journey across the car park. We loaded my belongings into the boot and I walked to the front to get in. There were barely words in any of this for Olav spoke little English, though he tried. When I opened the car door he abruptly stopped, eyeing me with surprise, and upon looking in, I realised that by instinct I'd gone to the driver's side. They drive on the right here, I scolded myself. Finding the other side where Norwegian passengers sit I unrobed for the heating. Off came ski gloves and beanie, jacket studs were unclipped, jacket zipper undone and scarf unwound.

The first glimpses of Oslo were enticing. There were old buildings of large stone blocks, grey or painted in pastel yellow or light blue and the footpaths were made of bitumen; they needed round blue street signs with walking people outlined in white to direct cars not to go there. Suburban houses were wooden and starkly painted in red, yellow, blue or black and the road tunnels under the city centre were not neatly tiled like the small number of examples that Sydney had, but rough, cavernous and suitable exactly for the inhabitation of trolls. The simplicity of train platforms, the ice on the Oslo fjord and the billboards of foreign disposition, especially if they featured the extra letters, with an 'æ', 'ø' or 'å' in them, were marvellous. There would've been a conversation of interest with Olav had there been the means.



Suburban houses were wooden and starkly painted in red, yellow, blue or black.

But the excitement of the evening scenery was outdone by something unexpected: the driving. On icy roads it is to be imagined the car would slide a bit but it soon became apparent that the unsteadiness in the weather was more than matched by the unsteadiness in Olav's steering. In the forty minutes it took to cross the city we nearly had a few accidents and when Olav changed lanes other cars honked at us, the ones we were set to collide with, causing him to get nervous and swerve jerkily back the other way. I found myself holding onto the door, no longer embarrassed about having gone without thought to the driver's side. It might've been the best option.

I wondered if his lenses were sufficiently thick, not knowing he was an optometrist.

My new home in Rælingen, across the Nitelv River from Lillestrøm proper, sat midway up a small hill at a swing in the road. It's not there now. But the house was large, white and wooden with red window frames. As Olav took a few automobile charges in battlement with the hill, which turned out to be normal for conditions of ice, I held my breath. He insisted on it: scarf re-wound, jacket zipper closed, studs clicked, beanie and ski gloves on, for the few short steps to the front door. I found a small area inside with racks and coat hangers and a heated metal stand for shoes, but as I had no knack for tapping boots together to loosen snow, my snow was left to melt inside. Then all the extra clothes came off again.

My host mother Gunborg waited. She had a wrinkly round face and permed brown hair such that she could've been Santa Claus's sister-in-law; and she wore an apron when she cooked. She spoke no more English than her husband; I suppose it wasn't the lingua franca of the North Pole.

As usual she'd whipped together some culinary masterpiece in anticipation of our arrival; soon enough I looked forward to every meal. There were boiled mountain potatoes as a rule, dripped with melted butter. There was fish or meat, sometimes both, with matching creamy, garlic or gravy sauces. I liked that the soft drinks were chilled on the veranda to save fridge space. I liked the taste of deer.

Apart from the white walls, the living room was of deep colours, burgundy leather, heavy cream and browns. The rich patterns of rugs and the art: the photos, handmade woollen tapestries and prints of classical Norwegian paintings on every wall wherever there was space, gave to the house warmth. In Australia our living room was painted yellow and had just one painting in it.

At meal times Gunborg lit a candle in an old candleholder they'd bought in Pompeii, a Roman replica. In Australia most rooms were lit by just