

## Volcano

### Gravitational force

Gravity isn't a rule. It's a theory that Isaac Newton invented one day in 1666 when he was sitting under his apple tree and an apple dropped from its branch. Isaac Newton came up with the theory of gravity in order to explain why things fall to the ground. But even though the theory has held up so far, you never know in principle whether the next apple will fly up to the sky.

I like that thought.

That gravity is a theory.

And that the apple can absolutely fall far from the tree. That it might actually be able to fly the opposite way.

It was Thomas who told me about gravity. And it was the crisis psychologist who gave me this book. 'PTSD,' he said. 'Write it down,' he said. 'It's healthy for you,' he said. His pale, hairy toes stuck out over the edge of his foot-shaped sandals. His couch scratched against my bare legs.

It feels like several years have passed. But it's only been a few weeks since Mum and I turned the key to room number 11. We stopped halfway down the hill to take one last look at the red-brick building that had been our home until recently. Fenced-in and video-monitored.

We had hardly any belongings. We were able to take it all on the bus. The driver was listening to the radio. We nodded in time to the music. I hugged my backpack against my chest. Mum dumped the overfull IKEA bag on the floor. She blew on her palms, which had been gnawed red by the handles. We smiled at each other.

'Chapter two starts now,' she said.

## Chapter Two

It's hard to start chapter two when chapter one never seems to end. Mum is listening to music with bells and deep, chanting voices. It's something the people from social services recommended. And probably the crisis psychologist, too. PTSD. The nervous system. Healthy for you. But no matter how loud the bells chime, and no matter how much her breathing sounds like the ocean, she can't drown out the vibrating phone.

It vibrates particularly hard when he texts. It vibrates so much that it falls out over the edge of our Salvation Army coffee table. When it hits the floor, it makes a bang that causes us both to wince. The only thing you can do is laugh. We were probably just startled there.

But our laughter dies down again quickly. I still have Dad's visitation every other weekend. It was decided in the family court and we don't have the strength to appeal it right now.

I dream that Idris is something that could happen in chapter two. Or maybe chapter three or four, if I'm being a little realistic. We haven't spoken to each other yet.

Idris is in the parallel class. His profile picture is taken from below while he's in the middle of a jump. There is only Idris and the blue sky around him. He's wearing a black hoodie and black tracksuit bottoms and looks like a shadow. Or a mirage. Something someone invented.

I sit staring at his profile picture. And gathering my courage.

Would you like to send Idris a friend request?

I *would* like to. But I *can't*. My heart beats at triple speed, the cursor shakes, and the floorboards under me crack. And Chili says I might as well not bother. He's not grounded. And he is ridiculously childish.

Chili is my friend here. She has platinum blonde hair, which she spends ages brushing in the wrong direction every morning so it becomes wild and unruly. She has safety pins in her black jeans and a push-up bra under her checked shirt. She's the kind of person who will easily smoke if whoever she is with is smoking, and she's in love with a guy from Year 10 with holes in his trousers and dreadlocks that stink of Roskilde Festival. Not that I've ever been there, but I'm pretty sure that's what they smell of. His name is Oscar, and he's invited us to a party at one of his friend's tonight.

Well, actually, he only invited *Chili* to the party. Chili is the kind of person who gets invited to parties by some guy who plays guitar. And I don't just mean Wonderwall. He can really play the guitar. He's in a band.

I'm more the kind of person they probably don't mind tagging along, providing I borrow some clothes from my new, cool friend.

Chili: Are you coming? I'm waiting at the corner.

Anna: 2 sec.

I fold the computer shut. Idris' black shadow remains a stain in front of my eyes, like when you've looked straight into the sun.

My skirt creeps up as I run down the stairs.

'Hi, Anna!' Nadja is on her way up. 'Look,' she says, opening her palm.

'A tooth,' I say.

'Mm. It fell out in kindergarten.'

'Cool,' I say.

'And look,' she says, pulling a crumpled piece of paper out of her pocket. 'It's a letter I've written to the tooth fairy.'

I close my eyes and pretend to read the doodles.

'It says that I'd like to wait until I've lost all my milk teeth to get the money. That way, I'll earn interest. But she can have the tooth now as a guarantee if she likes.'

Selma catches up with us. She's carrying two heavy net bags. 'Hi, Anna.'

I pull down my skirt.

'Are you going to a party?'

I nod.

Selma smiles. She doesn't look like a mum. Her lips are red and her shiny, black hair is in a loose bun. She has a pair of short shorts on her long, slender legs, and a tattoo of a naked woman on her upper arm.

'We're going to have our own party. A Disney Club party where you're allowed to eat sweets,' says Nadja.

I nod again. I never really know what to say when Selma is around. It's been like that ever since she first rang our doorbell and said, 'Hello, neighbours!' and gave us a moving-in bouquet. We had no vase, so we put it in a glass of water, and the flowers stood there so long that the water stagnated, and the petals fell off.

Selma sticks the key in her lock. 'Oh, by the way, Anna,' she says.

I stop on the landing and look up at her.

'I'm looking for a new babysitter. I don't need one that often. Only once in a while, at the weekend. Would you like to do it?'

'Em ...' I say. 'I don't really know anything about children, so maybe it's not a good idea.'

'I don't know anything about children either. Come on. It'll be fun. And I pay well, I promise.'

'Em, well, I guess I could ...' I begin, but Selma is already on her way into her flat.

'Super! Enjoy the party? You look lovely!'

## Hangover

The traffic lights changed to red before I could cross. Chili is waiting on the other side of the road. She stays away from the cars whizzing past between us. I look at my holey Converse and consider turning around. If I hurry, she won't be able to see me go. But they turn green again before I have time to decide.

'Come on, Anna!' Chili shouts.

I hitch up my backpack. Chili heads towards the outskirts of the city, past derelict warehouses and loud homeless people on the corners, enters a graffiti-painted yard through a gate. A band is playing somewhere. I can't see them. I can barely hear them through the scratchy speakers. Chili headbangs so her intentional-bed-head-hairstyle falls down over her face. She's wearing too much makeup. At least that's what my mum would say. She laughs at me.

'There he is,' I say.

Oscar's dreadlocks stand out from the crowd. Like a furry octopus swimming around in an ocean of black hoodies. Chili squeals as she elbows her way through the densely packed yard.

'Wait!' I shout. But the sea of people is closing in on her, and now I am completely alone. My backpack gnaws my shoulders.

Anna: Chili!!

Anna: Come back.

Anna: I don't know anyone.

Anna: What am I supposed to do?!

Anna: Seriously Chili

Anna: If you don't answer soon, I'm going!!!

Anna: I mean it.

Anna: 5 minutes. I'm going.

Anna: Hello???

\*

'Hi, Anna,' says my mum. She's sitting at the kitchen table. She doesn't look up. Maybe she's meditating.

'Hi.' I lean up against the door frame and yawn.

'Tired?'

'A little.'

'Did you have a good time with Chili?'

I shrug. 'It was okay. We just watched a movie about a girl who goes to a party with her best friend, but then her friend abandons her for a guy. It ended with her just walking around the city, waiting for it to be morning.'

'I see. I haven't heard of that one.'

I don't think she is meditating. She's just trying to decide whether she should butter herself another cheese sandwich. She runs her finger around the crumbs on the plate.

'It wasn't that good. But it apparently won an Oscar.'

'It's great you've found a female friend,' she says. 'Really. You deserve it.' She moves her lips as if she wants to say something more. Something about how sweet and clever and amazing I am, and how strange it was with the girls in my old class, how much they missed out on. But luckily, she doesn't go there. Finally, she looks up at me and frowns. 'What are you wearing?'

'I borrowed it from Chili.'

'Why? Did you pee?'

I shake my head. She probably thinks I'm lying now. But it's the truth.

'By the way, we need incontinence pads,' she says.

'No, Mum. Didn't you just go down to buy bread?'

'Yeah, but I forgot the incontinence pads.'

PTSD. Memory problems. Completely normal, but quite annoying.

I roll my eyes and pull down my skirt.

'And milk!' Mum shouts, just before the front door slams shut behind me.

'A bodily reaction,' said the crisis psychologist. Involuntary urination. Also normal, apparently.

## A seat

I've not got a seat yet. First, Carsten was sick, and then there was a special subject week where no one had their own places, and we've been busy with one thing and the other, and there's something about no extra desks in the classroom due to fire safety. Sometimes Carsten rolls his chair down to the end of a table, so we are three to the desk instead of two. Carsten's chair is soft. It's upholstered in yellow velvet that's ripped, so you can see the rubber foam. The backrest is a bit broken too, so you can't lean back too far. And you definitely shouldn't attempt to smell the chair.

It's not because the others are mean or anything. Most people don't even notice that I roll the chair over to their desk and that's worse than being in the way. So most of the time, I sit on the window sill.

Today Emil is sick and he usually sits next to Chili, so I borrow his seat.

We're learning about tectonic plates. Chili leans in over the world map. 'I'm not a virgin anymore,' she whispers.

'What?' I exclaim.

Carsten jumps. He likes to doze off a bit while we solve exercises. 'Anna and Chili!' he says.

'Sorry,' says Chili. She smiles a small, curly smile. 'We had sex,' she whispers.

'What?' I whisper.

'Me and Oscar. After the party. Where did you even go?'

I shake my head. 'Why?' I ask.

'Do you know he can play the guitar?'

'Yeah, you mentioned that.'

She smiles down at her paper.

'What did he do with his hair while you were doing it?' I ask. Chili rolls her eyes.

As the bell rings for break, I set Emil's chair in place. 'I think I have to go home. I'm not feeling well.'

Chili doesn't say anything. She stares dreamily down at her screen, which is full of text messages from Oscar. I wave my hand in front of her face, but she doesn't see me.

'Everything's spinning, do you know what I mean? It's like there's a membrane between me and the rest of the world.'

I heave my bag onto my back and squeeze past the others standing around the classroom chatting in clusters.

In the schoolyard, I'm practically tackled by a boy from Year 3.

'Watch out!' he shouts.

I duck my head and run through skipping ropes and hopscotch squares and girls chasing boys. On the other side of the fence, I stop and gasp for breath.

'Are you bunking off?'

The sound comes from above. I recognise the voice, even though we've never actually spoken to each other. Idris is balancing on the red-painted fence. He's wearing baggy tracksuit bottoms and an oversized T-shirt. His eyes twinkle golden in the sun. His hands are in fists. At first, I think he's angry about something. But then he raises his arms and spreads his fingers. And it rains with glitter from both palms.

'What was that?' I ask.

'Move a moment,' he says, jumping down on the asphalt. He lands elegantly on his feet. 'Are you bunking off?' he asks again.

'No. I'm sick,' I say.

'You're new, aren't you?'

'Yeah.'

'Chili's friend.'

'Yeah,' I say.

'My name's Idris.'

I nod as though I didn't already know. Idris.

'Well, get well soon,' he says.

'Thanks,' I say.

'We have to hope you get well before the city walk.'

'Are you going too?' I ask.

'The whole year is going.'

The city walk's next week. The others don't talk about anything else. First, we're going to look at old buildings and talk about how the city has developed. Afterwards, you don't have to go back to school. You can walk down Strøget or to Fisketorvet, for example.

'I think I'll be all right again by then. I just feel weirdly dizzy, you know? It's like I can feel the ground spinning.'

But Idris has already jumped on. I unlock my bike. It's new. Well second-hand, of course, but new to me. Everything we have here is new.

## A challenge

'So, are you dizzy?' asks Mum.

'It's more a feeling that I have nothing to hold on to,' I say.

Mum frowns. 'Maybe we should call the doctor.'

'No, I just need to rest. It's a bit like the feeling you get when you're on the roller coaster in Tivoli Gardens, and the attendant who's supposed to check whether you're strapped in tight doesn't seem to have a clue about how to check it. If you can imagine that.'

She probably can't, but she sighs and says that I'm allowed to stay home.

Chili: Shall I come over?

Anna: You can't. I'm too sick :(

Chili: I'll just drop by and give you the homework? We got a huge assignment in geography.

Chili: Shall I?

Chili: I have news about Oscar too <3

Chile: ?? :)

I mostly just sit and watch YouTube. I watch a dare video with a guy who has asked his followers to invent challenges, and his followers have suggested all sorts of crazy and disgusting things like sticking your head in a toilet bowl as it flushes and eating an entire jar of jalapeños.

Mum stands watching from behind my chair. 'Why is he doing that?'

I shrug. 'For fun.'

He lifts the jar to his mouth, but puts it down again laughing. '*Oh fuck, man,*' he says. '*You guys ... you guys are fucking crazy!*' He points to the screen. '*But I love all of you motherfuckers, you know that, right? So I'm gonna do this. Because I made a commitment when I asked you for dares. I made a promise that I would ...*'

'Blah, blah, blah,' I say, forwarding three minutes, to where he's finally putting jalapeños in his mouth.

'*FUCK MAN!*' he shouts. The sound blares. Mum puts her hands over her ears. He turns completely red in the face. '*Hot, hot, hot. I need water!*'

'He shouldn't drink water,' Mum says. 'That'll just make it worse.' She shakes her head and shuffles out into the kitchen.

I press pause. 'Hey, Mum?' I shout.

'What?'

'The class is going on a trip tomorrow. In the city.'

'Okay?'

'It's a city walk,' I shout.

'All right, so.'

'So I'll probably just take the train straight after.'

Mum is quiet for a moment. 'So, you're going to lug your weekend things around all day?'

'Oh yeah. I hadn't thought of that.'

'You decide, honey.'

'Yeah. I'll think about it.'

'Okay.'

I press play.

'Unless he cancels again,' she shouts.

'I haven't heard anything from him yet, so I don't think so.'

'But do you think you'll better enough tomorrow?'

I clear my throat. 'Yeah. I feel a little better already.'

'Okay, honey.'

I press pause. I find Idris' profile and look through the pictures. There's one where he's balancing on a bike rack. He's backlit, but his face is glowing anyway. I imagine him jumping, the second after the picture was taken. And I realise I'm holding my breath in excitement. He often balances on things, I think. And smile so the air glitters and something in me crackles. The cursor points to: Send Idris a friend request?

I close my eyes and quickly press OK, before I can change my mind.

Afterwards, I press play.

*'Oh, man! This is CRAZY! This is the sickest dare you have ever given me! I hate you guys! Nah, man. Just kidding. I love every single one of you sick motherfuckers. Don't forget to subscribe to my channel! Bye!'*

## Head in the clouds

'To the back! Are you listening? We have to go to the BACK of the bus!' shouts Lene. I don't know if she really squints all the time, or whether it's just her small, square glasses that make her look that way. Thin, blonde wisps of hair fall out of her short ponytail and stick to her sweaty forehead. Annoyed, she strokes them away. 'Idris! Please WALK down the bus.'

I turn my head. Idris swings on the bars and crawls over the seats, overtakes us all and swings down onto the backseat next to the boys from his class.

'Shit, it's hot here!' one of them shouts.

'Lene? Can you ask the bus driver to turn on the air conditioning?'

'You're well able to do that yourselves,' shouts Lene. 'Year 7 – A, B and C! Now, we're on a tour out in the world. You have to remember that you are REPRESENTATIVES of the school! This means that I expect you to behave PROPERLY and leave a GOOD IMPRESSION of us. And how do you behave properly on a bus?'

'You don't shout!' shouts one of the boys.

'And if an old lady gets on, you can give her your seat,' says one of the others.

I don't know their names yet.

Chili is on the other bus.

The floor is sticky.

I find a free seat next to a girl from the parallel class, but before I can sit down, she pushes her backpack down from her lap and onto the vacant seat. 'Taken,' she says, waving to her friend, who is right behind me.

I stand in the aisle. I'm sweating already.

Lene smiles at me. 'Isn't there a seat for you?'

I shake my head.

'You've brought a big tour bag with you.'

'It's my weekend bag. I'm going to my Dad's after.'

Worried, Lene frowns. 'Do you not think your back will get tired carrying it around all day?'

'It's not that heavy,' I say.

'Well, you can put it on the floor while we're on the bus.'

'Shit, it's hot!' shouts one of the boys.

Lene nods. 'This month has set a new record heatwave. It's the hottest May in fifty years ... Idris! Now I'm telling you for the LAST time: Sit DOWN! If the bus suddenly brakes, hanging from that is really dangerous.'

Someone laughs. Idris sits down again. But only for a moment. I don't think he's trying to be cheeky.

He just *can't* sit still. And, of course, he doesn't fall. Gravity doesn't apply to him. As we're getting off, Idris swings past me and out the doors. 'Hi, my new friend,' he says.

I check my phone.

One new notification: Idris has accepted your friend request.

\*

'Take a picture of me.'

I hitch up the backpack.

'Hello? Can you hear me? Will you take a picture I can send to Oscar?'

The noise of all the feet up on the Round Tower's steep slope sounds like someone is clapping. The white walls throw shouts and laughter back and forth. I duck my head.

The backpack pulls my shoulders down and makes it tighten around my neck vertebrae. Chili grabs my T-shirt and pulls me into her selfie. She makes rabbit ears behind my head.

The wind lifts our hair and we hover over the city.

Lene and Carsten point out some special buildings. Far in the distance is the water. Chili takes my hand.

I always know where he is. I don't purposely keep an eye on him. I just know. Someone says something funny, and Idris throws his head back in a laugh that shoots cool breezes and fleecy clouds.

'Ah, a little shade from the sun is such relief,' says Carsten, pushing his sunglasses up onto his forehead.

Idris has a small plastic tub in his pocket. Once in a while he takes it out and unscrews the red lid. He sticks his thumb and forefinger down into it and sprinkles glitter all over the city like spice. He sprinkles glitter out over the railing at the top of the Round Tower. Then he turns around and blows the last of the glitter in his palm towards me. I reach out my arms to try to grab it, but the wind is lazy and the glitter falls to the ground before it reaches all the way.

We see Rosenborg Castle, too. On the way to the Little Mermaid, Chili drags me down a side street.

'Whoa, shouldn't we be going the other way?' I ask.

Chili wrinkles her nose. 'Oscar has actually texted,' she says.

'Has he?'

'Yes. He's in the city, too. And he wants to know if we want to hang out with him.'

'Like, both of us?'

'Mm.' Chili nods, quickly clicking out of the message.

'But what about the mermaid?'

'She's not exactly on her way to the sea just yet, is she? We can always see her some other time.'

'But won't it be a little awkward?' I ask.

'Why should it be awkward?'

'Now that you're boyfriend and girlfriend. I don't want to hang out if you're going to be kissing all the time.'

'Do you think we're boyfriend and girlfriend?' she asks. The sun shines on her pink cheeks. She finds Christiania on Google Maps.

We run through the city with our noses in the screen and our heads in the clouds.

## Thank you

Oscar sits by the embankment. The gel in his dreadlocks glistens in the sun. From a distance, it looks like a halo. He nods in time to the music in his earbuds. He's sitting on the back of the bench, bent over the phone in his hands. His bony knees glow white through the holes in his dirty trousers, like snow-covered mountain peaks. Chili gives him a kiss. And another one. And then a long, messy, noisy one. She has saliva on her chin when they pull apart again.

'Hey,' he says hoarsely, putting out his cigarette.

'Can I have one?' asks Chili.

We sit down on the seat.

'So, what's going on?' Chili sucks in and coughs.

Oscar shrugs. Someone roars in his earlobes. *Growls* – it's apparently called that when it's music.

'Are you skiving?' asks Chili. Her eyes are watering.

'I'm not skiving. We have a gig tonight, so I had to leave early.'

Chili nods seriously. She drums with her feet. 'So, what are we doing?' she asks. 'Are you thirsty? I'm a little thirsty. Are you thirsty? Are you thirsty, Anna?'

'Yeah, a little maybe,' I say.

'I'll buy a Coke down there,' she says, pointing to a newsagents.

'Okay,' I say.

She gets up and leaves. A few feet away, she turns around and sends Oscar an air kiss. He smiles and waves to her, but when she turns around, he snorts.

Two seagulls fight over a piece of mouldy bread. From a nearby playground, we can hear screaming children's shrill voices. Somewhere a car is beeping. But on the bench, there is silence. Except for the roars from Oscar's headphones, of course. I clear my throat a few times and smile stupidly at my Converse. One shoe smiles back – the hole is so big my toes can get fresh air if I stick them out far enough.

'We just saw Rosenborg Castle,' I say. 'But we didn't bother with the Little Mermaid. You can always go to see her. It's not like she's heading out to sea just yet.'

Oscar doesn't answer.

'So ... where's your concert going to be?'

Oscar turns around and looks at me for the first time since we got there. Then he leans forward and kisses me. It happens so quickly I doubt afterwards whether it really happened. But my mouth tastes of cigarette smoke, and my upper lip is irritated from his stubble.

'You're very naughty,' he says casually.

Chili comes back and hands me a Coke.

'Thanks,' I croak.

Oscar winks at me. The song in his earbuds goes crazy.



*Fuck you I won't do what you tell me. Fuck you I won't do what you tell me.*

My movements are stiff and awkward when I get up. 'I just need to ... Eh ... I just have to... Bye.'

## **Hair on it**

I don't know where I'm going. The world is a film and I'm only half-following it. I seem to have walked over a little bridge. A black dog was barking at me, so its homeless owner shouted: 'Buster, leave the damn girls alone!'

I take a sip of my Coke and sniff in the sweet, heavy smell. I'm on a crowded cobblestone street with small colourful stalls, stray dogs and Tibetan flags hanging across the blue sky. People keep bumping into me and I realise it's because I'm standing still in the middle of everything. I put the Coke bottle in my backpack. A bunch of American tourists push me into a dark cool gateway.

'What will it be?' A dirty guy without any front teeth is sitting at a folding table. He has a thick fleece jumper with an Icelandic knit pattern and black coffee in a white disposable cup.

'Where am I?' I ask.

'What are you doing, Jaser? You can't sell to her!' A woman with an unusually deep and hoarse voice comes out through a door. She's wearing a pair of floral leggings. Her legs look grotesquely thin under her bloated stomach. On her chest hangs a bumbag. She unzips it and finds a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. All the wrinkles on her face are pulled down towards the cigarette when she puts it in her red-painted lips and inhales. 'Ah,' she sighs.

'Why not?' asks Jaser.

'That girl isn't sixteen yet.'

'Sell what?' I ask.

'We have a rule here in the shop, young lady.' The woman holds her head high so that the liver pâté-coloured fountain on top of her head dangles.

'What? Her? She's at least eighteen!' Jaser spits on the ground. 'How much do you need?'

'Eh ...'

'I'll just make a tiny, totally mild portion for you,' he says, winking.

'No, she's bloody well not! The girl doesn't have tits yet. She's about ten years old max. I have a granddaughter your age,' says the lady, pointing at me with her cigarette.

'Actually ...' I say.

'And you know what? I'm not being a mean aunt, or whatever? It's my maternal instinct speaking now. I just think that if it was my little Rosa coming here, you know? You not bloody mature enough when you're only ten.'

'But I'm not ten,' I say.

The woman raises her eyebrows. 'Well, okay then, but I need proof, honey. I'm not so easily fooled. Can I see your pussy?'

'My what?'

'I need to see if you have hair on it.'

'Shit, Jeanette. No young girl has hair on it these days. Definitely not those over sixteen,' says Jaser. Jeanette waves me closer. 'Come here, come. It's only me who's going to see it. It's not dangerous.' Jeanette pulls out the edge of my trousers. She blows smoke out of the corner of her mouth and squints.

'Well?' asks Jaser.

'I *think* there's a little tuft ... but it could just be a shadow ... It's hard to say.'

Jaser whistles through the gap where his front teeth should be. 'Leave the poor girl alone, Jeanette. Look at how embarrassed she is.'

Jeanette releases the waistband with a slap. She lets out a loud, rattling laugh. 'Ha, ha. She's so bloody sweet!'

'You know what?' says Jaser. 'You are bloody sweet. And you also look very sensible. So I'll let you buy this. It's very, very mild and completely organic.'

Jaser puts a small, square bag in the palm of my hand and closes my fingers around it. His nails are black and his skin is rough.

'Eh ... thanks,' I say.

'And you only have to pay me 100 kroner,' he says.

'I don't know if I have ...' I'm about to rummage in my backpack for my purse, but just then a guy sticks his head in the gate and shouts: 'The FILTH! THE COPS ARE COMING!'

Jaser clears the folding table and hurries after Jeanette.

'But what about the money?' I shout.

No one answers.

There's a commotion outside the alley.

I stuff the bag down next to the Coke.

The smoke is dense. Stalls and people are knocked down. I run. My backpack swings from side to side, slamming hard into my back every time my feet hit the ground.