Zero Point

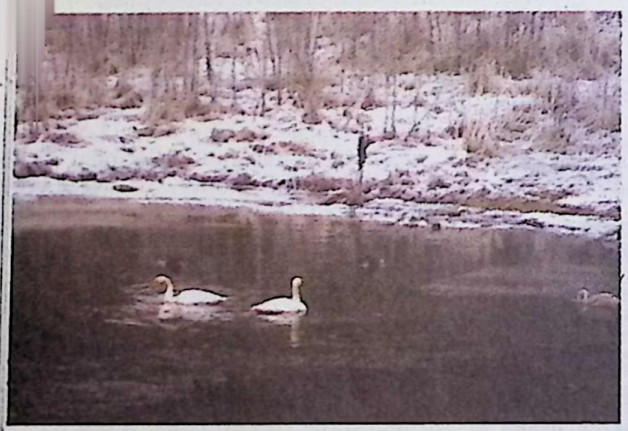
ANDREW EAGLE

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Besides, just as the heart might be found inexplicably inhabiting some distant delta, the cogs of the brain might turn their first in a snowy land.

In the free hours in those initial weeks in Norway, at the zero point, I'd taken to exploring and found that up the street from the Rælingen house suburban Oslo gave way to open country which at the time of year was decked white. There were deep pockets in the landscape of fields and in one I found an impressive oak tree. Against the grey skies of the Eastland the stem patterns seemed to mimic the shades and arcs of light in the house and the flicker of the candles.

There was a small pine forest and having grown up in a land of eucalypts I was excited to clamber through it, up the icy slopes with a leg occasionally falling deep into a random hole of snow. I had all the wonder that Bangladeshis do when they say they'd one day like to see snow, and touch it.



Swans on the Nitelv in autumn.

I was wrong about Gunborg and Olav. Theirs was not a bingo existence; the Rælingen house was no retirement village. Perhaps I appreciated that best in the summer, because although I was staying in the Westland by then I continued to visit whenever I had the chance to reach Oslo again. To my astonishment, that summer Olav sprang about the lawn in his sports outfit. He leapt and stretched as we played the badminton he'd proposed. It was tiring.

They were members of a swimming club so we'd swum; they liked to walk so we went to see the wild birds in the river flats a little to the south of Lillestrøm town. They were members of a pensioner's ski club and one day we all went cross country skiing. I was part of a team with an octogenarian leader and all other participants over seventy. There must've been at least some arthritis for them to contend with, but the pace was altogether suitable for an Australian skiing novice. Maybe it was really me who was seventy.

Meanwhile the oak tree had been busily changing its dress, not into a sports outfit but donning a light green hairdo for spring, a mature deep green summer crown and a short-lived autumn cloak of yellow and brown. It wasn't only Gunborg and Olav I came to visit in every season, but the equally active oak tree.

But I get ahead of myself. In the initial days Gunborg and Olav, ironically, spent some amount of energy concerned that I was bored, despite my saying I wasn't. They proposed the museum trips and the National Theatre for a play. They organised for me to spend one weekend with their eldest son Torgrim and his family; but unfortunately, because of the language difficulties, I hadn't understood that plan. Just as we were leaving there was a sudden fussing because I hadn't packed any clothes. I had no idea I needed to.

When it became apparent I wasn't going back with them on the same day, I was quite upset about it, though I said nothing. I thought I must've done something wrong. I was sure they were bored with



The oak tree with the activity of summer.