

Kirsten drives me to the 100-year-old home we shared in Sandvika, overlooking the Oslofjord. It's strange being an outsider in the same house Kirsten and I lived in. Some of the furniture and decorations are different, but otherwise it is identical. I stand at the window where I sat at my computer writing my first book during two winters. I might not have ever started writing if I hadn't had to endure the Norwegian winters. So many thoughts went through my head then, so much angst as I tried to adapt to living in Norway. I used to watch each and every plane land and take off from Fornebu airport – across the water, behind the islands – as if they were a crucial link to the outside world. Now Fornebu is closed and the silence is noticeable. So much has changed.

I look at the corner where Bonso's basket used to be. It is odd being here without him. The last time I came to Norway for a short visit I had arrived unannounced and walked into the back garden. Bonso saw me and ran at me barking, but as soon as he smelt me he started jumping around happily and then searched for a stick or ball for me to throw. In the winter I'd throw snowballs and he'd try to catch them in mid-flight. I'd be the quarterback and, like an American linebacker, he'd run past me at full speed; I'd coordinate my throw so that he could jump up and snap the snowball as it arced over him. As long as my passes were good and his timing perfect, he'd do this happily for hours until he was so tired he'd barely be able to stand up. Once he was so exhausted I had to carry him home.

Seeing me study his basket, Kirsten fetches Bonso's urn from her bedroom and shakes the contents. 'Sometimes I think I can hear him bark,' she says, eyes glistening. He was her devoted friend for fifteen years. He died just a week before I arrived this summer.

Before dinner I visit our neighbours and landlord. Herr Oma seemed like my best friend in many ways. He was so patient with my broken Norwegian. Coming from the west coast of Norway, I suppose he was always an outsider in Oslo too. He is surprised by how good my Norwegian is. It amazes me how esoteric Norwegian words pop into my head even as I am talking. I recall

all those long, frustrating evenings taking courses with other immigrants, trying to learn the language, and ironically how, after finally mastering it, I no longer have use for it.

Marta-Louise and Lars, whom Kirsten and I met twelve years ago in Kathmandu, arrive for dinner with their four children, including my godson Endre. Annabel and I had spent some days with them earlier in the summer at their family *seter*. They are quintessential Norwegians, demonstrating equality in everything they do, from sharing the housework to taking turns to have time off from their professional roles as doctors to look after the children. Over the years, Lars has almost become like a brother to me. Critical as I can be of others, there was rarely a Norwegian I met, and got to know, that I did not like. Norwegian men in many respects seemed to epitomise the ideal man: sensitive, liberated and earthy.

Kirsten has handmade the children an impressive tent, which she has filled with toys and books. The four children play inside the tent on this warm, sunny evening no longer punctuated by the roar of jets taking off or landing. I recollect flying back from a consulting trip to Namibia and getting out of the taxi, standing at the front door fiddling with the lock, and hearing the clip-clop of hooves. I turned around to see an adult and juvenile elk, what I still think of as moose, in the driveway staring at me.

I stand on the lawn now with its spectacular view over the fjord and islands and recall how on summer days and evenings like this I would be frantic to be out in the mountains, or on the water, maximising the good weather. In the winter, Bonso ran unleashed beside me when I went skating on the fjord for an hour or two at midday. My constant companion, he'd sit at my feet as I wrote and I'd tuck my toes under his body for warmth. Although he was originally Kirsten's dog, he adopted me readily and would follow me everywhere, even when I got up to make a cup of tea or to walk to another room.

Across the stretch of water is Kalvøya, an island connected to the mainland by a suspended footbridge, where I walked Bonso at least twice a day, all year round. The evening light illuminates the

scene: the sailboats, the converted fishing boats tugging gently at their moorings, the islands, the exposed pine trees with their windswept branches, the children playing on the curve of beach. But there is a chill in the air too, and a reminder that the short summer will not last much longer. Tomorrow I take the train back to Bergen and the ferry back to Newcastle.

Lars drives me into the centre of town. Kirsten has given me a present. Alone in my hotel room I unwrap the gift paper and inside is a CD – Secret Garden. I open the plastic container and there, wrapped in a ribbon, is a tuft of Bonso's hair.