From *Being Grown-Up*

(*Til de voksne*)

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**Introduction**

**Dear grown-ups**

While working on this book I imagined myself standing on an endless ladder stretching far out into space. There I stood, high above Norway with the world’s best and sharpest binoculars, looking down on the entire country through the windows of apartment buildings and the doors of holiday homes, into cellars and at parties, into bars and bedrooms during summer days and winter nights – and into the hearts and souls of the nation’s grown-ups.

Being grown-up sounds so easy. A grown-up is capable of most things, doesn’t need to ask for much, has lived through and survived their teenage years, can take care of others and themselves – and can answer questions, and knows how to do things like light a barbecue.

But I, for example, have no idea how to light a barbecue. In fact I can’t even operate an induction stove, and every now and then I feel like the world’s biggest baby with club hands and a brain that isn’t yet fully developed – but I’m grown-up. Grown-up and in middle age. I know that from how old I am. And this is precisely why it’s been so exciting to go beneath the surface through writing this book – to first find people through my binoculars, and then study them and see whether they’re really as grown-up as they appear to be. To see whether they are grown-ups at all, in fact – to simply poke around in and examine their grown-up-ness. And my own.

I have interviewed, observed, remembered and invented grown-ups. And all these grown-ups, these people in middle age, these ‘growing’ individuals, as I would rather call them, are not fully grown, even though it might seem that way. They are not done living, not fully drawn – even though many of them may feel that way. Sometimes. Many of us are still first drafts – luckily enough.

Some people are satisfied living their middle-aged lives, while others would rather be elsewhere in another time, and were happier with what once was, and perhaps think that this middle-aged period is actually just an entrance, a gateway to old age – which sounds even scarier than middle age.

I think that this period of life, the transition from young to old, is reminiscent of a day at the beach. You know, the kind of day when you’re lying on a beach in a foreign, boiling-hot country, and there’s sand everywhere – between your toes, in your eyelashes, on your back, in your shorts, in your soul, and all over the sweaty beach towel you’re lying on. The air is piercingly bright and you squint, and everything stings and everything itches, and you’re thirsty, but the can of Coke you’ve stuck into the stand beneath the sun lounger is warm, and there’s sand on both the outside and inside of the can, and there’s sand both on the outside and inside of you. And all around you people are shouting out to each other and asking one another to pass the factor 20 – ‘No, not that one, the other one – the blue one, the Nivea, I think it’s in the bag’ – and all the mobile phones have to be left with someone, and something that’s in the bag needs to come out and then be put back again, and ‘Could you just try to move your sun lounger a little to the right so we can keep our heads in the shade?’, and you start to feel dizzy and the heat intensifies and the air buzzes – becomes tense – and you can’t bear to answer anyone or to smile, you’re almost in tears, and think ‘surely there has to be an end to all this’ – something has to change.

And that’s when it happens. As if by magic.

And everything that seemed so difficult, is over.

There’s no more scorching sun – it’s taken its leave for the day and withdrawn behind the mountains on the horizon. There’s no sand in your eyes, no hurry to move or to pass somebody something at once.

Afternoon has arrived at the beach, settling over it like a cool, thin blanket so we can breathe again and move again, more slowly.

Some people shake their towels, which are sandy and damp, and set them neatly and comfortably back on their sun loungers and tilt back their heads, closing their eyes and smiling. Others, two by two, are sitting on the ends of their sun loungers and chatting, cold drinks in their hands. Nobody has to fetch anything, pass anything, organise anything or catch the last of the sun’s rays. People with just the right amount of sand between their toes have accepted this just-right afternoon with a sense of pleasure and calm and a glass of Chablis.

Perhaps you’re also sitting on this beach as you’re reading this book? I hope we’ll see each other there one afternoon. Because it’s easier to be grown-up in the company of others.

Happy reading!

Linn Skåber

**To give birth to a man**

The man over there, walking towards security at Oslo airport, is grown-up. He’s wearing a hoodie and a cap and carrying a rucksack – he looks like a teenager, but he *is* grown-up.

 I know him well, and he knows me. Well. You can see it in his eyes when he turns and glances at me over his shoulder. And squints. Over his rucksack. He often squints. Has done it ever since he was little, even when there’s no sun. The man over there, walking towards security at Oslo airport, is my son.

 A grown man, walking towards security as Oslo airport, alone. And I whisper: ‘It’s cold in London in the evenings. It’s draughty – London is known for it. Remember to wear wool next to your skin.’ But he doesn’t hear me. Thank God.

 Thank God he doesn’t hear me. Thank God I said this embarrassing thing in a low voice – because it is embarrassing. A mother taking care of a grown man – it’s embarrassing, nagging, like a nagging wind at his neck. Mums are known for it. But he turns a little all the same, not all the way around to face me, but a little, and touches the back of his neck with a hand before he puts his MacBook in the box in front of him. And then he does it again – touches his neck – as if something is breathing down his collar. As if something nagging, caring and everlasting is breathing on him.

 He’s going to London to study. He’s going to live in a flatshare, and sleep in a bed with freshly bought sheets from a local store, perhaps, and use the shared kitchen to make coffee, and he’ll meet friends and go to the pub and sit on the grass outside the university and speak English, and after a while maybe even start thinking in English, and one night maybe he’ll hitchhike with friends, and later end up in fits of hysterics at an after party, and he’ll meet new people and maybe new girls.

 And he’s my son.

 Perhaps he’ll meet a special girl, too, with a beret and protruding front teeth and fine thoughts about the country she comes from – France – and maybe she’ll have stories from home, about her city and her friends and the cafés there. And then he asks her out to a restaurant with red-chequered tablecloths in central London, and maybe she says: ‘This really reminds me of France and the cafés there,’ and they laugh and drink wine and get to know the people sitting at the next table, and then it’s night and then it’s the next day and then it’s the next year, and maybe she hurts him, or maybe he leaves her, and then there’s sorrow, and then it’s tomorrow, and soon the spring of the next year, too.

 And he’s still my son.

 Maybe he eventually meets another girl, one from Denmark, who makes him laugh, with rosy cheeks and fake eyelashes, and who loves Danish sausage and Tivoli Gardens. And then he’s happy again, and they’re together for a long time, and she gets pregnant and they move back home, or to Copenhagen, and live in a terraced house and smile and have another baby and then get divorced. And he moves to Oslo and doesn’t see the kids very often, but they’re old enough to fly alone and visit him every other weekend, and he flies down to them, too, whenever he can.

 But it’s tough for him. He doesn’t like it, but then maybe he meets Lisbeth Danielsen at work, who is also divorced with two children, and they move to Hadeland together – maybe that’s where she’s from – and then she gets pregnant, a little late in the day, perhaps, but it’s great news all the same. They have a good life down there in Hadeland, and they often travel to Oslo, and that’s where they meet, the siblings from Copenhagen and the new little girl.

 Three children, and he’s my son.

 The kids like spending time with me – they get to mess around with my hair, playing hairdressers, and then he and Lisbeth have a chance to enjoy themselves out at a restaurant. They take the tram into the city to celebrate his forty-fifth birthday, and I stand there and watch them go. They laugh and look happy, and Lisbeth is wearing shoes with heels that are slightly too high, but she’s stylish and a little flawed, and he holds her around the waist so she won’t fall, and I think: I’m sure he’ll take care of her tonight. Then he looks up towards the house and waves and laughs, standing there in his suit and squinting. He often squints. Even now, when it’s evening.

 And they have such a nice time out on the town – they deserve it – and the day after they go back to Hadeland, and they have chickens out there in the country and neighbours who are kind, and I die, and he copes very well, and the children grow up and move to France, London, and terraced houses near other cities, and the chickens lay eggs and he’ll soon be eighty and Lisbeth is in a care home and several summers pass, it seems like a hundred, and he sits under a tree in his garden one autumn, there on a bench, and he looks out over the small forest lake before him and squints. And it’s summer and evening and warm and the air is still, and yet not.

 Is there a wind starting to blow? Did he just feel a breeze? His left hand, covered in liver spots and wearing his wedding ring, touches the back of his neck there under the tree, in front of the lake, towards the end of his life, and he thinks: ‘It’s chilly – I must remember to wear wool next to my skin.’

 And he gets up, but totters – his balance isn’t what it used to be – but he manages. He has a walking stick, and uses the tree to support himself, too. The light breeze follows him all the way across to the house, and he shakes his head as he opens the creaking door.

 Typical. A tranquil, late summer evening in August – and still there’s this wind that passes over his neck, like something nagging, caring and everlasting breathing on him.

**Elixia took them**

She’s a monster, Elixia. Or Sats, as this chain of gyms has suddenly started calling herself in an attempt to seem more ordinary and harmless. Like when the lamest boy in class, Svein Harald, started calling himself ‘Svenna’ to make himself sound more appealing – but he was still just as bad. A rose by any other name, as they say. But she smells of sweat and is brightly illuminated inside, Elixia. And I’ll never call her Sats. To smell of sweat inside – how gross is that?

 Her breathing is heavy, too – loud groans and the occasional gurgling sound from the depths of someone’s throat or soul. Like a tiny person about to drown inside her. Inside a person running on a treadmill.

 The smell is hard to describe, but I’ll try: it’s the odour of secretions that have squeezed their way out of places on the body you didn’t even know had openings. The sweetish smell of humans, of wet dogs and the fear of dying.

 My friends tell me it’s worth it, worth all this – you feel so good afterwards, everything is so much better afterwards, they say – but what can possibly be so wrong for this to feel like a liberation?

 Elixia is a monster who preys on people at that most vulnerable age, between forty and fifty, and brainwashes them and coaches them so regularly and routinely that they no longer notice it. They should have protested. They should have shouted it out loud – *My friends!* Or quietly. Preferably quietly, like a secret Elixia shouldn’t be allowed to overhear.

*Help me. Find me. Get me out of here!*

But they say nothing. The people who end up in Elixia’s grasp don’t even know it, have no idea they’ve been kidnapped until it’s too late. They think they’re just visiting, and through the pounding techno music they’re unable to hear the scream of that little person in their throat.

I was too slow. I was too late. I should have seen it in their eyes. The evasion, the girls’ nights that happened less and less often, the manic shopping and chatting about groceries, the trivial conversations. I didn’t hear it, didn’t see it. At least not before Elixia. She was just so fucking quick. Stood there with her muscular index finger, beckoning them in. One by one.

I should have grabbed them by the hand long ago – dragged them out of the Rema 1000 supermarket on an ordinary Tuesday, that’s what I should have done, taken them by the hands I knew so well from the good old days and led them calmly into a dark café or a pub, to a table in the corner. I should have bought them wine and chili nuts, and let them talk, talk and drink wine, even though it was only just one o’clock in the afternoon and they were supposed to be finishing their grocery shopping before going to Elixia. And they’d put their hearts and feet up on the table beside the chili nuts and gossip about the way Elixia kidnaps people without them even realising it.

But most of all, we should have talked about life, love and the weather. Because of course it’s raining. It hasn’t rained this much in years. Not since we last sat here, over twenty years ago. A kind of Ragnarok, a tender hosing down with a pressure washer by God, a thorough house cleaning, a rinse, a wet curtain that falls down the windows and hides us from the outside world, and other people, and the day, and Elixia.

It’s warm in the pub, but it doesn’t smell of sweat. Pubs don’t smell of sweat inside – or at least not the kind of anxious perspiration you get at Elixia, just the ordinary sweat of people who don’t think it’s necessary to shower every day, and it smells of smoke. We’re allowed to smoke inside today. And you smoke, even though you haven’t smoked in over twenty years, and you laugh and you cry and you look so cool and sexy with the cigarette in the corner of your mouth, making your smile all lopsided, and you’re not sweaty at all, and then you start to talk.

About how hard it is to get through the days, about your inadequacies, about cabbage and broccoli, about your fear of dying, the loft extension you can’t really afford and don’t really want, about the guy at work you think is cute, about your mother-in-law, about the holiday to Denmark by ferry that you cancelled because it seemed too tiring or just too tacky, about lonely evenings, about the music you listen to at night, and how you miss me and our conversations, sometimes, late at night.

She’s a monster, Elixia.

She’s got to me, too. Even though I saw how she swallowed up the others. She lured me in by telling me that all my friends were there, my entire past was there, my health was there – but I’ve never felt so sick in my entire life. Not sick in a mortally ill sort of way, but… how can I put it? A sick of life sort of way.

I feel sick of life as I lie here on this pink mat, looking at my worn out and skinny friends. They don’t look at me. Nobody is supposed to look at each other in here. We’re supposed to turn our gazes inwards. Or so says our instructor, Jonas, the Swedish guy who is twenty years our junior. Inwards. And we listen to him. And I think: is this life? Yes, it is. This *is* life. My new life. I’m now a member of the living dead on a pink mat. Sick of life.

It doesn’t pass. This will never pass. The Elixia gym subscription automatically renews if you don’t cancel via email, and then there’s the month-long notice period, and by the end of it the fear of dying and physical decline has gripped us and we cling to our subscription like some old, wet, desperate bastards clinging to rocks as slippery as soap.

We won’t cancel. We daren’t do it – not when the others won’t. Who wants to grow fat and old alone? I can see it in my friends, in their faces. They’re too strong to give up. To cancel. They trust Jonas, the Swede in his twenties, as if he’s some kind of Dalai Lama. A muscular Dalai Lama. If Jonas thinks it best that we turn our gazes inwards, we do it. Look inwards – straight past the little voice that’s screaming.

And again, I think about them back in the day. Their stubborn, freckled faces with long fringes in the high school classroom. Heads tipped back with a defiant smirk when Norwegian teacher Mr. Pedersen said that we had to read *Hunger* if we were going to understand anything at all about literature. We stuffed Hamsun under our packed lunches in our bags and went out into the spring day, not giving a crap about Kristiania and the story, and instead enjoyed Oslo and our future and met a cool guy from Manglerud whose name was Zakka.

And I think about all the people we met who tried and failed to scare us. About our parents, who said we might be kidnapped if we walked home alone through the forest; about our boss, who said that if we slept with him we could be the general manager of his grocery store. The skinny bundles of nerves in our year group who had discovered diet shakes and loneliness at the same time, and who tried to convince us that being thin and neurotic and aloof was much better than being fat and swimming naked in Ulsrudvann lake one Indian summer day in September.

We didn’t read Hamsun until we wanted to at some point in our thirties; we quit our jobs at the disgusting kiosk and showed its manipulative owner the finger. We happily walked through the forest alone at night and held a hotdog in our hand every Friday and laughed with mustard and ketchup running down our eighties sweaters while the skinny girls went home because they were going to get up early and try something new that had just come to town – the fitness centre.

And now we’re lying here. At Elixia. There’s no lock on the door, but we stay.

Although nobody knows that I’m not looking inwards now. Jonas doesn’t see it. Jonas isn’t as smart as he thinks he is. Jonas is Swedish, young and fit – and an idiot.

Jonas doesn’t know that I lie here looking at my beautiful, worn out friends in secret as they lie on their pink mats, still sweating.

He doesn’t know who they are. He thinks they’re just old yoga crones.

He doesn’t know who they were, and he doesn’t know that I no longer see pink yoga mats but colourful beach towels on the sand at Hvervenbukta one summer day, and that my friends have salt water in their hair and are laughing and giggling, and that the little voices in their souls are not screaming but doubled over with laughter, because they’re so looking forward to the night and their futures and how everything will be great – will continue to be great. And that nobody will ever force Hamsun, boring everyday routines, exercise programmes or the fear of dying upon us.

Jonas and Elixia don’t know all this. They think we come here because we enjoy it. They think we do this by choice.

**The world’s most romantic film**

It’s just like the world’s most romantic film. And we could have played the starring roles.

They meet in the middle of Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen. Standing there, leaning against the railings of the lake. The lake is almost like something out of a fairy tale, with swans on it, and little ripples that the swans make as they glide across the water’s surface, two by two. Almost surreally beautiful. There are coloured light bulbs hanging above them, too, against the dark blue of the summer sky – dark blue as the sky can be only in early August, when joy is still in the air but the melancholy that summer will soon be on the wane casts a pleasant, touching, purplish-blue sheen over everything. Over them. Over the swans and Tivoli Gardens. And all around the lake, up in the air, these lightbulbs hanging from thick, black cables, in a multitude of colours above these two strangers. Strangers, at least, for the time being.

‘I haven’t been here since I was little,’ she says.

‘Are you Norwegian?’ he asks.

And from this moment, they never let each other go.

It doesn’t get any more romantic than this. ‘This is better than the world’s greatest film,’ they both think as they leave Tivoli Gardens together and enter the real world out on the streets – but they both know that reality will never be truly real again. They will be unreal forever, forever as they were beside the lake at Tivoli Gardens.

He will conjure all this up through the beautiful words of his wedding speech at the Grefsenkollen restaurant many years later, while new friends, shared friends, clap and cry and almost can’t believe that this encounter, this encounter beside the lake, was even more beautiful than the world’s most beautiful film. But the two of them know that it was even better than anyone can imagine.

But now: Copenhagen and this summer night and the Danes that stagger and laugh down the pavements ahead of them and past them. The Danes with their vowels that smell of hotdogs and beer and Tivoli Gardens and love and those red apples covered in sprinkles.

They walk holding their own hotdogs in their hands and laughing, too. At everything. At their encounter beside the lake, each other’s stories, at the people they meet – perhaps they might turn out to be their first friends as a couple? On this, their first purplish-blue night. They say hello to and laugh with strangers in the queue outside the kiosk, which looks as if it was built in the 1800s, and they buy an apple, too – a red apple with sprinkles on it that they both eat, each from their own side.

And then they kiss with the taste of the city, with the taste of exhaust fumes and sprinkles in the corners of their mouths from the glazed apple, and red and white striped tents behind her, through her hair and behind him, his hotel, which in the world’s greatest film isn’t one of those nice, expensive chain hotels with SAS in illuminated letters above the entrance, but a small, slightly cheap one out on Amager.

When they wake in each other’s arms in the light of the ordinary day that shines through the windows the next morning, everything is even more wonderful. They know that from this day forward, every day will be better than the last. And they are – the days. Everything just gets better and better.

It’s just like in the world’s most romantic film. But I didn’t get one of the leading roles. I got a supporting role in the little scene towards the end, when he goes home to the yellow terraced house with a pile of children’s bicycles in the driveway in front of the garage, and tells me and the kids he’s fallen in love beside the railings on a business trip to Copenhagen.

**The beaver**

I’ve suddenly found myself responsible for a totally crazy beaver. She sits there between my legs, grinning with her curly fringe and defiant attitude, taking over the evening, my life and my future.

*I* wanted to go home several hours ago. I’d wanted to go home at nine-thirty, ten-thirty perhaps – or at least, at ten-thirty I had started to get ready to leave the bar we were in – but do you think the beaver made any sign of retreat or collaboration? Of *course* not – quite the opposite! The beaver – she wanted to demonstrate how much power she has, sticking to the barstool like a stubbornly overeager and obstinate suction cup, so that all the patrons in Bar Boca noticed it. She seemed to flatten herself across the barstool, moving closer to the guy sitting next to us – the one my brain had said ‘no thanks’ to at least an hour ago, perhaps two. Now she, the bossy beaver herself, had grabbed onto the wood of the barstool and was sliding like a promiscuous snail towards this poor victim, who had no idea that in just a couple of hours he would find himself stuck like a helpless, scrabbling ant.

*I* had gone home long ago – the ‘I’ inside me. Inside I was at home in bed, under the new flannel bedding I’d bought at the Kid home interiors store, my glasses half way down my nose and scrolling Facebook like a fifty-year-old should – but the beaver isn’t interested in Facebook. She’s interested in online porn and nights of fun. She popped herself off the barstool with a noisy smack as she released the vacuum she’d created – everyone in the premises jumped, and the guy almost fell out of the door, out into the winter cold. The beaver left first, like a pounding, sweaty polar bear cub, with me following on the arm of the guy. Steam rose out from between the buttons of my coat as we walked down the street. How embarrassing. Now she wants to go to Lorry, the beaver. To have a gin and tonic.

And there, at the bar in Lorry, it only got worse. *I* feverishly tried to have a sensible conversation with *him*, as I ordered some peanuts and water to accompany my wine. (Yes, I drank wine. Of course the beaver wanted a double gin and tonic, but I put my foot down. Hard, beneath the bar.)

But down there, all the way below the belt, she was getting going. *I* was talking sensibly with the guy up above, about a play I’d been to see at the theatre, about casual racism and the new development at Bjørvika, but what do you think she was doing at the same time? Under the bar?

Well, let me tell you – down below she was doing an improvised, undulating pole dance against his thigh, softly thrusting against his fly, grinding and rubbing herself against his jeans and zipper and laughing, like an overenthusiastic, clawing and saccharine little hamster. Yes, she *is* cute. And she bloody well knows it, how cute she is – she’s dangerously and insightfully aware of it. She can charm the pants off anybody – and that’s what she was doing under the bar at that very moment. Charming the pants off the guy’s bottom half, while I had to hold the top half of him up.

‘I have work tomorrow, so I’m going home now,’ I said to the guy, just as a fifty-year-old is supposed to say to some random guy at Lorry at two-thirty in the morning on an ordinary Tuesday in November.

And I don’t know whether he heard it, but I’m almost certain that he felt it. The beaver laughed against his thigh – undulating, electric shocks against his groin like secret Morse code, secret messages, invisible words that he immediately understood. A kind of soundless scream, a wordless poem:

I’m a beaver. There’s no flannel on my bed.

This beaver’s not going home – she’s coming to your place instead.

This beaver might be old, but once she’s going she doesn’t stop.

She won’t sleep the night away – she’s going to dance with the fox.

And I had no chance up there, and nor did the guy, either. His weak-willed fox was hypnotised by my sassy beaver, and now the two of them were already on their way out of the bar and heading for his apartment in Frogner. The two of us – us humans – who had been chatting up above could do nothing but follow.

I took a taxi home at around nine o’clock the next morning, and of course was late for work – again. So this has to stop, things can’t just carry on like this. Next week we’ll have to go to couples counselling, therapy, a gynaecologist, or spend a girl’s night together. The beaver is worn out, and I’m sad. But of course I love her, and she loves me. We’ve known each other all our lives, ever since she and I were both young, innocent and kind.

We’re the same age, but in different places.

I’m going through the menopause, and the beaver is going through the terrible twos.

**Why didn’t you come?**

The other kids came to their parents.

They were born at hospitals around the country, landing safely with families and moving into homes, being taken home.

Why didn’t you come?

There was a crib with a blanket with stars on it waiting for you in my soul. Everything was ready. Always ready. Always clean and ready and freshly made. And there were Babygros in the drawers in your room, in the chest of drawers with clouds and fat, flying teddy bears painted on it. In your room in my heart.

Why didn’t you come?

I sat and waited for you everywhere, you see. In parks in the spring and at home on the sofa and on the streets through all seasons and while on holiday in unfamiliar cities and in familiar café’s where the other parents sat with their bun-eating kids in their laps – but you never came. I would have always held you tight, but I’d have let you play with the things on the table, and if you were ill, with a slight fever, perhaps, I’d have given you an iced bun and warm cocoa, if you had come to me.

Why didn’t you come?

I walked with a free hand around the local farms – I just want you to know that – I so wanted to teach you the names of all the animals. In Norwegian. *And* English. Goat. Horse. Pig. Cow. I would have never been impatient or brusque if you still hadn’t learned the names by the second, third or maybe twentieth attempt. We’d have plenty of time to practice everything. Many years, great swathes of afternoons – a life.

Why didn’t you come?

And you know, if you’d gone to sixth form, I’d have been happy to let you have a celebratory breakfast here at home with your friends after your exams. In our apartment. No problem at all – no need to say thank you, I’m the one who should say thank you.

I’m the one who should have said thank you.

As I would have said thank you.

I should have said thank you.

Why didn’t you come?

**I might return in spring**

I no longer want to be among people.

We don’t communicate, don’t live together, I’m not invited to any of the meetings or decisions. Or at least I wasn’t at the meeting where everyone decided that we should just say fuck everything and go to war against our own planet, fight the forests and the seas – that we should regard ourselves as above all other life on earth and fight the animals and insects. That we should wage war against everything that doesn’t look like us.

I wasn’t at that meeting. Wasn’t invited.

If I could choose, I’d join the birds up there in the night air instead. I’d ride the gusts of wind with them and fly away from humanity – take some time off, time for myself, be free. Screech and cheer with a seagull that loves the sea; dance with a white wagtail looking forward to spring. Stagger in the gutters with a couple of fat city pigeons in the night and join the companionable formation of a flock of Canada geese, far from these strange beings down here.

I no longer want to be among people. I’m not invited to their secret meetings anyway.

I might return in spring, if I can bear it. If the wind changes.

Down there.

**Kiss me**

Kiss me. Kiss my name.

Kiss the person I was and the one I became.

I need the kisses we kissed before

exhausted days and baby’s breath.

Kiss me. Kiss my night.

Kiss my past with all its dancing, wine and light.

Kiss my face the way it once was

without everything time gives and takes of us.

The time that passes can never fix or set

What I’ll remember most and what I’ll quickly forget.

But the thought that we’ve held out so long

Through kiss-free zones and un-kissed struggles

Makes me want you to kiss me, still.

Kiss me. Kiss my day.

Kiss my soul and the middle of my belly.

Kiss our first encounter so I remember when

Our eyes met, and what we kissed back then.

Kiss me. Kiss our dream.

Kiss me so we both can see

What it is a little kiss can do

When we argue loudly the whole night through.

The time that passes can never fix or set

What I’ll remember most and what I’d rather forget.

But the thought that we’ve held out so long

Through slippery winters with the brakes on

Means that I want more than even I can understand.

Kiss me.

**I believe**

I believe in God the Father, the Almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I also believe in other things, smaller things.

In sun-filled afternoons in Grünerløkka, for example. Just after it’s rained, and there are puddles on the asphalt and glitter in the air. Or after someone has rinsed the pavements clean in the early hours of Sunday morning.

And I believe in Italian ice cream and the French cheese shop not far from here. And in Birkelunden park and café tables, and the sound of the tram and the sound of heartbeats. And the woman who always walks around shouting without us understanding what she’s saying – but who makes us feel safe. Because she belongs to us. Our place. Our world.

And I believe in encounters. Encounters between people don’t know each other, but who talk to one another anyway. Maybe just an ‘excuse me’ if they happen to bump into each other in the bustle of Thorvald Meyers gate, or on the corner of Markveien.

And I believe in spaces. The spaces within us and around us. Maybe mostly those around us, actually, where we’re not alone, and where we can meet other people. And be silent together, talk together, be together and belong together.

I believe in all this. It’s what I believe in. And that’s why I believe in God the Father, the Almighty, creator of heaven and earth and the parks and freshly washed pavements.

Amen.