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DOCTOR PROCTOR'S
FART
POWDER

JO NESBØ



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DOCTOR PROCTOR'S
FART
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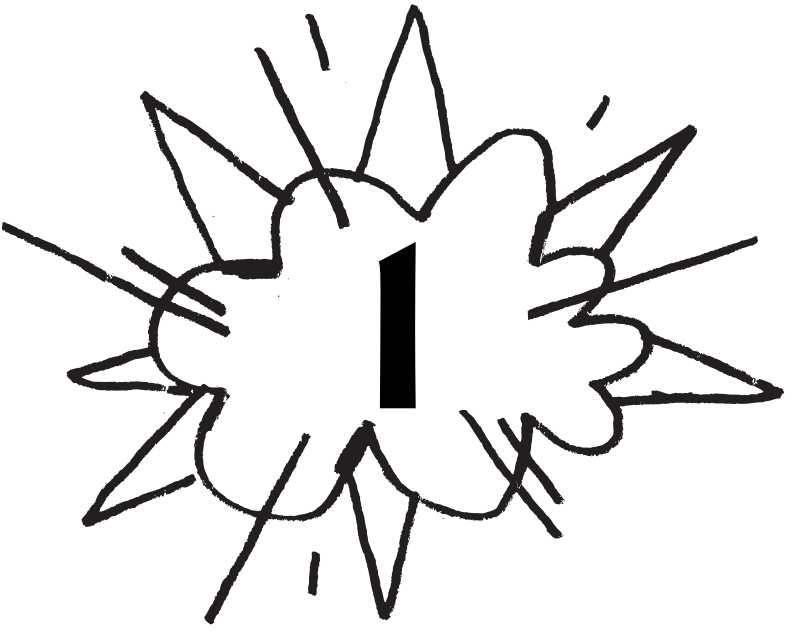
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The New Neighbour

IT WAS MAY, and once the sun had shone for a while on Japan, Russia and Sweden, it came up over Oslo – the very small capital city, of a very small country called Norway. The sun got right to work shining on the yellow, and fairly small, palace

that was home to the king of Norway, who didn't rule over enough for it to amount to anything, and on Akershus Fortress. There it shone on the old cannons that were aimed out over the Oslo Fjord, through the window of the Commandant's office and then onto the most remote of doors. The door that ultimately led to the city's most feared jail cell, the Dungeon of the Dead, where only the most dangerous and worst criminals were kept. The cell was empty, apart from a *Rattus norvegicus*, a little Norwegian rat that was taking its morning bath in the toilet.

The sun rose a tiny little bit higher and shone on some children in a school marching band who had practised waking up very early and putting on uniforms that itched, and who were now practising marching and playing almost in time. Because soon it would be the seventeenth of May, Norwegian Independence Day, and that was the day when all the

school marching bands in the whole small country would get up very early, put on uniforms that itched and play almost in time.

And as the sun climbed a tiny little bit higher it shone on the wooden wharves on the Oslo Fjord, where a ship from Shanghai, China, had just docked. The wharf planks swayed and creaked from all the busy feet running back and forth unloading goods from the ship. Some of the sun's rays even made their way between the planks and down under the wharf to a sewer pipe that stuck out into the water.

And one single ray of sunlight made its way into the darkness of the sewer pipe making something in there gleam. Something that was white, wet and *very* sharp. Something that bore a nasty resemblance to a row of teeth. And if you knew something about reptiles, but were otherwise very stupid, you might have thought that what you were seeing were the eighteen fangs found in the jaws of the world's

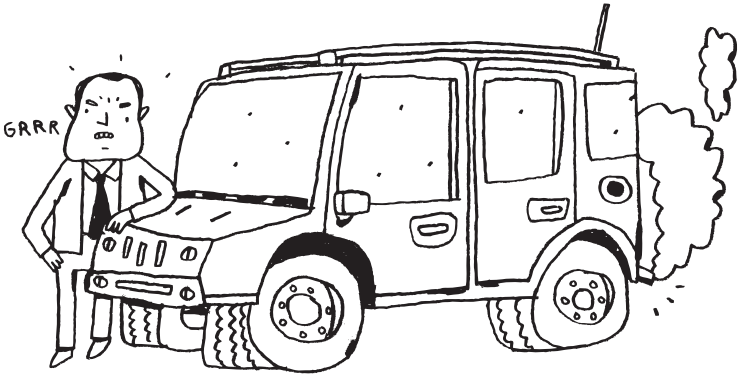
biggest and most feared constrictor. The anaconda. But nobody's that stupid. Because anacondas live in the jungle, in rivers like the Amazon in Brazil, not in the sewer pipes running every which way beneath the small, peaceful, northerly city called Oslo. An anaconda in the sewer? Sixteen metres of constricting muscles, a jaw the size of an inflatable swim ring and teeth like upside-down ice-cream cones? Ha, ha! Yeah, right, that would've been a sight!

And now the sun was starting to shine on a quiet street called Cannon Avenue. Some of the sun's rays shone on a red house there, where the Commandant of Akershus Fortress was eating breakfast with his wife and their daughter, Lisa. Some of the rays shone on the yellow house on the other side of the street, where Lisa's best friend used to live. But as her best friend had just moved to a town called Sarpsborg, seeing the yellow house empty made Lisa feel very

lonely. Because now there wasn't anyone for Lisa to play with on Cannon Avenue. The only other kids in the neighbourhood were Truls and Trym Trane. They were the twins who lived in the big house with the three garages at the bottom of the hill, and they were two years older than Lisa. In the winter they threw rock-hard snowballs at her little red-haired head. And when she asked if they wanted to play, they pushed her down into the snow. And with icy mittens they rubbed snow into her face while christening her Greasy Lisa, Flatu-Lisa or Commandant's Debutante.

Maybe you're thinking that Lisa should've mentioned this to Truls and Trym's parents so they would rein the boys in. But that's because you don't know Truls and Trym's father, Mr Trane. Mr Trane was a fat and angry man, even fatter than Lisa's father and way, way angrier. And at least ten times as rich. And because he was so rich, Mr Trane didn't think anyone had any business coming and telling him

anything whatsoever, and especially not how he ought to be raising his boys! The reason Mr Trane was so rich was that he had once stolen an invention from a poor inventor. The invention was a very hard, very mysterious and very secret material that was used, among other things, on prison doors to make prisons absolutely escape-proof. Mr Trane had used the money he'd made from the invention to build the big house with the three garages and to buy a Hummer. A Hummer, in case you don't know, is a big, angry car that was made to use in wars and that took up almost the whole road when Mr Trane drove up Cannon Avenue. Hummers are also awful polluters.



But Mr Trane didn't care, because he liked big, angry cars. And besides, he knew that if he crashed into someone his car was a lot bigger than theirs, so it would be too bad for them.

Luckily it would be a while until Truls and Trym could christen Lisa with snow again, because the sun had long since melted it on Cannon Avenue, and now the sun was shining on the gardens, which were green and well groomed. All, that is, except for one. The garden was scraggly, drab and unkempt, but was pleasant anyway because it had two pear trees and belonged to a small, crooked house that might possibly have been blue at one time and that was missing a fair number of roof tiles. The neighbours on Cannon Avenue rarely saw the man who lived there. Lisa had only met him a couple of times, he'd smiled and otherwise looked sort of like his garden – scraggly, drab and unkempt.

"What's that?" grumbled the Commandant as the

roar of a large engine disturbed the morning quiet. "Is that that awful Hummer of Mr Trane's?"

His wife craned her neck and peered out the kitchen window. "No. It looks like a moving van."

Lisa, who was generally a very well-behaved girl, got up from the table without having finished what was on her plate or having been excused. She ran out onto the front steps. And sure enough a moving van with the name CRAZY-QUICK written on its side was parked in front of the empty, yellow house that used to be her best friend's house. Movers were unloading cardboard boxes from the back. Lisa went down the stairs and over to the so-called apple tree in her garden by the fence to get a closer look. The men in overalls were carrying furniture, lamps and big, ugly pictures. Lisa noticed one of the movers showing the other a dented trumpet that was sitting on top of one of the cardboard boxes and then they both laughed. But she couldn't see any sign of what

she'd been hoping to see – dolls, small bicycles, a pair of short skis. And that could only mean that whoever was moving in didn't have kids, at least no girls her age. Lisa sighed.

Just then she heard a voice.

"Hi!"

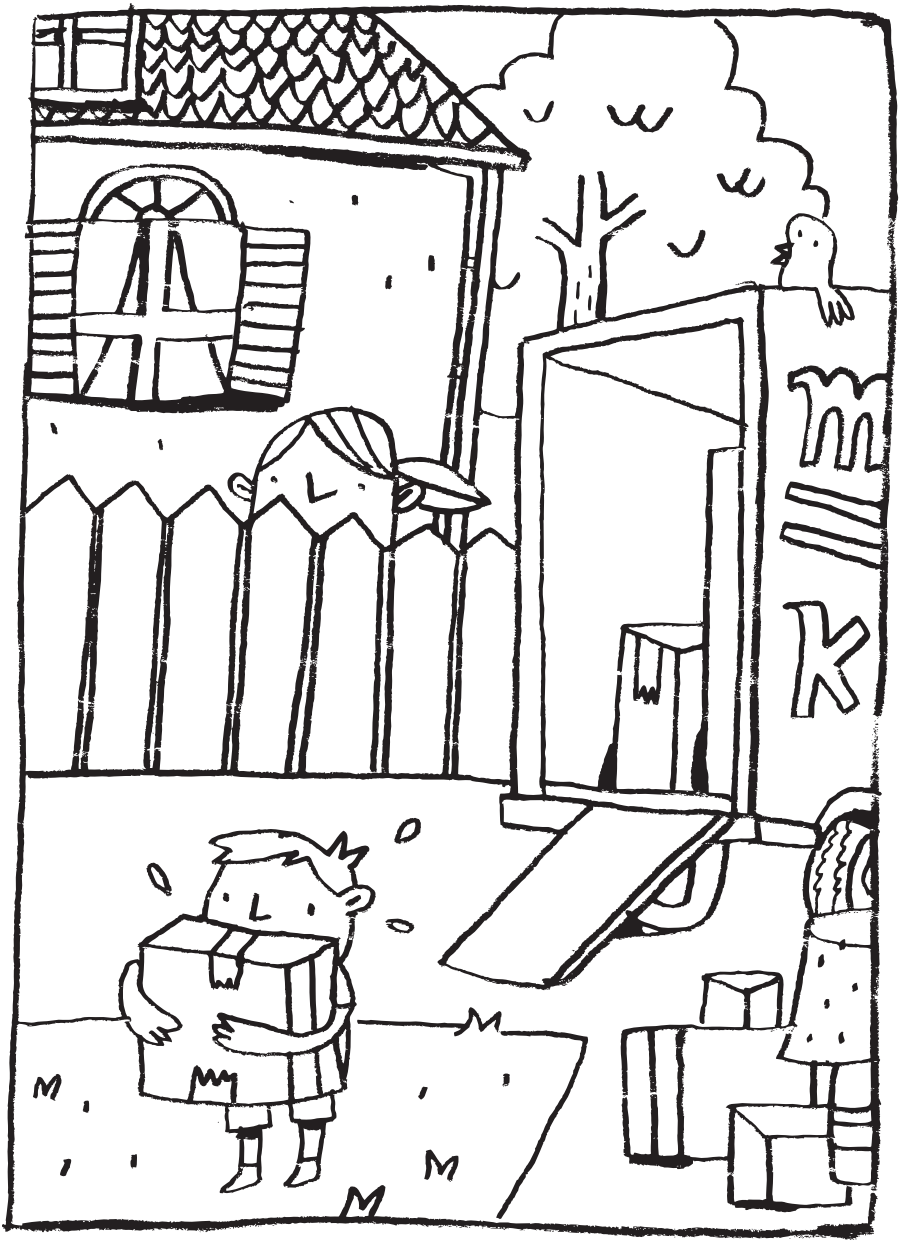
She looked around in surprise, but didn't see anyone.

"Hi there!"

She looked up at the tree her father said was an apple tree, but that no one had ever seen any apples on. And that now appeared to be talking.

"Not there," the voice said. "Over here."

Lisa stretched up on her tiptoes and peered down on the other side of the fence. And there was a little boy with red hair standing there. Well, not just red, actually, but bright red. And he wasn't just small, he was tiny. He had a tiny face with two tiny blue eyes and a tiny turned-up nose in between.



The only things on his face that were big, were the freckles.

"I'm Nilly," he said. "What do you have to say about that?"

He was supposed to be named William, but the priest refused to give such a tiny boy such a long name. So Billy would have to do. But the ringer of the church bells came up with a brilliant idea: a boy who was so tiny that he was *nearly* invisible should be called Nilly! His parents had just sighed and said okay, and thus the bell ringer got his way.

Lisa asked, "What do I have to say about what?"

"About my being called Nilly. It's not exactly a common name."

Lisa thought about it. "I don't know," she said.

"Good." The boy smiled. "It rhymes with 'silly', but let's just leave it at that. Deal?"

Lisa nodded.

The boy stuck his right index finger in his left ear. "And what's your name?"

"Lisa," she said.

Nilly's index finger twisted back and forth as he watched her. Finally he pulled his finger out, looked at it, gave a satisfied nod and rubbed it on his trouser leg.

"Jeez, I can't think of anything interesting that rhymes with Lisa," he said. "You're lucky."

"Are you moving into Anna's house?"

"I don't know who Anna is, but we're moving into that yellow shack over there," Nilly said, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb.

"Anna's my best friend," Lisa said. "She moved to Sarpsborg."

"Whoa, that's far," Nilly said. "Especially since she's your best friend."

"It is?" Lisa said. "Anna didn't think it was that far. She said I should just go south on the highway when I visit her."

Nilly shook his head, looking gloomy. "South is right, but the question is if the highway even goes that far. Sarpsborg is actually in the Southern Hemisphere."

"The Southern what-i-sphere?" Lisa said, shocked.

"Hemisphere," Nilly said. "That means it's on the other side of the world."

"Whoa," Lisa said, taken aback. After she thought about it a minute, she said, "Dad says that it's super warm in the south all year round, so I bet Anna can go swimming all the time now, whether it's summer or winter."

"No way," Nilly said. "Sarpsborg is so far south that it's practically at the South Pole. It's freezing. Penguins live on people's roofs down there."

"You mean it snows all year round in Sarpsborg?" Lisa asked.

Nilly nodded and Lisa shivered. Nilly pursed his lips together while at the same time pressing air out

between them. It sounded like a fart. Lisa furrowed her brow, remembering how the twins had called her Flatu-Lisa. “Are you trying to tease me?” she asked. “About my nickname?”

Nilly shook his head. “Nope, I’m practising,” he said. “I play the trumpet. That means I have to practise all the time. Even when I don’t have my trumpet.”

Lisa cocked her head to the side and looked at him. She wasn’t really sure anymore if he was telling the truth.

“Lisa, you have to brush your teeth before you go to school,” she heard a voice rumble. It was her dad, who’d put on his blue Commandant’s uniform and was waddling towards the door with his big belly. “The ship with the gunpowder for our cannons arrived from Shanghai this morning, so I’ll be home late. You be a good girl today.”

“Yes, Dad,” said Lisa, who was always good.

She knew it was a special day when the gunpowder arrived. It had sailed halfway around the world and had to be handled very carefully and respectfully, since it was used to fire off Akershus Fortress's Big and Almost World-Famous Royal Salute on May seventeenth, Norway's Independence Day.

"Dad," Lisa called to him. "Did you know that Sarpsborg is in the Southern . . . uh, Hemisphere?"

The Commandant stopped, looking puzzled. "Says who?"

"Nilly."

"Who's that?"

She pointed. "Nill . . ." she started, but stopped suddenly when she discovered that she was pointing at a stretch of Cannon Avenue where there was only Cannon Avenue and absolutely no sign of Nilly.