one another, breathless and joyful, and listened to “Perfect Day”.

I blew the smoke from my cigarette up towards the ceiling and turned my head towards Katrine.

“Katri?”

She looked up at me.

“What if we,” I paused. “Okay, you’re probably gonna think this sounds a little weird, but...”

“What is it?”

“What if we started playing tennis?”

Katrine sat up. She looked amused. “Tennis. You want to play tennis?”

“Yeah,” I said, but hesitated a little, “well, yeah, I mean we just sit around at cafés all day and like, go to the Folken, Ankeret, and back to the Folken, and then the Ankeret, and then it’s like, ‘oh here’s an idea, let’s go to the Folken!’ You know what I mean?”

“And is Helge going with you? You can’t really believe that Helge’s gonna go along with that, right?”

I shrugged. “It’s just an idea. If you think it’s stupid,”

Katrine immediately gave me a hug. “I think it suits you,” she said and smiled.

“What do you mean, suits me?”

“Just the way you can be so unexpected. But I think it’s great. I’m with you.”

Katrine had always wished that we would do something. Do something. It had been her biggest complaint in our precocious relationship. We never do anything, she used to say. So I knew what I was doing when I brought tennis up that night. It was practically her idea, after all. It couldn’t go wrong.

“Jarle,” Katrine murmured, languidly rubbing against me.

“Hmm?”

She brushed her fingers over my face, “do you think it will be us,” she began, “I mean, forever?”

I looked at her. Her eyes were beaming with her love for me, and mine reflected it back.

“Yes,” I said.

Katrine put her hand against her neck and clutched the necklace I had given her after our first month of dating.

“Yeah, I think so too,” she said with tears in her eyes.

The Monday after, I bought not only a world map, but two tennis rackets, one for me and one for Katrine. I didn’t mind paying for hers. The benefit of having divorced parents, and a father who feels guilty for never having been around, is that one can always get extra money. I had called Papa on Sunday evening.

“Papa? I’m gonna start playing tennis.”

He didn’t have a chance.

“Tennis?” Papa cleared his throat. He suddenly sounded austere. I felt a sink in my stomach.

“So what do you think?” I asked.

“Tennis, you say?”

But it went well. I talked to him for five more minutes and afterwards Papa agreed to give me a thousand kroner.

Papa was pressed into a corner when it came to such conversations, and he knew it. I knew it also, that he was programmed into thinking that sports were admirable character-building enterprises, and he wouldn't be able to refuse sponsoring such an endeavor. And I knew that he had probably been out the night before, as he hadn't had a visit from his only son that weekend, and even if it was me that had cancelled he would feel guilty for all the other times he had cancelled and would feel he owed me something. I had control.

Helge was, as expected, skeptical when I presented my idea during the first break on Monday. He looked at me, “Tennis?!?! In the name of God, tennis? What, have you gotten scurvy, what in the hell is up with you? I don't get it, Jarle. I really don't. You going to join the local country club too now or what?”

“Yeah, maybe, why not?” I replied.

“This is fucked up,” he said. “Plain and simple”.

Katrine laughed. “You're just jealous, Helge. That's all. You can't stand it when anybody else has an original thought, and you just stand there eating your own shit.”

“Me? Me? *Helge Ombo*?” he yelled defensively. “Tennis! God, you all are so bourgeois! What's next, fucking golf? And you're asking me? What in hell made you think that I would ever even go near a tennis court?”

Katrine shook her head with pity in her eyes. “You're so cute when you're angry, Helge.”

“Oh shut that oil-happy yuppie mouth of yours, Katrine.”

Everything is going my way, I thought. Helge's sour, but he always is, Katrine's in love with me, Mamma's happy, Papa has money, Yngve is beautiful, and I'll get to see him every day. Yes, everything is going my way.

Felicitous fortune does not live long. It is only meager, and often is long before destined, so it doesn't know its own short life. It's just luck.

I was in love, and there isn't anything stronger than that.