

Homeward Bound

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As a greeting from our family and as Arne's holiday-home neighbours, we have had the pleasure of partaking in his knowledge of the Nordic language and history. Arne's academic commitment to our cultural heritage shows us that we are part of a rich language history that binds us together by the sea. The text that follows is written by Hilde Rognskog as a series of associative memories on the journey 'home', to Veiholmen.

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It was the wind. Shouting and screaming at it, 'you can't catch me'. Or leaning your back against it, trusting it to keep you upright. The freedom of it. Usually, it was the opposite. The fear of its force. Its power being so great that it is impossible to move forward or breathe against it. The first nightmare is about the wind. The wind that fills all cavities – throat, nose, armpits, and eyes. Sneaking in all over the place. Hair blowing in all directions, making it hard to see. Never still, never calm. The windswept island with windswept people and the clouds drifting past.

The ferry rocks vigorously. It's not scary. Feeling the impact of the waves. Head moving slowly from side to side. Not unwell,

just a wee bit queasy. None of the passengers leave their cars to go up to the lounge for a coffee and a snack. On this late autumn evening, they remain safely cocooned in their separate shells.

It's dark. Markers with reflectors and white stripes on the road edge are all that is visible. Narrow roads. Over narrow bridges. From Edøy island to Kuli. The Kulibrua bridge over the Kulisvaet strait, Dampleibrua bridge over the Dampleia strait. From Kuli over Hestøya island and further out to Lamøya island. Some names are signposted along the way. Others are only mentioned on the map. The fishing boats are gone, and the recreational boats driven away on trailers.

The quickest route is through Frostahaia. Some slack turns and then straight ahead. A meeting place signposted with M. for cars coming in the opposite direction, or to allow cars to overtake. No cars. Straight ahead over the flat marsh. The lowland plains, like the prairie. A generation ago, there were no trees here. You could see for miles in all directions. The flatness beneath you, and the sky above you. Clusters of imported Sitka fir block the view now. Welcome as protection from the wind for some, a plague and nuisance for others. Marsh and bog, poor man's coal, and oil. The wind and rain, lack of sun and evaporation.

There is no consistency in the story. Just fragments. A disparity between mind and body. Where is the connection between the bigger picture and the smaller stories? Moving on, moving on. Over the moor, further out. Way out, towards the outermost reef. It's late and the weather is bad. Past Frostahaia and a right turn towards Sætran. Smooth turns, enjoyable to drive.

Round the church slowly, past Hopen Pier, over Kvalpøystraumen to Kvalpøya island. Pitch-black night. The frantic movement of the windscreen wipers whipping everything

away. Names of islands come to mind. Place-names that tell of a property, a quality, a utility. AUSA, Måøya, Svinsylta, Pissarholmen. Like a delightful children's rhyme.

Finally, the bridge over the Verjeskift. Almost home and emotion takes over. The trinity – landscape, home, tears. White foam tops on the reef, turbulent sea and wind. This is Veiholmen, the real Veiholmen. Not summer, calm and idyllic.

Over Haugøya island. The little pine forest. Light brown barn needles, cones, and ants on the ground. The smell of summer. Further on to Hamarøya island. The dream of summer, rarely attainable. It's all about finding the right moment when all the variables align. A warm morning at low tide, just enough to warm up rock and sand. High tide in the afternoon, warm and delightfully free. To dive in and be saturated by the wild Atlantic waters.

The thoughts are interrupted by a gradual realisation. Strolling on the shoreline and climbing the island peaks. Look what I found! A sea urchin shell and a bird's skull. Crab claws coloured pink by the sun. Mussels and razor shells. Lovely clusters of sunburned black tang. Tossed in the middle of the island by storm surge and hurricanes. Look here, a bottle with Russian writing, a fish crate from Scotland! In the beginning a phenomenon, and a fleeting thought about storms at sea and reckless crew. Eventually, there were other things crunching underfoot! Jumbles of nylon nets, plastic bottles in all shapes and colours. Pipes, bags, and polystyrene. Entangled in the heather and becoming overgrown. As if ashamed and sweeping the stranger under the carpet. Until it can't be hidden anymore. So quickly, over so many years.

The car wipers are noisy and are turned off. Moving on, past the fishing co-op and the sports ground, past Stortjønna. Past Varden and Verkjen that provide views of the sea and the mountains, which can be glimpsed towards the mainland.

Flaksbåen rock acts as *mèdast* ('marker') for Veiaflesa in the outermost Langfjellet, and Dyrnestuva on the eastern side of Andholmen. Double Dutch for most people, but fun to recall from *Mål og méd*.¹ Locating the fishing spot requires systematic record taking and experience, local knowledge of weather, wave conditions, the seabed, and tides. The movements of the fish through the seasons are yet another variable. Weather-worn houses, boats, and their usage, all requiring extra care. Repairing fishing nets, mending engines. Take a deep breath and move on. Past Gulltjønna, the graveyard and the turn between the corner houses.

The last stretch across Sementveien, past Samvirken, and parking in Johan Været's living room. The house that once fitted into the row with Øyenhuset, Indre Angelhus, and Tangstad. It's missing. Now it's a parking lot. The house is cold. A glass of wine, a blanket, and out on the terrace. The smell of seaweed, kelp, and the sea. It's windy, but the familiar sounds are easy to call forth. The black-backed gull's wings as it flies close to the house walls, and its rough, easy call – *kaa-ga-ga*. Its sound more complex than the irksome *kija-kija* of the seagull. Its gaze moving on towards the Atlantic.

Remman, a reef strip into the ocean to the north-west, enables people to live out here. A natural barrier to the ocean. Small and large reefs protruding over and under the water. Only the cormorant sits on the clean-cut reefs in the barren and grey winter. With breaking waves, you can't get ashore. In summer, it explodes with dooryard dock, mayweed, viola, and hogweed. Electric green, white, and yellow. Growths cling between cracks and small patches of soil, fertilised with bird excrement. Plants make haste to grow before the autumn

1. Triangulation navigation technique using two or three landmarks to get one's bearing. See Kruse, Arne. 2000. *Mål og méd. Målføre og médnamn frå Smøla*. Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag.

storms set in. Ducks wade past and lose feathers; gulls rest on the wind. The oystercatcher plunges down to defend his nest. Baby seagulls do their best to hide in the rock crevices. But best of all, the kelp forest. Toothed wreck, oar weed, black tang, and dead man's rope. Leaning over the side of the boat, hand in the water, the feeling as fingers slide along dead man's rope, bulging like spaghetti on the surface. Cold, smooth, and slippery.

Several stories can be told about Veiholmen. For example, about stone stacking. Not as in Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil* – a single man's struggle to clear stones to create a living in the barren soil. Rather, the large stacks of stone used as supports under houses and boathouses. The cairn tower with its tarred wide stones, or boulders placed rhythmically over the pier. Buildings that made it possible to not only fish here, but also to live. Cutting, blasting, and moving an infinite amount of stone. Stones must be angular, pointed, and crooked to withstand the waves. Round smooth stones are spineless and slip easily apart. Stones should be entwined and resilient, like the islanders themselves.

Other stories will follow. Not about individuals fighting the forces of nature, but collective efforts and community building. Such as that of the Haugjegla Lighthouse. To stand by its lantern, observing the curvature of the earth, the peace and tranquillity. Tomorrow, the wind will abate.