Johnny 777

Mission 1: Rio de Janeiro

Chapter 1: Too few and too low houses

I wait until it’s dark before I tie my shoes, put a hoodie on and head out. Alone.

I cycle downtown in the evening, leaving my bike next to the GNURTE PIZZA BAR TAVERN, always after closing time. Then I run through the little park, make a few simple leaps and rolls, run across a wall, dash along the gravel road to the school, grab the gutter next to the main entrance and jump onto the wall, pulling myself up to the roof. I run, crouching forward, until I reach the ridge, balancing slowly, staying focussed until I reach the flat roof above the gym. Then comes the hard part. There’s a seven foot gap between the roof and the town hall.

I stop, start running again to make the leap, landing with a gentle roll along the large, flat town hall roof, and run over to the big stag, the municipal symbol of Gnurtedal.

I can see the whole town, including the World’s Loneliest Football Pitch, where no children ever play.

I grab the stag by the horns, swing gently back and forth, drop and grab the gutter. That’s the trickiest part. On the second floor is the sheriff’s office, and I knock on the window as I slide down the gutter. The sheriff is inside, working overtime. Playing Candy Crush. There’s not a lot of scary stuff going on in Gnurtedal.

This is my life. Every evening. The houses here are too few and too low for me to have any real fun. I long to go back to the city.

Inner Gnurtedal. The only place in Norway with no internet. Even the sheriff is only working overtime because you can only get a decent signal at the town hall.

There are only small houses and nearly only old people here, so they haven’t learned to miss the internet. Around us are mostly farting cows. Why we moved to Inner Gnurtedal three months ago, remains a huge mystery. Also, I don’t believe there is an Outer Gnurtedal.

There’s even less going on at home. I have no siblings to fight, no friends, no internet, just a terrible 3G phone signal. I have no life.

But two days ago, something happened. From the thick Gnurtedal fog came a big car I’ve never seen before. And – it followed me as I was cycling home. Pretty much right behind me, in fact. I could feel a lump in my stomach. Nobody’s after me, are they?

The car’s back, I have a feeling it’s looking for me. Or even worse: that it knows where I am.

2. The black car

Yesterday, it was waiting just fifty yards from our house, at the bus stop where I have never seen a single bus stop.

And now it’s here. The black car. Standing still, with no lights on.

The car has tinted windows, impossible to see through. What does it want? I’ve seen a lot of films, and I know this is the kind of ginormous black car owned by mysterious organisations.

I walk calmly towards my bike. Trying to look very chill as I cycle away.

I won’t turn around.

I’m sure it won’t follow me.

I turn around.

It’s totally following me!

My heart speeds up. I pedal harder and harder, I taste blood, breathing heavily. Don’t, don’t, don’t turn around again. I slow down to let the car past. But it stays right behind me – keeping the exact same pace as me on my bike.

I pedal so fast down the steep Dead Guy Lane, I almost wet myself. If I lose my balance and fall now, I’ll get permanent brain damage – and my shattered knees will mean I’ll have to amputate both legs.

The car speeds up – whoever the psycho inside is, he wants to kill me – the car almost grazes me as it swooshes past, disappearing around the bend, right before the bus stop where I have never seen a single bus stop.

3. **Is living in this lame valley so boring that people in black cars run over children just for fun?**

I lose my balance and end up at the side of the road. In the middle of a huuuge cowpat. My knuckles are bleeding. One shoulder is aching. I’ve broken both arms and both legs. And my neck. At least.

I cycle home again, smelling like soiled cow.

What did that car want from me? Does anyone in Inner Gnurtedal own a car like that. Is living in this lame valley so boring that people in black cars run over children for fun?

Dad’s cooking noodles for supper. I can barely keep myself from crying. I tell dad about the black car, about crashing my bike and the cowpat and that someone wants to kill or kidnap me.

* Right, right, dad says. – You mustn’t break that nice bike, Jon. I had it as a boy, I paid a lot of money to have it fixed for you. And it’s important that you don’t take drugs, that you empty the dishwasher, and that you pick up the dog poo and put it in a little bag.
* We don’t have a dog, I say. Dad has never been a great listener.

I’m thinking I should say something, ask if he’s happy at work, if we’re going to stay here forever, and he and mum are really my parents.

* Good night, I say.
* Yes, dad says.

I go to the bathroom to clean my teeth, and everything is normal and not normal.

And I’m asleep and awake at the same time. My body is aching, and I picture mystery men who want to kidnap me and sell me for research.