

Extracts from

Oskar and Me, and All the Things We Have

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The Fishing Rod, or, When Granny Did a Cannonball

‘This year in the summer holidays I’m going with Ida to stay at Granny and Grandpa’s place,’ Oskar said one day. We were in our red house, sitting around the dining table, eating taco soup. It was raining outside, and there was nothing at all that might remind us of summer.

‘Ehm...,’ said Mum, looking at Dad.

‘Uhm...,’ said Dad, looking at Mum.

‘Really?’ I said, looking at Oskar.

‘Yes,’ said Oskar. ‘Because I’ve started school too now.’

And he wasn’t wrong. In fact, it would soon be a whole year since Oskar started going to school. He’d certainly given it his best effort, even though there was the occasional bit of chaos. It’s not every pupil at school who suddenly has to be fetched down from the school roof or fished out of the stream. But that’s how it is with Oskar. He’s also managed to lock himself in the toilet a couple of times, and the janitor had to come with his screwdriver. And then there were those few weeks with the substitute teacher, which we’d all rather forget about.

‘Oskar certainly keeps things spirited,’ the headteacher told Mum one day when we met her in the shop.

I thought that was a good way of putting it.

‘We thought you could go along to the holiday club at school until we can all go on holiday together,’ said Dad.

Oskar was shocked.

‘Holiday club? I’m going to Granny and Grandpa’s. Just like Ida normally does.’

I looked across at Mum and Dad.

The last three summers in a row, I'd been allowed to go and stay on my own with Granny and Grandpa for a week at the end of June. It was like my own private holiday. Oskar, who was still at nursery before, was dead jealous.

'No, Oskar,' Mum told him. 'You're going to holiday club. Granny and Grandpa are beginning to get old. It's too tricky for them if they have to look after two children.'

That's not true, I thought. If they had to look after two of me, it would've been completely fine. Nobody has ever had to fetch me down from the roof at school or out of the stream. And I don't know the headteacher half as well as Oskar does, even though I'd been going to school for almost four years by then.

It's because Oskar is Oskar. That's why Mum and Dad were saying this.

Suddenly I felt annoyed with them. Poor Oskar had been working hard at school every blinking day for a whole year, so why shouldn't he get to go on a summer holiday like other people?

'Let's both go to Granny and Grandpa's,' I said.

I later regretted a little bit saying that. But what's done is done, and Granny and Grandpa were in perfect agreement. Of course Oskar could come to their place on holiday too, now that he was going to school.

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I've told Oskar a lot about my holidays and especially the fishing trips with Grandpa. He's got a little plastic boat with no roof, and we row out onto the fjord in it. We eat bread rolls with special brown cheese that Granny makes for us, and we have a lovely, peaceful time. We do some fishing too, although I actually think Grandpa likes it best when we don't catch any fish. Still, he's got a very professional fishing rod that he was given by Uncle Aksel, and which Grandpa says 'must be worth more than the boat'. I'm allowed to have a go with it while he drinks coffee from his thermos.

Oskar's fixated on that fishing rod. Is it really worth more than his entire boat? And might Grandpa's fishing lures be made of real silver? And does the rod always catch fish? He's been asking away, question after question, and I've been answering him, but he loves hearing about that fishing rod so much that I might have made it into something slightly more magical than it really is.

Anyway, it soon became clear that trying out the fishing rod was what Oskar was looking forward to most when he finally got to go on holiday there too.

'Do you think Grandpa will let me have a go with it?' Oskar asked.

'Yes,' I said. 'You're pretty good at fishing, after all.'

'I am, but Grandpa doesn't know that,' said Oskar.

'I can tell him,' I promised.

Mum and Dad were even less sure about Oskar going on holiday when they got wind of his fishing plans.

‘Grandpa will have even more to keep an eye on when you’re out in the middle of the fjord,’ they explained. ‘You’ll have to sit completely still, and do whatever he tells you.’

Oskar promised he would. He’d keep as still as a stick insect in the middle of the boat and listen to everything Grandpa said. No problem.

* * *

Finally the day came when we found ourselves standing outside Granny and Grandpa’s house, ready to say goodbye to Mum and Dad. Mum told Oskar one more time how he would have to behave on the boat, and Oskar promised to be good and listen. Cross his heart and hope to die, and all that.

‘The children are in the safest hands possible,’ Granny said, reassuring Mum and Dad. She put those safest hands of hers round us, and I could feel them warm and soft on the back of my neck.

‘You’d better be getting on now,’ Oskar said, wrapping things up. ‘Bye!’
Then they left.

As the car disappeared round the corner, Oskar tugged at Grandpa’s T-shirt.

‘Shall we go fishing now?’

Grandpa scratched his head for a moment and said that we’d have to wait until the day after. There was no desperate rush, after all.

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The next day, Granny came out of the bathroom wearing different clothes than usual. She had a check shirt and a strange pair of baggy trousers that made her stomach bulge out. She was wearing a cap too.

‘Are you coming with us out on the boat?’ I asked in astonishment.

‘Yes,’ said Granny. ‘That’s right.’

‘She’s going to look after me,’ said Oskar.

He was sitting at the breakfast table, wearing his life jacket. It was a brand-new and extremely orange jacket that Granny and Grandpa had bought so that Oskar would be in the safest hands. His head only just poked out far enough that he could still stick in his bread and jam. He was sparkling with excitement.

‘Grandpa, do you think we’ll catch a shark?’ he asked.

Grandpa looked at me and didn’t answer. He was probably realising that his fishing trips were going to be a bit different this summer.

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‘Oooo, golly gosh!’ said Granny as she stepped into the boat and it all rocked.

‘Sit down,’ Grandpa told her sternly.

‘Yes, yes, I’m trying to,’ she replied, sitting down with another little ‘oooooo’. She sat down a little to one side, so the boat ended up all wonky.

‘Come on, Oskar,’ she said, waving to him. ‘We can sit here at the back.’

‘Yup,’ said Oskar, wading out, sending the seawater sloshing up over the top of his boots.

Granny thinks it's important we don't get our feet wet, so this was hardly a good start. 'I'll pop back home and fetch some dry socks,' she said, getting half-way up.

'Sit back down, Målfrid!' said Grandpa.

Granny listened and sat straight back down, making the boat rock so much that Oskar and I lost our balance and almost fell out onto the stony beach.

'Oooo dearie me, sorry,' Granny shouted. 'Are you alright?'

Grandpa sighed and told us all to sit on our bottoms.

'It's only German tourists who stand in their boats,' he said, pushing the boat away from the shore.

'Oh my,' Granny puffed, trying to make herself a bit more comfortable on the bench. 'Are we really putting to sea in this bathtub? With wet socks too,' she added unhappily, looking at Oskar.

If only she knew how wet we'd get before this trip was over.

Grandpa sat at the oars, and they creaked as he pulled them. The boat drifted ever so slowly over the swaying seaweed in the shallows.

'It's a bit heavier than usual,' he said, smiling.

Granny looked at him and pretended to be offended. She was wearing an even bigger life jacket than Oskar and graced the boat impressively with her grey curls fluttering at the sides of her cap and a basket full of bread rolls between her feet. I think Grandpa liked having her on board.

It was good to get out on the fjord. A faint breeze tickled my nose, but it was still lovely and warm. Oskar had taken off his boots and socks. He was sitting in the bottom of the boat, barefoot, studying the lures we would use to catch the fish.

'Am I allowed to have a go with that rod that's worth more than the whole boat now?' he asked when we'd rounded the breakwater.

Grandpa looked at him, perplexed.

'He means the one Uncle Aksel gave you,' I explained, nodding in its general direction. It was with the other rods, and they all looked quite alike, really.

'We've got to go a bit further out first,' said Grandpa, sweating as he rowed.

'Are we far enough now?' Oskar asked after two more strokes of the oars.

'A bit further still,' said Grandpa.

'How about now?'

Grandpa sighed and said that it would probably do, and that we might as well do a bit of fishing. But not with that rod. Oskar was too little, so he'd brought one that would fit him better. I saw Oskar's heart sink under that life jacket.

'Oskar's actually pretty good at fishing,' I told Grandpa, as I'd promised to.

'Please!' Oskar pleaded. 'I'll be really careful.'

'Come on, let the boy have a go,' said Granny.

Grandpa gave in but said he'd have to demonstrate first, so Oskar could see how to cast with it.

Oskar was quivering with anticipation in his life jacket as Grandpa picked up the rod.

'Is the lure made of real silver?' he whispered.

‘It’s a type called a Jensen Pirken, if I’m not mistaken,’ said Grandpa, squinting. ‘Here we go.’

Although Grandpa had just said that it’s only German tourists who stand up in their boats, he got up until his whole thin and bony figure was standing tall above us. Now he’d show us how to do a long cast with a fancy and expensive pole like this one. He stretched back. Oskar leant a tiny bit over the side of the boat to get a better look, but that was enough for Granny’s alarm bells to start ringing. She got up half-way with another ‘oooo, golly gosh’, and grabbed the belt of his life jacket. But when Granny got up, the boat wobbled, completely throwing Grandpa off balance just as he was about to cast the lure. So instead of just casting the line and the lure, as you’re supposed to do when you go fishing, he threw out the whole fishing rod too. It shot out of his hands, flew in a perfect arc through the summer sky, and dove down into the water a few metres away from the boat. Then it sank into the deep and vanished.

Oskar’s face went all white.

‘Oh no!’ he shouted. ‘I’ll fish it out, Grandpa!’

Before any of us could twig what that might mean, Oskar leapt into the sea.

I’ve grown quite used to Oskar doing things like that. He doesn’t exactly wait around when working out what to do. But Granny and Grandpa aren’t so used to it. As Oskar landed in the water like a little orange ball, Granny screamed in horror. That boy, who was supposed to be in the safest hands possible, had fallen in the sea!

She got up and I watched while, unlike Oskar, she took a couple of seconds working out what to do, but she ended up doing exactly the same as him anyway. She braced herself and leapt overboard. Our big old Granny flew through the air and made a splash like no other I’ve ever seen. Both Grandpa and I got our faces sprayed with water. The minor tsunami washed over Oskar too, who was like a giant rubber duck in his new life jacket. He couldn’t get his head underwater, no matter how much he tried.

Oskar was stunned and rubbed his eyes as he watched Granny splashing towards him with her hair all flattened down.

‘I didn’t know you could do cannonballs!’ he said, clearly impressed.

‘Oskar,’ Granny panted, ‘Oskar, Oskar, Oskar! Get back on the boat straight away.’

‘But the fishing rod!’ Oskar whimpered, trying again to dive down, unsuccessfully.

Granny said that you could always buy a new fishing rod, but there was nowhere in the universe you could get a new Oskar.

‘Get on the boat right now!’

* * *

It fell to Grandpa and me to organise the rescue operation. It was one thing to fish out Oskar, who scrambled back aboard more or less by himself. Grandpa only had to hold one of the straps on his life jacket. But Granny was another story. Every time she almost made it over the side, the boat rocked so much that she let go. Grandpa tried to reassure her that the boat wasn’t going to capsize, but Granny didn’t believe that for a second, she said. I didn’t believe it either, to be honest.

‘Målfrid, dear, we can’t just leave you bobbing around here,’ Grandpa said in despair.
‘Come on, now.’

But Granny wouldn’t budge. She didn’t want to put any other lives in danger than her own.

‘Well, Granny,’ Oskar said quite seriously, ‘we’ll just have to tow you.’
So that’s what we did.

* * *

That afternoon, Granny and Grandpa needed to take a nap for almost three hours before they came back to their senses. Even though we’d attached a rope to Granny, she’d spent all her energy swimming as she tried to help make it easier to row the boat. But it was still hard. Grandpa had to put all his strength into pulling the oars. When we finally reached the sandy shallows by the shore, Granny and Grandpa were both totally exhausted.

‘Was it a week you said they’re staying?’ Grandpa asked Granny when he thought we were out of earshot.

Granny gasped for breath as she wrung out her check shirt.

‘A week and one day,’ Oskar answered before she could.

Then he turned to me and whispered: ‘Let’s go on the boat without them tomorrow, Ida. Going with those two is far too dangerous.’

The Bicycle, or, The Most Beautiful Feather in the World

The week after my tenth birthday, the present from Mum and Dad came. It was a new bike! It was orange and blue with eight gears that made satisfying clicking noises when I changed them.

‘You’re so lucky, Ida. You’re as lucky as a millionaire,’ said Oskar, kneeling down to look at the gears.

‘Well, you’re getting a new bike today too, Oskar,’ said Dad. ‘Now Ida’s old bike is going to be yours.’

I felt the tiniest of twinges in my stomach.

‘Is Ida’s bike mine?’ asked Oskar.

‘Yes,’ replied Mum.

‘All mine?’ he asked again. ‘Not Ida’s at all?’

I was about to say that bike would always be a little bit mine, since it was me who had it first and who had become quite fond of it too. But no.

Dad nodded. ‘All yours.’

The first thing Oskar did was to pick off the sticker that said ‘Ida’. I could understand that. But the next thing he wanted to do was to spray the bike light purple. I was pretty sure that my old bike wouldn’t like that.

‘It’ll be ugly,’ I said.

‘It’ll be cool,’ said Oskar. ‘And it’s my bike.’

Soon my old, green bike was bedecked in a shocking mauve colour. There were mauve spots on the saddle and the parking space and all over Oskar too.

No sooner had the paint dried than Oskar went to fetch the collection of feathers he keeps in the basement. Oskar never leaves a feather untouched if he spots one. And now they would finally come in handy. Mum gave him some wire, and he must have sat there for two hours tying them on.

‘Why are you doing that?’ I asked.

‘I’ll go faster with feathers on. It’ll be like flying,’ said Oskar.

The whole rear rack on the bike was covered with feathers from crows, seagulls, and geese, all jumbled together.

‘It looks like the backside of a chicken,’ I noted.

‘The backside of a *purple* chicken,’ Oskar said, happily correcting me. ‘With disco lights,’ he added before pressing some buttons.

Red lights started flashing among the down and feathers. It was almost so much that I had to close my eyes. He’d taken the rear lights from our other bikes and put them all on his.

The last thing Oskar did was to attach a piece of card to the wheel with clothes pegs. To begin with the card just dropped off, but then Oskar got some help, first from Dad and then from Edvard Lien, that man from over at the new houses. He was out for a walk, and he once had a bit of card like that on his bike when he was little, so he knew exactly how to put it on. The card made a noise when Oskar rode along that sounded like an engine.

‘I saw it on YouTube,’ said Oskar. ‘Cool, don’t you think?’

'You're not allowed to watch YouTube,' I muttered.

Then I swung up onto my new blue and orange bike and changed the gears a couple of times right there at the parking space. There was no looking back.

I was tingling at the thought of riding it to school and showing everybody!

* * *

The next day, the straps on my bag flapped about as I shot down the big hill. Oskar followed on behind, with his moped noise at full pelt, sticking his legs out. I turned by the field and felt proud as I pedalled hard along the track and over the bridge. Naia-Maj and Arvid were waiting over by the new houses.

Naia-Maj's got a glittery bike with six gears. Arvid's got eighteen, but only two of them work, because his bike was passed down to him by three cousins and a half-brother. The gears have sort of frozen a bit, but Arvid doesn't mind. He says two gears are enough.

I braked in front of them and grinned. Naia-Maj saw my bike and was about to say something, but then she and Arvid heard the sound of a cardboard motor.

'What's that?' Naia-Maj asked.

She stared at Oskar's bike, her eyes wide.

'I've blinged it up,' said Oskar, as proud as a peacock.

'Cool,' said Arvid.

Neither Arvid nor Naia-Maj congratulated me on my new bike. They were just totally transfixed by Oskar's purple heap.

* * *

It was the same story at school. Oskar and his bike were the centre of attention. Even the eldest children came to see and thought that feathery monstrosity of his was 'lit'.

But it was just my old bike! It had stood in the bike rack at school every blinking day for years without anybody ever looking at it. And now I had my shiny new bike, with its bigger tyres and gears and all, but nobody was looking at that either. It was as if both the bike and I were invisible. I looked angrily at Oskar, surrounded by all those people. *That little twerp*, I thought, and I felt my heart beating away furiously.

When it was time to go home, I cycled as fast as I could while talking with Naia-Maj and Arvid so that they kept up. Now we were big enough to have bikes with gears, we raced along the road. Still Oskar managed to keep up too. He was pedalling fast, and the feathers flew around him back there. I just couldn't shake him off.

By the time we'd said goodbye to Naia-Maj at the big house where she lives and Arvid at his track, Oskar's face was boiling. I felt full of rage as I looked at him, then I decided to put in a mega-spurt.

I stood on the pedals and pumped away across the field until my legs felt stiff. Eventually that annoying motorbike noise faded away behind me. At the bottom of the steep hill, I changed down into first gear with a gorgeous click and whooshed all the way up the hill.

* * *

I'd already got out my maths book and put it on the kitchen table by the time I heard Oskar out in the corridor. Mum was making fishcakes and checking her e-mail. She jumped when she heard Oskar's helmet thud on the floor.

'Hi, Oskar. Have you had a good...'

'No!' Oskar roared.

His hair was sticking up, full of sweat and fury.

'I need a bike with gears NOW!'

I bent down over my maths jotter and felt a mean kind of delight inside me.

'There's not a six-year-old in the world who needs a bike with gears,' said Mum.

'Six-year-olds who live at the top of a hill do,' Oskar shouted.

Mum didn't think so. Oskar had a super bike that was just the right size, or even a little bit too big for him. And now it was smart and purple and covered in feathers.

'It'll be fine for another year, Oskar.'

When Mum mentioned another year, she made it sound like she was talking about next Wednesday. I glanced at Oskar.

'Aaargh!' he fumed, with tears of rage gushing out of his eyes.

He slammed the kitchen door so hard that my eardrums almost burst.

'Ida, can't you wait for him when you get to the hill?' Mum pleaded.

'Huh?' I blurted back. 'What's the point of having a new bike if I'm just supposed to push it up the hills like I used to?'

* * *

The next day I was playing football on the mini-pitch when I heard some shouting from over where we park our bikes. It was probably Oskar showing off again, I thought angrily. I was in goal and trying to concentrate on the match, but before long several of the players started craning their necks to try and see what was going on.

Suddenly, Naia-Maj came sprinting across with her jacket open.

'Ida, come quickly!'

She grabbed my arm and pulled me with her. Naia-Maj was speaking so fast that I could barely catch half of what she was saying, but then I made out something about Oskar and one of the older boys.

'Huh?' I said, pulling my arm free.

'Yes, Aleksander. Oskar's beaten up Aleksander. There's BLOOD,' Naia-Maj shouted in a piercing voice.

'Now all the older boys are saying that they're going to kill Oskar. Come on!'

Naia-Maj caught hold of my arm again, but I was frozen to the spot. Had Oskar got into a fight with Aleksander? Was there really blood?

I could neither breathe nor move. I felt a worried lump in my stomach that just grew and grew. Aleksander's in Year Six and teases other people in the worst way imaginable. He

tries to be cool while he's teasing other people, so that everybody else laughs, except whoever's being teased. It's as if the air were thinner whenever he's around. I never say anything when Aleksander's there. I make myself completely invisible. We were in the same group for the whole Christmas craft workshop last year, but I managed to make sure Aleksander didn't even notice I was there. When we made gingerbread biscuits, he and two others made gingerbread men with huge private parts and were almost killing themselves laughing until the teacher came. Then when we made candles, Aleksander spent the whole time bleating, because there was a girl in front of him who's got sheep at home. That's the kind of thing he does.

I looked with dread at the crowd over by the bike rack. What on earth had Oskar done?

Naia-Maj dragged me along. There were loads of children from every different year there, but no teachers. Eventually we made it to the bike rack. The purple chicken bike was knocked over, with almost all the feathers torn off. Aleksander was standing by the wall, his nose raised up in the air, with blood streaming down. He was even crying! Everybody was shouting and talking over each other, until eventually one of the staff, a playground supervisor, came over. She took Aleksander by the arm, looked up his nose, and asked him to come with her to the staff room.

'He just suddenly snapped!' one of the others from Year Six told her, and I thought he meant Aleksander, but then I realised he was talking about Oskar. 'He's totally insane!'

I felt a shiver up my spine and heard a ringing noise in my ears. Was everybody looking at me now? Oskar is my brother, after all. I started to shuffle backwards and was about to run off, but then I felt a little hand reaching out to mine. It was Heloise. She was biting the top of her jacket and looked very scared.

'Where's Oskar?' I whispered.

'He ran for his life. That way,' she said, pointing towards the woods.

Then she tugged gently at my hand.

'Ida?'

'Yes?'

'They were making fun of his bike.'

I looked at the chicken bike. Then I looked at the woods where I knew Oskar was. Then the bell rang.

* * *

I'd never before stayed out when the bell rang. Neither had Heloise, I think.

'You go. I'll find him,' I promised.

Heloise nodded. Then she smiled through her tears and ran off.

I had to look for a fair while, but eventually I heard some sniffing under a spruce tree just outside the school grounds. Oskar had curled up into a little ball and was hiding there.

'Is Aleksander dead?' he asked, terrified, when he saw me.

'No, but there was quite a lot of blood...'

Oskar winced.

'Did you hit him? I asked. I thought it was pretty hard to believe.

'Yes. With a bicycle pump,' said Oskar.

'You hit him with a bicycle pump?' I gasped.

Punching somebody is bad enough, but hitting people with bicycle pumps means using a weapon. What would Mum and Dad say?

'I was just going to hit him on the shoulder,' said Oskar. 'But then the pump handle shot out and got really long just as I was hitting him, and then...'

Oskar started crying just like when he was little. He wailed as he told me that Aleksander had been making fun of him. He'd just been joking to start with, and Oskar had laughed, but then Aleksander started plucking feathers from the bike and making bird noises. He'd wrecked the piece of card that made the motorbike noise as well.

'That was really hard to put on, too!' Oskar sobbed. 'You remember? Even Edvard Lien had to come and help.'

I nodded.

'And then he took the bike and started riding it around, pretending to be a chicken, and he wouldn't stop even when I told him to stop. Everybody just thought he was funny and laughed. Then I took Rafael's bicycle pump and just...'

'Hit him?' I suggested.

Oskar nodded.

If there's one thing we're pretty clear about in our family, it's that we don't hit people. But what do Mum and Dad know about people like Aleksander?

'They said they were going to kill me,' Oskar whispered.

'They were just saying it,' I told him.

The worried lump in my stomach began to change. It was as if it grew spikes. What kind of lowlifes would attack somebody in Year Two like that?

I don't know if I've ever hated anyone before. Mum and Dad are quite clear about that too. Hating and hitting are things we don't do. But there I was with Oskar, feeling a sizzling hatred for Aleksander. For Aleksander and for all those mean ones from his class who laugh at people and make the air go thin and think they're cool, while they're really the opposite.

Making fun of somebody as small as Oskar is actually such loser behaviour that it's enough to make me puke. We've got seven classes at primary school in Norway, and nobody in Year Seven would tell a Year Two that they're going to kill him. After all, Year Sevens are genuinely a bit cool. Year Sixes are just trying. What a bunch of dimwits. And to think I'd be that age next year. I shuddered.

'Do you think my fingerprints will be on the pump?' Oskar asked, wiping away his snot and tears with the sleeve of his jumper.

'Oskar, half the school saw you hit him.'

'But do you think they're going to kill me?' he asked again.

I shook my head. No, they weren't going to kill him. Definitely not.

'Come along,' I said.

On the way back to school, Oskar found a feather. It wasn't from a crow or a seagull or anything else we'd seen before. It was long and with a pattern on it. Oskar stared at it, mesmerised.

* * *

Therese, Oskar's teacher, thought it might be a tail feather from a female hawk. She knows almost everything about nature. She's not bad at sorting out Year Sixes either. I heard it with my own ears, as I refused to leave Oskar's side.

Even when Aleksander and his teacher came into the staff room to talk with Oskar and Therese, I still didn't leave. Although Therese said several times that they'd sort it out, and that I should go back to my classroom, I just shook my head and stood there. I kept on standing there, and I don't know how I dared, but there was no way I was going to leave Oskar. Eventually they gave up, so I was allowed to stay there while they sorted it out.

Aleksander's nose was all swollen, and he didn't even look at me, but it wasn't like at the Christmas craft workshop this time. Now he was the one who wished he was invisible. He said sorry to Oskar for messing around with his bike, but he just mumbled it and didn't look up. Oskar also said sorry, but he did so loud and clear and even shook Aleksander's hand. *Just like Mum taught us*, I thought proudly.

As we were leaving the staff room, Therese put her hand on my shoulder and held me back. I thought I was going to get in trouble for not having left when she told me to, and I could feel my stomach tightening again.

'You know, Ida?' she said. 'I wish I had a sister like you.'

I stared at her, flabbergasted.

'Really?'

'Yes, really,' said Therese, smiling a little. 'Now, off you go,' she said, giving me a little push on my way.

* * *

Arvid, Naia-Maj, Oskar and I cycled home from school quite calmly that day. Oskar had put his new feather in his helmet. It was sticking straight up, majestic and tall.

'Are you going to tie that feather on your bike?' Arvid asked him.

Oskar shook his head. For once he was pretty quiet. His bike was pretty quiet too, now that Aleksander had wrecked his bit of card.

* * *

When we got to the hill on the way home, I jumped off my bike and pushed it, walking up the hill with Oskar just like we always used to. My legs were exhausted. It was as if my whole body had turned to jelly after such an awful day. But I could feel something soft and warm buzzing inside me, and it felt like it shone out all the way to my fingertips. It was what Therese had told me.

At the top of the hill, Oskar stopped and took the feather out of his helmet. He studied it carefully. It changed colour in the light as he turned it. It really was a spectacular feather. Almost magical.

‘This is for you, Ida,’ he said.

Then Oskar took the most beautiful feather he had ever found and gave it to me.