

Radical Activists' Brutal Raid of Drammen Livestock Farm

Son of local politician killed in violent attack on security guard

20th August — Around 1 am, masked radicals breached the security fence and gained entrance to the premises of the Sandvik pig breeding facility in Drammen. When the security guard on duty, 38-year-old husband and father Sören Andersen, tried to stop the activists, he was brutally attacked. The attacker was film student Hendrik Berg (21), who according to Andersen's statement, came at him with a bolt cutter. In self-defense Andersen shot at Berg, son of Jorgen Berg, the mayor of Drammen. According to statements by first responders, at the time of their arrival, the student could only be pronounced dead.

The other presumed animal rights activists were able to flee the scene unrecognized. Tips leading to the culprits can be shared with the appropriate police authorities in Drammen.

Mayor Jorgen Berg did not reply to the Drammen Daily Record's request for a statement regarding the incident. It is expected, however, that by the next council session in October, at the latest, he will officially distance himself from his son's criminal activities.

8 months and 17 days later

Chapter 1

Freya

When life is pulsating all around you, it should be easy to not think about death. To ignore the feeling of helplessness and paste on a smile. But when you miss someone so much that it takes your breath away, then you can't manage any of that. Because thoughts of him are omnipresent.

Especially on a day like this one.

"You have to blow them out." Merrit is looking at me expectantly and pushes the cake closer to me.

Twenty-four candles are stuck in the whipped cream. The wax is already dripping down the side of one of them. Little blue dots, like the tears I've been holding back for hours. Because it's my birthday today, and I know that the people around me don't want to see me cry. They've

had to bear that far too often for almost nine months now. And even now I feel the familiar burning in the corners of my eyes. I miss Hendrik. That's always true, but especially so today. He should be here. He should be celebrating my birthday with me, push his camera in front of my face and eat at least half of my cake. Instead, I'm sitting here alone with my two best friends in my apartment, staring into the little candle flames. I'm grateful that they're here, that they brought me cake and took care to be available this afternoon to spend it with me. I try to enjoy their visit, to distract myself and drink a toast to another trip around the sun, but I just can't do it. Last year I celebrated my birthday with Hendrik. This is the first one without him, and it's incredibly hard not to compare the two days. Because I hate it that he isn't here anymore, and because everything has just felt wrong ever since.

For a brief moment, the despair sucks me into my thoughts, only to spit me out in the next instant. Back to the here and now. Back into a world without Hendrik. Back to the twenty-four colorful candles, my girlfriends, and their still unwrapped presents.

"Freya?" Sarisha studies me with concern. Her long, dark hair perfectly frames her face with its big brown eyes.

"Yes." I sit up a little straighter, force myself to smile, and blow. One flame after another is extinguished, and with them a little of the hopelessness that I've felt far too often in the past months lifts.

"Make a wish." Gently she nudges my upper arm with hers. But there's nothing left that I could wish for. That I want to wish for. Hendrik isn't coming back, no matter how much I want that to happen. So the only thing left to do is let go. And that is something I cannot do.

Silently I watch as Sarisha cuts the cake. Merrit hands out plates and cups. Everything seems so normal like on every other birthday we've celebrated together through the years. But today the extra fuss makes me furious. I don't want to sit here and eat cake when the day should have been completely different. I'm fully aware that my friends mean well. They want to make sure that I don't think about Hendrik constantly. Make some space for the good things in life. Have fun. Because they don't understand that grief doesn't work that way, at least not for me. Of course, I know that Hendrik would find my anger and lethargy awful. He was the exact opposite of all that, loud and funny and always in a great mood. But I can't pretend that everything is okay, at least not for more than a few minutes.

Again I make an effort to smile and take the plate that Merrit holds out to me.

"I'm curious what you'll think of the cake." Sarisha's eyes light up as she waits for us to take a bite. "I changed the recipe a little bit and replaced the lemons with limes."

"I'm sure it will be fantastic," Merrit replies. "Like everything you bake. Why do you think we're friends with you?" She dips her fork into the whipped cream topping and shoves a big bite into her mouth. "Oh, God." The next moment she rolls her eyes with pleasure. "Exactly for this." She

grins. “This is amazing, Risha. You should definitely put it on the menu.” Merrit gestures back and forth between our friend and her plate with the fork. “What else is in there?”

Although I’m not hungry at all, I don’t want to disappoint my friends and try a little piece anyway. And I have to admit that Merrit is right. The cake is delicious. Not too sweet, but fresh and fruity, like limes and melon. Sarisha has a real knack for combining the exotic with typical Norwegian flavors. She should definitely offer this cake in her parents’ café.

Mechanically I eat another piece and listen to my friends as they laugh and joke. At the beginning it was hell to watch people whose world isn’t completely unhinged like mine, who just carry on as if nothing has happened. It took months before I understood that exactly that was the case. For almost everyone in Drammen, nothing has happened. Because it wasn’t their boyfriend who died, but mine. The only ones who understand how I’m doing are Hendrik’s parents and his siblings. They lost their son and their brother, one of triplets. And I don’t have contact with any of them anymore.

“Fee, are you listening to us?” Sarisha actually snaps her fingers in front of my face to tear me away from my thoughts. That happens to me often these days. I get so lost in memories, in the past, that I completely block out conversations happening right around me.

The truth would be to say no. No, I’m not listening to you. Not because your conversation isn’t interesting to me, but because there’s a ghost in my head that I’m completely engrossed with.

Before I can figure out how to reply, I’m saved by the ringing of my doorbell. Immediately the faces across from me are puzzled. “Did you invite someone else?” Merrit asks.

They know perfectly well that that’s not the case. Without saying a word I shake my head and stand up. My apartment isn’t very big; a few steps bring me to the door and the intercom system.

“Yes?”

“Delivery service. I need a signature.”

“Oh, okay.” I open the door downstairs for him and open the door to my apartment. It’s only two flights up and the delivery person is quick.

“Hey,” he greets me. He doesn’t seem to be much older than me. With his right hand he extends a small device toward me, where I’m supposed to sign my name with a finger. Then he hands me the package. It’s only a few centimeters thick, but fairly heavy.

“Ciao,” he says in parting and bounds down the stairs two at a time.

“Bye,” I murmur quietly to myself, staring at the package in my hand. I have no idea what it is, I haven’t ordered anything. Certainly not from... I turn it over so that I can read who sent it. Norli. No, I’m definitely not expecting anything from a bookstore.

“Everything okay?” Merrit appears next to me and peers into the empty hallway. “Who was that?”

“A delivery.” I lift the package a little higher. “A surprise from one of you?”

“Nope, not from me. You?” Merrit looks to Sarisha, but she is also shaking her head. “Maybe someone else? Your family? Thore would do something like that.”

“No.” I had breakfast with my parents and my brother this morning, and the presents they gave me are with the ones my friends brought.

“Well then open it.” Merrit pulls me back into the apartment and closes the door. “I’m curious!” After she sits back down at the table she takes a sip of her coffee and studies me with large, bright blue eyes.

Very slowly I open the packaging and soon I’m holding a coffee table book in my hands. Wordlessly I stare at the cover: Magical Woodcarvings and Where to Find Them.

“Is there a message with it? Sometimes there’s a little card or...” Sarisha grabs the empty box and rattles it. And indeed, a small slip of white paper falls out, but I don’t need to read it to know who sent the picture book. All at once my mouth is bone dry, adrenaline races through my body, and simultaneously I have the feeling I can’t move anymore. I have a knot in my gut and start to feel sick to my stomach. And then I reach for the note that Sarisha is holding out to me after all.

Happy Birthday, Fee

I don’t think I’ve ever ordered a birthday present this early before. I’m curious if it works. We’ll know in May. Here’s to you, forest girl. I wish you lots of inspiration. And if you need a muse, well you know where to find me.

Hendrik

It’s the last words that bring me to my knees. You know where to find me.

My vision goes blurry as tears gather in my eyes. Because he had no idea that by this time that would mean the cemetery. My hands grip the little note and the book tightly, while my friends put their arms around me, concerned. Questions rain down on me, but I can’t answer them. Not yet.

Utterly weak, I sink all the way to the ground, feel my heartbeat, hear the rushing in my ears. It’s been weeks since I’ve had such a powerful reaction to Hendrik that I can’t catch my breath

and I feel like my heart is being crushed. But that's exactly how I feel now. Because I can remember the exact moment when we talked about this book, and I told him that it was going to be published on my birthday. And he had joked that he would have to give it to me then. Never... I never would have imagined that he would keep his word. On the other hand, it doesn't surprise me at all. Because Hendrik was just like that. Full of surprises and especially full of plans.

I hear my friends' voices as they talk with each other above my head, even if I don't really understand what they're saying. Their worry is audible in every syllable. I know it's not easy for them to see me this way. But now, with Hendrik's present in my hands... Fuck. I can't hold back the tears. They spill over my cheeks like little streams. All the love that doesn't have a place inside me anymore surfaces. And it hurts. It hurts so damn much.

I let go of the book and instead press the palms of my hands on my chest. I feel my heart, beating steadily in its rhythm. Just that, its regular pulse, helps me calm down again. I sit up straighter, blink, and wipe a hand across my damp eyes. Merrit still has her arm around me and looks at me pensively.

"I'm sorry," I mutter. My voice sounds embarrassed. "It's..." My glance falls on the book at my knees. "This is from Hendrik and..." God, just saying his name out loud takes everything out of me. In the corner of my eyes burn new tears that I can only keep in check with great effort.

"You don't have to explain yourself." Sarisha takes the book and Hendrik's card and carefully places both of them on the table. "It's really a beautiful gift from him. And it's such a shock. I mean, no one would have expected that." Her soft smile is encouraging, like a confirmation that it's okay for me to feel so broken.

"Yes." I nod slowly, take my hand from my chest, and use a chair to pull myself upright. Merrit's hug releases me and she stands up as well. "I'm okay. I just have to..." With two fingers I gesture toward the small balcony. "I need a little bit of fresh air."

Before they can protest or offer to keep me company, I've already brushed past them and pull open the heavy balcony door. For early May it's surprisingly warm, and yet I'm freezing. I wrap both my arms around myself and look at the roofs of my neighbors' houses. A gentle wind blows through my hair, spinning loose strands in my face. But the thoughts of Hendrik remain. It's like they're stuck, they are so intense that I have to hold on to the railing with both hands. I wasn't with him out here often, but the few times we stood here together... I miss him. Miss his presence, his warmth, his arms wrapped around me while he laid his chin on my shoulder. And I miss his scent, the way it enveloped me. Sandalwood and forest. When I told him that once he laughed and said that was because I was the forest girl. Because I was the one who worked in a saw mill and carved wooden sculptures in her spare time. Little figures like the ones Michael of Lönneberga made – only better.

His voice is still incredibly clear in my head. At the same time, I'm afraid of the day when it won't be anymore. At some point I won't know and won't be able to remember what he sounded like. How he laughed. How soft his hair was when I ran my fingers through it.

The lump in my throat gets bigger, as it always does when I surrender too deeply to the thoughts and feelings about Hendrik. But there are times I can't help it. I don't want to forget him. And even if it hurts, even if the desperation overtakes me more powerfully some days than others... I wouldn't change anything. It's worth all the pain.

I take a deep breath. Inhale to a count of four, hold the breath for seven, then exhale for eight. It's a trick that has the effect of making me calmer. Hendrik's gift caught me totally unawares, but it is something I wanted. And he didn't forget it. The wind is blowing through my hair again as I become aware of what that means: he wanted me to have this book. He made sure of it, so many months in advance... That knowledge makes my heart sink and soar at the same time.

The quiet opening of the balcony door pulls me from my thoughts and I turn around to see the concerned faces of my friends. They have our plates and coffee cups in hand.

"Hey," Merrit moves toward me first. "We thought if you need a little fresh air, maybe we could just join you here outside..." She waits a moment, but when I don't object, she steps all the way out onto the balcony.

"Here." Sarisha, who follows her, hands me my plate with the cake on it and my coffee cup. It's probably cold by now, but that doesn't matter. Suddenly I'm incredibly glad that I wasn't alone when the package arrived.

My balcony is much too small for a table for three people, but that's never bothered us. Merrit spreads out the checkered blanket she grabbed from my sofa on the tiles. As soon as we sit down, I lean against the railing, which isn't especially comfortable, but the pressure on my back at least makes me feel like I'm alive. And that's something I need, because after Hendrik's death there were too many days when I didn't feel anything at all.

The windowpane reflects the sun's rays and blinds me. I squint and scoot a few centimeters to the side, until my legs almost bump into Sarisha's. She still looks troubled, but because I didn't send her and Merrit back into the apartment she seems to relax a little.

"A cake picnic!" Merrit's voice interrupts the stillness. "We should do this more often."

"But only if Risha is baking." The words come out of my mouth before I can think about what I'm saying. And they launch a conversation in which the ladies plan a trip to Drammens Fjord for us, including a picnic.

I listen only half-heartedly. The other half is still with Hendrik and his present, and it will remain there for the rest of the day. I'm familiar with these phases when I'm only functioning on autopilot. They are becoming fewer, but this beautiful book... Later, when I'm alone, I'll take a closer look at it. Drink a glass of wine, put on some music, and surrender to all the emotions. That's my plan, but when my friends finally say their goodbyes, it occurs to me that that's not how I want to spend my evening. Not at home, but in the place where Hendrick and I were happiest.

It is still light out as I slip on my jacket, put the book, a bottle of water and a flashlight in my backpack, and head out. It isn't far to the little cabin, not even fifteen minutes by bike, and yet it's peaceful and quiet out here. People rarely find their way to this part of the forest, because at some point the path becomes rocky and uneven. That's probably one of the reasons my grandfather was able to buy this piece of property for such a reasonable price all those years ago. It's been in the family ever since, and Hendrik and I built a little hut there, not far from the fjord.

When I reach the edge of the forest I get off my bike and push it the rest of the way. By now the sun is low on the horizon, but I know the way by heart. The orange glow of the last rays of light transforms the forest into a fairy tale setting. It doesn't take a lot of fantasy to imagine little dancing fairies, elves and trolls around me. There are lots of stories and legends about the Drammens Fjord and the woods surrounding it. I grew up with them, but tonight not one of them would prevent me from going into the little cabin that appears before me in the undergrowth. It stands there, serene, looking just like it did the last time I was here. The red paint on the wood is already peeling in some places, showing the effects of weather, but I won't sand it and repaint it before next year. Because above the front door is a little heart with our initials, painted by Hendrik when we finished our building project.

I dig the key out of my backpack, unlock the door and step into the cabin. It smells musty, so I open the little window facing the fjord and let in some fresh air. There isn't very much inside. A table with two chairs, a box of pillows and blankets, and above the doorframe a battery operated string of lights. It's cozy, and last summer I stayed overnight with Hendrik more than once. It was our kingdom. The place where we could just be us.

Sometimes I can't comprehend that we only had a single, short summer together. It feels so much longer than those two hundred and five days, from the end of January until that night in August when he died.

I turn on the lights, then drag a chair to the clear space in front of the cabin. The trees stand quite close together here, but I can still glimpse the reflection of the setting sun glittering on the water of the fjord. On evenings like this, Hendrik often made videos. Basically he was always making some video or another for his film classes at the university, while I worked on my wood carvings. Little trolls that I set all around the cabin, because they just belong here in this forest.

Before it gets too dark, I take the book out of my backpack and open it up. Magical Woodcarvings. It was the title that had first caught my attention. Carefully I turn to the first page and trace the contours of the figure in the photo with my fingertips. In my mind I can practically smell the scent of wood, when the scraper digs into the wood and peels it off, layer by layer. I leaf through the pages, studying every work of art, every photograph. This special way of playing with light and shadow and the colors is absolutely incredible. I tilt my head to the side so I can read the name of the photographer on the spine. Jack Bradford. Whoever this Jack may be, he is talented.

Below each photograph is a caption. Sometimes it's just a title, other times several sentences. Finally, I come across a page with step-by-step instructions. Most of the time I watch videos on YouTube or TikTok that demonstrate various woodworking techniques, but sometimes I also like to browse in books and read things through, without being shown how to do them. Then it doesn't make any difference if I make mistakes. In the end, all that counts is the finished sculpture and the feeling that I get when I'm carving.

When it gets darker, I withdraw into the cabin. The string of lights above the door brightens the room, but I still put a couple of candles on the table. I tuck the book back into my backpack. I know that I shouldn't stay too long. Even with a headlamp, at some point it will be pitch black in the forest. I'm not afraid in the woods around my hometown, but the paths can be tricky in the dark. Together with Hendrik... sometimes he just stopped, reached for my hand, and imitated animal sounds until I cried from laughing so hard. He was so vibrant, so present. Just there.

Without him the cabin seems empty, even though it is not. Everything is full of memories of a better time. Summer evenings that were the opposite of mild, and still wonderful. Hours long conversations that we had in here. And a fight that ended with us both cooling our hot heads in the ice-cold water of the fjord. Everything screams his name, so loud and powerful that I stand up at some point and start to blow out the candles, one after the other. To be completely sure that they can't continue to burn, I put two fingers in my mouth and cool the wick with my spit. It's a little trick I learned from Hendrik and once again makes me aware that he isn't here anymore. He's been gone for months, and he won't be coming back, and that will never be okay.

When I turn around, the sole of my shoe catches on one of the wooden boards in the floor. I stumble but manage to catch myself on the foot end of the bed. I clutch the wooden frame with my hands and look down, startled.

Behind my left shoe is a hole in the floor. Apparently one of the floorboards has come loose. I crouch down, but it's too dark to see anything. I grope for my backpack and get the flashlight out of it. A few seconds later I shine a light on the spot on the floor and pull the board a little to the side.

"What the...?" I set the flashlight down next to me and reach into the opening.