# Prologue

\*\*Where it is very cold/A cow has a limp/The sale of the farm is discussed/Someone wins a price\*\*

Cold air blew into the room as he opened the hallway door. "The cow have their food, and I've cleared most of the snow." He said rubbing his hands together to get a bit of warmth back into them. The old man sat down heavily at the table. His wife was at the counter preparing breakfast. From the stove she got the coffeepot and filled his mug. "Drink, warm up." "It seems colder every year" he said as she put the basket with bread on the table and sat down herself. Outside it was still dark. She knew there were snow covered mountains all around.

She saw how it hurt him to pick up the warm mug with his cold hands. From the basket she took a bun, cut it, and put cheese between the halves. "Clara had something wrong with her feet this morning. I'll call Heinz later and see if he has time to come and take a look at her." It was always the cow named Clara that had trouble with walking. She smiled as she thought it might be something in the name. "You sure you want to call him out in this weather? It can't be easy for him to get out here." "It'll be fine. I know he does not just want to sit at home." They finished their meal, and she cleared the table. Dieter went back into the cold to do some work in his workshop.

Heinz went into the house after taking a look at the limping cow. Although he found it was nothing serious Dieter still wanted to stay in the stables. Keeping watch. "Hallo?" He yelled in the hallway. "Come in, come in." Grethe called back from the front kitchen. He found his own mug already waiting for him on the kitchen table. As he sat down Grethe was hobbling around getting the milk and sugar and putting some cookies on a plate. The mug had a small chip on the rim from when he had dropped it years ago. Ever since it was his mug and it had been standing, waiting for him as he came by. "How is Clara?" she asked, sitting down. "She will be fine. A bit of trouble with het hooves. It will heal. She is just getting a bit older." As we all are he thought looking across the table and feeling his cold toes.

"We have put the farm up for sale." She said after they had been sitting for a while. He kept on looking at the yard and nodded. "It was time. The children do not want to take over and we are having more and more trouble keeping up." she continued as he took another sip of his coffee. "How is Dieter feeling about it?" Heinz asked. "I think he accepts it. It is not his family that has had it for so many years." Now he looked at Grethe. "And you?" Silence for a bit. "It will take me some time, I think." She said with a sigh. "Times have changed. And we can't force the children to do something they don't want to do. Especially in these times." She looked outside. "They both have good jobs and a life in the city." Heinz nodded again. "There is a reason your farm was the last in the valley."

They sat for a while in silence finishing their coffee. Afterwards Heinz went back outside looking for Dieter. He found him, still in the stable looking at his cows. He got another stool from a corner and sat down as well. The air in the stable was warmed by the cows making it almost warm inside. Picking his glasses off his nose he cleaned them on his shirt. "You've heard about the sale from Grethe? Heinz nodded his glasses still in his hand, Dieters face a blur. "It is hard on her. The family has been farming here for at least four generations. I only came in later when we married." Putting his glasses back on, Heinz replied. "I think you took good care of it. Farming is getting harder and harder around here. It takes a young person to grow the business." Dieter smiled. Fifteen cows and a few fields were enough to feed a family and make us happy."

"I've won. I really won!" Laying in bed the thought kept me awake. The winning ticked on the nightstand right next to me. I was happy they let me keep it. Maybe I should have it framed. This and other thoughts just kept running on. Today it had all become real. First the champagne and congratulations and forms and advice about accountants and banking. Then the ride back home. First class in the train, for the first time. My debit card somehow feeling heavier in my pocket. After the weekend I will quit my job. Then a vacation for a while. Just sit in the sun and think about what I want to do. And after that. Maybe a little farm. And thinking about the green fields and riding around on tractors I finally fell asleep.

# Chapter 1

\*\*Where we arrive by train/Drive in a small yellow car/Take a first look at the farm\*\*

The train was slowing down. Around us the valley was opening up. On one side there still were steep cliffs but on the other the mountains went further away. Grass meadows appeared. "Erlengrad, Nachste halt, Erlengrad Bahnhof." A voice announced over the speakers. The cliffs on the left side made room for the village. A loading platform with a small road leading further into the mountain and then apartments next to the road. As we slowed to a stop I stood up and picked up my bag. The train came to a halt. Through the open doors I stepped onto the platform. The stifling air hit me as I left the airconditioned train. Behind me the doors beeped and closed. I was still looking around as the train drove off again. A few other people had gotten off the train with me. I followed them up the stairs and over the bridge across the tracks.

Most of the people went left to the parking lot as they got off the stairs. I followed them. As I was looking around, they got into a small van. Their driver packing luggage into the back. A small man walked up to me. "John?" He asked as he reached out to shake my hand. "I'm Dieter, we talked on the phone." I moved my bag to my other hand and we shook. He was a lot smaller than me. Balding, with his hair combed over the bald spot in the middle. Tanned and skinny. He did look old but wiry and his grip felt crushing. "Follow me, to the Doschwo" On the last parking space a small yellow car was waiting for us. Dieter opened the trunk of the ugly duckling. My bag only just fitting inside. I slit onto my chair. Dieter getting in next to me. Our elbows almost touching. But it was clean inside, and the engine did start the first try.

Dieter backed out of the parking spot and put the car in first. Smoothly we drove away the engine revving up. "I would give you a tour of the town, but I think you really want to see the farm." I nodded. "There is not much to see anyway." He continued. At the roundabout he took a right around the station. Across the river we stopped for a stop sign before turning left following the water. On the right a couple of houses. Then right at the roundabout. "This is not the fastest way from town but this way we can see the whole farm. The engine was working hard. The road going steep uphill. "The houses here are vacation homes or small bread and breakfasts. There used to be small farms here, but they are all gone. Curve after curve we went higher up the hill. Then a left at another roundabout. More traditional houses. At a field just past them Dieter stopped the car right in the road. "Here on the right is our high field. Behind those trees are the house and the farmyard."

A grassy field with mountain flowers with a small wooden fence in the middle. "To the right of that fence is our neighbors’ field. A farm from the next village over maintains it for him." On our, my, side of the fence the field lay next to a dense forest with spruce and a few leafy trees. I could see nothing of the farm. Dieter put the car back in gear and we drove on. On the right we passed a small road. A white and red barrier blocking access. "The rear entrance of the farm. We will go around." Dieter said. We were going downhill now. The road pretty steep. At the bottom we were back on the road next to the river. A right turn. "The field next to you is also part of the farm. In between the trees you can just see some of the farm buildings." I did catch a glimpse of a wooden roof in between the needle trees. Another turn. On the right there were more trees, and on our left a field of grain. Golden, ready to harvest. "That plot is farmed by the farmer in the next valley. They manage most of the flat fields between the town and the lake." "Hold on we have to keep our speed high to get up here."

With a bump, the springs squeaking, me holding on and Dieter shifting down we drove into another small road. Steep uphill. In a flash a saw white fences around a field with a few cows. Even with the run-up the car almost did not make it to the top. Dieter had to put it into first gear the engine working hard to make it the last few meters. Past another barrier, fortunately open and coming to a stop in front of a classic Swiss wooden house. I looked around as I got out of the car. The house was three stories high with a sloped roof. The wood part was built on the concrete first floor. To get to the door you had to use a small concrete stair. Next to the house was an old barn with tractors inside. I caught a glimpse of the red Linder and a wheel that could only be of the Brührer was just visible next to it. Everything was like the pictures. The stable across the house and the sheds a bit further out in the yard. "You will get the grand tour later. Grethe is waiting for us." I followed Dieter up the stairs into the house.

In the hallway there were another couple of steps to get up to the door of the kitchen. Dieter pointed to a steep stairway right next to the entrance. "Those lead right into the basement." He went up the steps, opened the door and motioned me into the kitchen. The room cool and pretty dark. The small windows not letting in a lot of light from outside. An old woman was working at the countertop in front of the windows. She looked up when we walked in. "Sit, sit. I'll be right there. You drink coffee, right?" I nodded and took a seat at the table while looking around. Dark wooden walls. Pictures on every free space. The table had four seats and Dieter sat down across from me. The woman had finished what she was doing and put a small basket on the table. I stood up and we shook hands. "I'm Grethe, welcome to the farm. Please take some cake. I'm sure you are hungry after the trip." I sat back down and took a slice of cake from the basket. Grethe got my coffee and a couple of small plates for the cake. The cake was not too sweet and very compact. More like sweet bread than the cake I was used to. Dieter and Grethe put some jam on theirs and I copied them.

After we sat for a while, and I finished my coffee Dieter was ready to show me around the farm. We went back outside and took a door at the side of the house. Directly behind the door where steep stairs to the first floor. Dieter climbed up and I followed. He paused on the landing pointing at stairs going even further up "If you go up there in the attic are the rooms for our children. They visit every now and then and usually sleep over." I had seen their children in photographs in the kitchen. A boy and a girl. The boy being the older one. No idea how old they were now. My apartment took up the first floor. Most of the room was for the kitchen and living room combination. The walls were freshly painted. Windows on all sides made it pretty bright. At the front I could look out on the yard and at the back I could see trees and the mountain in the distance. A small dinner table, and a lounge set made it pretty comfortable. The long wall on the far side had three doors. Two led to smaller rooms. The one on the corner already having a bed and closets. The other one still empty. Behind the last door was a pretty big bathroom. I even had a bath, right next to one of the windows. "We had this built in case one of the children wanted to take over the farm. We could live downstairs, and they could have their privacy."

Back outside Dieter took me for a tour around the rest of the farmyard. In the stable cows were standing happily eating their hay. We have got our Holsteins inside and the Brown-Swiss are in the field next to the entrance. We used to let them roam free, but it was too much work for us. From the stable we went to the barn. "That is your car." A shiny bright old yellow MB van with flatbed stood in the first of three big bays. "It is not fast, but we use it to carry all sorts of stuff around. Never let us down." The next two bays had the tractors in them. The other buildings were a chicken shed, without chickens and two, half empty, storage sheds. The first one with doors and the other with an open front. Made of concrete and metal painted green. At the other side of the yard Dieter showed me the manure and slurry pit. We walked to the back of the yard. "There you can see the back entrance we passed this afternoon." Next to it was a wooden building. Open on all sides, the inside packed with crates and other stuff. "What’s in there?" I asked. "That used to be our sawmill. It must be a couple of years since we last used it. Now it is just storage for some old things. There is a new saw somewhere in there though. Might be worth selling." Talking we arrived at the last shed. "Here we keep the feed for the cows." One of the bays had a couple of bales of hay. The other bays standing empty.

"Everything is looking really good." I said to Dieter. "Clean and almost new." "It better" He replied. "A few years ago, the children were thinking about taking over. We used our savings to restore old sheds and build the new cow barn. The deal fell through though. We've done our best to keep everything nice." "And yellow" I added. "Ach ja, the yellow." Dieter looked out at the mountains his accent suddenly became stronger. We were almost back at the house. "It is her favorite color. For a while everything had to be yellow. We got used to it." We stood in front of the house for a bit. "You can take the van for a little ride if you want to. The keys are hanging on the wall right next to it." "I'll wait." I responded. "I have some unpacking to do." Dieter pointed at the garage door in the barn. "Your boxes and other things are in there. We can call you when dinner is ready. If you would like to eat with us." He looked questioningly at me. "Yes please, I would like to." I was still carrying my boxes up when they called me for dinner. Grethe had set the kitchen table for three. As we sat down, I found a ring with keys next to my plate. "The keys to the farm and all the buildings." Dieter said. "I know it is not official until tomorrow. But this did seem like the right time. We can talk about everything else tomorrow." He raised his glass. "Prost! To the next chapter at this farm." We raised our glasses. After that we ate without talking. The food was good, but I felt that they were in no mood for conversation. The silence uncomfortable.

After the food was gone Dieter got up. "Time to feed our cows." I started to raise but he at me to sit down. "Tomorrow, today is the last day we can do this." He walked outside and Grethe started to clear the table and ran water to wash the plates. "It is difficult." She said looking out the window. "This is the best solution but it's not what we hoped for." Outside Dieter had put on his overalls and was at the yellow Brührer. He got on and started the engine. Slowly he drove the machine out of the shed stopping in front of the house. Grethe stepped out of the house and he reached out to her. With his help she got on the tractor and sat down on the fender. Dieter put the machine in gear, and they drove off across the yard. Turning around I went back to my apartment and continued unpacking. It had gotten dark when I heard the tractor coming back.

#Hoofdstuk 2

\*\*Where we wake up on our own farm/Feed the cows/Go to the supermarket/Drive a tractor for the first time/Make our first bales\*\*

My alarm woke me up. The room was still pretty dark and for a few seconds I wondered where I was. Then I remembered. My own room at my own farm. Today would be the first day of my new life. As I opened the curtains the room got a bit lighter. The sky was blue, but the sun was still hidden behind the mountains. This was something I would have to get used to. It was pretty cold in the room. Something else that was different. I put on my clothes and went into the kitchen to drink some water. The fridge was still empty. No breakfast for me. Today I would have to take a trip to the supermarket in town. Going back to my bedroom I took an overall from its plastic wrap and put it on. At the bottom of the stairs, I put on my work boots. Outside Dieter was already waiting for me. "Morgen" "Morgen" I replied. Dieter started the Lindner and went to the rear shed to get a bale of hay. I stood there trying to wake up. After a bit he came back with the bale in the grabber at the front of the tractor. The door was already open, so he drove straight in and put the bale down. The cows came up to the fence for some fresh food. We unwrapped the bale and spread the hay in the trough. I was not cold anymore. It was hard work picking up and moving the hay around. Careful not to hit the noses of the cows, I moved the hay up to the fence with the pitchfork.

With this first job done Dieter went back to get another bale. Coming back, he pointed at the water trailer that was standing next to the well. I went and stood next to it. Backing up he opened the rear window. "Guide me to connect." he yelled. I waved him back until the hitch was inside the two holes. Then I put the pin in to connect. Dieter got out of the cab and was watching. I connected the power lead and break lines. As I stepped back. Dieter said "Don't forget the safety pin." I looked and at the top of the drawbar was a small chain connecting to an even smaller pin. As I was looking around where to put in Dieter just watched. I found a small hole at the bottom of the drawbar, just below the lower eye. As I put it in, he nodded. "That will keep the main pin from jumping out. He got back in and I walked ahead of the tractor. As I opened the gate the cows kept a little distance from us. The bale was dropped in the field, and he backed the trailer up to one of the water throughs. I watched as he put a hose into a square box with metal grating and started the pump. We waited until the box was filled and did the same at another trough. The cows had already started on the hay. Grabbing mouthfuls straight from the bale. We unrolled the bale, the cows watching and spread the hay out. "Don't they have grass?" I asked. "It is a bit of an extra for them. Keeps them happy and makes sure they do not eat all the grass in the field." I was covered in hay and dirt while Dieter’s overall was clean. He went to park the trailer and tractor while I closed the gate. Back at the house we discussed what to do the rest of the day. The next few days would be dry so we could make hay. We had to wait for the dew to disappear before we could get started.

"I have to get food and some other things first." I told Dieter. He followed me to the barn with the truck. I found the keys hanging from a nail in the wall. The yellow car was unlocked. "This feels more like a truck than a van to me." I said. "That is because it can be. If we change the springs and have it inspected, we can carry a lot more." Dieter grinned "The inspection is of course not necessary to make it carry more, just to make it legal. But this has been enough for the past years." He leaned through the window as I was putting my seatbelt on. "It is warm enough, so no choke needed. You should drive away in second gear. First is only for heavy loads or when you pull a trailer." I turned the key in the ignition and the truck fired right up. Then I had to search second gear for a bit. Press the clutch, feel around. Let go a bit and there it is. Dieter stepped back from the window and waved. "Have fun." I gave it a bit of gas and slowly let go of the clutch. Slowly it started driving and I went right to the exit of the yard. And downhill. The road down was very steep. Panicked I pushed on the brakes to slow down and came to a stop just before the road. A deep breath and then I took a left turn in the direction of the main road.

"First turn into town, Across the bridge and then left at the roundabout." With these directions I soon found the supermarket. A few people on the way had raised their hand in greeting. Looking surprised when they saw who was driving the truck. Some people must not have heard about the farm. At the supermarket I parked behind the building. Trying to get as much out of the way as possible. The van did not fit in a normal parking space. Inside the market it was not what I expected. Instead of the organized supermarkets back at home this was a mess. Crates with vegetables and fruit were standing in the middle of the aisles. Some of the shelves were half empty with a few jars of jam or honey. And in the back, there was something like a hardware store with planks, tools and even some furniture. I was looking around, the plan to get the food forgotten. Next to the hardware I saw a bakery section. Bread first the rest I could find later. At the checkout, a man with greying hair scanned my groceries. I tried my best German. "Sind these lokale producten?" He looked up from scanning. "Yes, a lot of them are. We support local farmers and craftsmen." "Danke schon. I said as I took my groceries and walked towards the exit. At the car I had a new problem. Could I put the bags in the rear, or would they fly off? In the end I put them in the cabin in front of the passenger seat. Back at the farm reversing into the bay was pretty easy and I could finally eat my breakfast.

After eating it was time for the first tractor driving lesson. The Brührer was already parked in front of the house, facing the chicken coop. I clambered up and Dieter sat down next to me. "It is almost like driving a car." He grinned. "Just different enough to trip you up." He pointed at the pedal to the left. "Clutch" Then the long black pedal in just to the right. "Brake. If you panic. Press those two. Nothing else." At the bottom almost under my seat was a gear shifter. "That does not shift the gears." he pointed at another shifter just in front of me. "That does. The other leaver lets you pick the gear group. Reverse and low, medium, and high. Higher gear group, less power but more speed. Is that clear?" I nodded even though I was not sure it was clear. "Ok, Press the clutch and start the tractor." I did this. It felt like a lot more noise sitting in the driver’s seat than just watching. Put the tractor in the low range and first gear. "Is that the gas?" I asked pointing at a small pedal on the far right. "Yes, and we will not be using that." One question from me and more questions than answers. Maybe I should just listen. So, I put the machine in low and first. "Now with your right hand you can rev the engine with that leaver." I saw a small leaver with a black knob at the end. As I pulled it the engine made more noise. "Good, pick a speed for the engine you like and slowly let off the clutch." I did as I was told, and the tractor started to roll. The machine made a lot of noise for going this slow. "One and one is crawl speed. A lot of power and noise. Not much speed.

I felt a big smile on my face. The first time driving a tractor, my own tractor. "You can shift from first to third now." I pushed in the clutch and shifted. "Well done. You don't need to change the speed of the engine." We did go a bit faster. "I think you are ready for reverse." As I looked up, I noticed the chicken coop was suddenly very close. Fumbling for the gas lever I pressed down on the clutch and brake pedal. We stopped. Still well clear of the wall but with no room to turn. "Grab the lower lever and put it in reverse. Just stay in third gear." I did as Dieter said and slowly backed up. "I think you got it. Just practice some more around the yard. Remember, this tractor is older than you." He got off and went into the house. The next hour I drove around the yard. Going faster and faster. I even tried connecting to the water tank we left next to the well. You could pick any gear and drive off. Soon I also used the food throttle to pick up some more speed after starting to move. The sun had come out from behind the mountain, and I was happily driving in the warmth of the sun. When I felt I had got the hang of it I reversed into the shed and switched the machine off. Grehte called me inside for a cup of coffee. I just sat at the table smiling the whole time. After tea me and Dieter went mowing in the Lindner. I sat next to him as he maneuvered the mower over the fields leaving neat swaths behind the tractor. That afternoon we milked and fed the cows together. The next day my body was sore all over. Pain in all my muscles. But the cows were hungry, and the grass had to be tedded. So, I got up and went to work.

# Chapter 3

\*\*Where we have some ideas for the future/Visit a tractor dealer/Do maintenance/Talk about changes\*\*

It was getting colder in the mornings. The days were still warm, but it took me a bit longer to get warm feeding the cows. I even had had to use the choke on the Brührer one or two times the past week. We even had to switch on the lights in the yard on more overcast days. The sun not giving enough light anymore. With the work done, I went inside. The door to my computer room was left open and I looked at the empty desk and boxes standing around. Maybe I would have some time and energy for that in the winter. Cold air was coming from the room, so I closed the door. With my breakfast I sat down at the dinner table and opened my laptop. Dieter had given me access to the farms finances and explained how it all worked. The last few days I had been looking through the numbers and it was clear to me something had to change. We had made a deal when I just took over the farm. I would pay Dieter for his time, and he would teach me how to run a farm. I don't think they needed the money but I would not be fair to give him nothing for all the things he did. I had put almost all the money I had won in the farm and had very little left. But as I had been working all the time there had also been no time to spend any money. With no rent and no debt on the farm I could live like this for a while longer if that were what I really wanted. The money would run out and I'd have to do everything myself earning just enough to eat and drink.

I would forever be just one sick cow or broken tractor away from trouble. The cows could be a solution. Every year they sold the calves. If we kept them and grew them we would have more milk and more calves the next year. Dieter and Grethe had stopped with the chickens because they were too much work for them. The coop was still there and ready for some chickens. I had already seen that the supermarket sold local eggs and maybe Dieter knew a buyer for them. A little bit more work in de morning was not a problem for me. I also planned to do some research into feed for cows and a way to get paid more for the milk. Maybe there was a way to make more money there. Where I came from, they would put the grass in a pit or make bales. Would that make the cows give more milk? I sat wondering and opened up my laptop to do some research. Maybe silage bales could be sold somewhere. The shed was already pretty full of hay for the winter and next month we would get another cut off the gras fields. As I was working on these questions Dieter opened the door downstairs and yelled to me. "I am going to the tractor dealer to get some parts. Do you want to come along?" Slamming the laptop shut I yelled back that I wanted to and ran down the stairs. We both got in their little car and Dieter drove us into town.

We soon got to the dealership in town and parked the car. It was inside a big building at the edge of town right next to the chocolate factory. Fendt and Class banners waving in the wind. A couple of second hand and some new tractors standing in the lot. Dieter took me on a tour of the machines. He stopped next to a dark blue tractor. A strange machine, no bonnet just a frame with arms on the front. "A Fendt GTA." He said climbing up to look in the cab. "A farm nearby had one of these. I thought about buying one for forestry. Beautiful color too." He did not really look at the newer machines, but I went over and walked around some of them. In the rear we found some more second hand machinery. I knew most of them from my farming game. It all felt a lot bigger in real life. Dieter went inside. I hung around a bit more to look at the tractors. Still thinking about the calculations from this morning. A man found me looking at a small Claas tractor. "Go ahead. It should be open." He said. I climbed inside and sat down behind the wheel. The man following and siting down on the passenger seat. The next few minutes he explained the buttons and functions on the brand new machine. As we were talking Dieter came back outside with a big box. The box went into the back seat, and he leaned on the car waiting for us to finish. "I don't know how this works, but can I reserve the Fendt GTA?" I asked the salesman. "I can call you if someone wants to buy it, but we don’t reserve." I nodded and gave him my phone number before we got out the cab. Dieter and I got in the car and drove back to the farm.

Dieter parked next to the maintenance shed. He opened the roll-up door as I got the box from the back seat. Inside the Linder was already waiting for us. The hood up and engine exposed. Dieter walked up to a shelf in the rear of the shed. On it stood and lay books, binders and other paperwork. He reached for something in there and came back with a binder and a paperback book. The binder went on the workbench and the book he gave to me. Lindtrack 130 maintenance manual was printed on the front together with a pretty picture of the tractor. "In the box is a new air filter. How about you find out where it goes and replace the old one?" I opened the book and quickly flipped through the pages and pages of tractor parts and instructions. Meanwhile Dieter cut open the box and put some other parts on the workbench. I found an old chair in a corner and started at the table of contents. For a while we worked in silence. I found the location of the air filter and opened the protective cover. Inside the box the filter was very dusty. As I got it out Dieter just reached out with some work gloves from the box. "For the rest of the work." I put the dirty filter outside and washed my hands before putting on the new gloves. I looked in the book how to install the new filter and close the box after installation. I followed the instructions and got the new parts fitted. On the other side of the tractor Dieter was lubricating the machine with the grease gun.

The installation done I watched Dieter working on the different part of the tractor. After a while I started talking. "I've been looking at the numbers for the farm." He grunted, taking the nipple from one of the lubrication points and cleaning around it with a rag. "In a little while I'll not be able to pay you anymore." "Then you will need to learn quickly." He said. Motioning for me to come closer and pointing at one of front attachment arms. "Watch for wear on this point. I replaced it a while ago, but it is starting to go again." I could see the place where the metal had worn away and nodded. "But I still want to hire you, so I think we need to expand the farm." He was silent for a bit. "It is your farm now, so you can do what you want." A pause. "But remember, the farm is a lot older than you and it has been good to us for many years." That said he went to the workbench and started writing the maintenance forms in the binder. Then he gave it to me to put it away. On the shelf I found more manuals and maintenance sheets for all of the farm equipment. "I'll take some of these with me to the house to read after we are done" I said to Dieter. "Just make sure you put them back in the same place." Replied Dieter. The rest of the afternoon we worked with the grease gun. Going from shed to shed, all the machines one after the other. In the evening after milking and feeding the cows I went back to my home with an arm full of books. To see how much more I still had to learn.

# Chapter 4

\*\*Where we get some new equipment/Get a new tractor/Do not get to mow/Welcome some chickens.\*\*

I heard a truck working hard to make it up the driveway. Quickly I went outside leaving my breakfast on the table. The large MAN truck just pulled through the gate into the yard when I got outside. As I said good morning to Dieter, the driver stopped and got out of the cab. On the trailer sat a couple of red machines strapped down with chains. As the driver started to walk towards Dieter, he just pointed to me. "That is not an easy driveway." The driver said and gave me a package of papers. I checked the transport manifest. 3 pieces of machinery, that was correct. Dieter was meanwhile walking around the trailer looking at the new arrivals. "Could you get the tractor to unload them?" I called out to him. With him warming up the tractor the driver and I went to unstrap all machines. We connected the first machine and Dieter slowly drove the Kuhn feeder mixer off the trailer. He reversed it into the workshop and soon came back for the second piece. "No more spreading the straw by hand." I said after we connected the machines. He just grunted and drove the Anderson off the trailer and into the workshop. The last piece was not a trailer but had to be put on the three point. Dieter slowly reversed up to the blue and yellow machine with me guiding him. With a soft metallic sound, the lower arms connected. A bit of a twist and the top connected as well so he could pick it up. "You can put this in the garage for now. We won’t need it tomorrow. The driver turned the truck around in the yard while we checked that the new machines were new and undamaged. After that I signed for delivery and the truck left. "Coffee?" I said.

Our coffee cups empty Dieter stood up. "We will have to unpack the machines if we want to use them tomorrow." He said. I followed him out the door. In the workshop I went to look for the manuals or unpacking instructions. Nothing in the rear of the Kuhn and the Anderson was empty as well. "The manuals must still be at the dealer." I said. Dieter was sure we would manage but I did not want to get started without knowing what we were doing. It was my first new equipment and he had not used anything just like these before. After I convinced him, we got in the van together and went off to the dealer. At the dealer we had to drive around a tractor and trailers standing in the middle of the yard. The Fendt GTA with a Lizard dual axle and on top of that a grey power washer trailer and blue bale grab. "It looks like the Fendt got sold." I said to Dieter while parking the van. As we got out one of the mechanics walked up to us. "We did not get the manuals and other paperwork for machines that arrived today." He said as soon as the man got close enough to hear him. "They are in the Fendt." the mechanic answered straight away. Taking the last few steps and handing him the keys. "I'll get them then, why would you put them in there?" The last part of the question getting more quiet. "Because we need them at the farm?" I answered. "You drive that back and I'll take the van." "You did not." He sputtered. "I did. With the chickens, new cows and the sawmill we will need something with a bit of power and reach. And something to clean the machines. I'm getting tired of working with a drizzle of cold water and a sponge." And the trailer? You saw the bale wrapper this morning. We'll need to be able to transport those bales after we made them. "Chickens?" Was all he said. "Tomorrow, now get in our new tractor. We've got work waiting at the farm."

The next morning, I hung the new feeder wagon behind the Brührer. Dieter started the Fendt and got a bale in the bale grab. He cut through the twine and dropped the haybale in the wagon. We both watched as the bale was chewed up. Then I drove into the barn. Pulled a lever and slowly drove forward as the hay was pushed out the side straight into the feeding trough. I could drive straight out the doors on the other side and back to Dieter. He had stepped out of the Fendt and watched the cows eating the fresh food. Were it had spilled for a bit we pushed the feed a bit more into the trough. "Job done." I said. "That really works well." Dieter said. "And in the winter, we can both sit inside if we want to. We will just have to teach you how to drive the Lindner." He went back inside for breakfast while I refilled the water for the cows out in the field. After that I also went to eat breakfast. After breakfast I started cleaning out the chicken coop. It was dusty inside, but they had cleared out the straw and everything when the last chickens left. Faster than expected the shed was clean and ready for new inhabitants. Halfway through it started to rain. With the rain and the trees dropping the last of their leaves it was pretty clear autumn was already on its way out. In the cold of the morning, I could feel winter coming.

We kept an eye on the weather, waiting for a few clear days. We really did not want to let the last cut of grass go to waste. We had just moved the cows from the field into the barn when the forecast gave us two clear days. Cold but with some wind and sunshine. Enough for us if we worked hard. "You get the mower on the Lindner after breakfast." Dieter said when we were done with our morning jobs. So I ate and then went into the garage where the Lindner was parked. Keys in the ignition I pressed the clutch. The engine started and I released the parking brake. The direction lever was right behind the steering wheel. Putting it in forward and pushing the gas pedal we drove out of the shed. Stopping in front of the garage I opened the door. The tractor got angry and started beeping at me. On the display I could see that I forgot the parking brake. As I applied it the beeping stopped. Sliding the garage door up I saw the mower right at the frond. Behind the second door. After opening that door, I reversed and lined the tractor up. That was the first time connecting something to the front. Leaning forward, I could just see one of the arms. Lowering them and driving slowly I got to the mower. Getting out to check I still was about twenty centimeters short. Crawling forward I got it about right and raised the front arms. The mower lifted a bit. Going back outside I connected the top link and PTO shaft. The hydraulic hoses went on the first group. With everything connected I reversed out of the shed and parked in front of the house.

That afternoon the grass was dry enough to start mowing. We got in the tractor together and started down the driveway. Just as we started going downhill a small van drove up to the yard. Dieter pretty much threw me from the passenger seat. The tractor beeping angrily because the door was open. "I have to get mowing." Was the least I heard as he closed the door and drove off. The van had stopped in front of the house and a man held up his hand. I waved at him in reply and walked over. "Some young chicks to see you." He said. I looked at him to see whether he was joking. But he was looking very serious. He opened the side door of the van, and I understood. The van was filled with chirping crates. "The chickens!" I said. "That was today." "Yes." He said. "Two hundred young female chicks and a couple of roosters." When Dieter came back from mowing, I was just done with unloading the crates. The van had left, back to the animal dealer. One by one I picked the crates up, put it in the chicken coop and let the chicks out. My back was aching. The bags of food we had put in the shed so we could close the door when the chickens were out in the yard. Dieter stood at the door and looked at the little chicks running around or sitting together in small groups. Grethe came out of the house to watch. "Are the heat lamps on?" She asked. I went to the control panel and flipped the switch. Red lights came on and soon the chickens were sitting in the heated spots. "It is nice to have some chickens again." Grethe said. Dieter just nodded.

# Chapter 5

\*\*Where we feel the winter/cut some trees/Drag small trees around/Meet another farmer\*\*

In the mornings and evenings, I was still pretty busy. First switching on the lights for the chickens. Then feeding the cows and mucking out the barn. After that back to the chicken coop. Feeding them, checking the water. I did not have to look for eggs yet, but they would start laying soon. The wind blowing down from the mountain was chilling me to the bone. Even though I started wearing another layer of clothes under my overalls. No snow yet but the trees had all shed their leaves. Looking bare against the grey sky. In the afternoon it started to get dark when I started the evening chores. Checking on the chickens again. Milking and feeding the cows. Dieter and Grethe stayed mostly inside, leaving me to run the farm. And I was slowly getting better at it. All the tractors had their maintenance done and we had put everything inside the sheds, leaving the yard looking very empty. Without Dieter thinking of chores like fixing fences or painting a siding I even had the middle of the day to myself. At first, I could only chill in front of the tv or sitting at my laptop. The past week I had had some more energy. I even started thinking about unpacking my gaming rig and maybe setting up the gaming room. The heater I got for the room still inside its box.

With the chickens fed I got out of the coop looking forward to setting up my gaming room. Then I noticed the workshop door standing open and Dieter working on something inside. I put the bag of chicken feed back on the pallet and went over to look what he was doing. In the fluorescent light I saw a chainsaw lying in pieces on the workbench. A gas heater blowing hard in his direction for some warmth. "You better dress warm this afternoon." Dieter said, not looking up from his work. "The trees really need some thinning. I could not do that for the last few years. But now with a strong young man around." I sighed. He really seemed to be looking forward to I. Leaving me no way to escape behind my computer. "I'm just checking the chainsaw and oiling the parts. You go get breakfast and I will see you later." Before I went back to the house I took a look at the trees behind the sheds. Tall trees and smaller saplings were standing close together. Mostly spruce with a few oak and birch in some places. The branches so close that it was hard to see to which tree it belonged. Underneath it was dark with no other plants growing. I tried to get through to look from the meadow a bit higher up the slope but with the trees so close I could not push trough. When one of the branches sprang back and hit me in the face I had enough and went for breakfast.

After eating we met up at the workshop. Dieter pulled a new helmet with face shield out of a box. "Early Christmas present for you. I see you already know why." I felt the scratch on my face. I had not bled to much but there was a bright red welt on my cheek and the area around is was still getting more and more red. I put it on, and Dieter also handed me some earplugs. "Ready to get to work?" I put my thumb up. We walked past the garage and went left in front of our bale storage. The first and second bay were full of haybales. The third was empty and in the fourth was a small box with a shovel and a light. Dieter pointed. "We used to put our saplings in there before planting them." To our left stood two bunks to put the logs. A small path went up to the trees that had hurt me this morning. "I will start cutting, you watch and drag the trees down." With a pull on the cord, he started the chainsaw and went to work. The small trees went down first. With two cuts he made a v in the rear of each trunk before cutting them down from the front. This made the trees fall away from him. Then I grabbed the small tree, dragged it down and put it on a pile. The next tree already falling as I walked back up. On my way down I had to be careful not to trip on the small stumps sticking out of the ground. In about an hour we made a lot of progress. Most of the smaller trees on the lower slope were gone with just a few left standing.

Dieter took off his helmet and wiped the sweat away with his handkerchief before blowing his nose in it. We had worked our way up to a small clearing with only a few trees. Because of the room they had these were green instead of brown like the ones we'd cut. "Your turn." He handed me the chainsaw. "Get one of the small trees off the pile and start cutting the branches off." I walked down to the pile and pulled one tree away from the rest. Then I put the saw down. Held it with one hand and pulled on the starter cord. The engine spluttered but did not start. Another pull, harder this time and it came alive. Dieter gave some instructions, and I got to work. Starting from the bottom I cut each branch with as little movement as possible letting the saw do the work. When I got to the top my arms were hurting from the weight and vibrations. With my foot I turned the tree and started working on the last branches. Dieter pulled the next tree down and I started on that. Whenever I shook my arms or tried to get a bit of rest he was there with another tree. It felt like I was cutting for hours. We took a break for lunch and then went back at it. Now we switched the jobs. I would clear a couple of trunks and then Dieter took over the saw while I dragged the trees. After a couple of hours, we had two piles. One big load of branches and one pile of cleaned logs.

One by one we picked up the trunks of the trees we'd cut and put them in one of the bunks. The sun had disappeared behind the mountains on the other side of the valley when we finished. "Just one thing left to do. Dieter said picking up the chainsaw. He went over to the three small spruce in the clearing and cut them down. He pointed at the largest of them. "Put this one next to the pile of branches." We dragged the other two to the house as Dieter went looking for something in the sawmill. He came over with a box. Inside I found a string of lights and some ropes. Together we dug a hole and pushed the tree upright in front of the house. Then he used the ropes to secure the tree in place. Grethe called me from the open front door. "Can you help me inside?" Only the smallest tree was left. She held the door open while I dragged it inside. There was a stand standing ready in the living room and boxes everywhere. I put the tree in the stand, and she started handing me decorations. When we were ready decorating the room it had gotten dark. Outside Dieter had also finished and there was a brightly lit Christmas tree standing outside the kitchen window.

The next morning a blue tractor with a trailer came up the driveway. A woman of about my age climbed out of the cab. Dieter stepped outside and she hugged him making me do a double take. She got back in the tractor and drove to the back of the yard. I saw a flash of a blonde hair in a ponytail sticking out of her cap. We walked over to the rear of the shed where she was already sitting on the crane on the front of the trailer. With the grabber she picked the branches up and put them in the trailer. Soon the pile was gone. Last, she carefully picked up the last Christmas tree and laid it down on top. Dieter and I got closer as she clambered off the trailer. "John, this is Lize. She is the owner of the farm in the next valley. And every year she comes over to pick up a Christmas tree." "Nice to meet you." She held out her hand. Slim and about as tall as me she stood there smiling. I shook hands with her. "Has Dieter been working you to the bone?" She asked. "It's not too bad." I replied "But I did not know what I was getting into." "I can imagine. Going from an office job straight into farming. It is nice to finally meet you. There have been stories going around about this new farmer from the city." "Really?" I stammered. "Yes really, but now I have to get back. Trees don't decorate themselves." With that she got back in the cab and easily reversed and drove away with a wave in our direction. "You can close your mouth now." Dieter said walking off in the direction of the house.

# Chapter 6

\*\*Where we clear out the sawmill/Meet the family/Have a morning off/Celebrate together\*\*

The wind blew through the shed leaving snow in corners and between boxes. I looked around at the white landscape. Winter had come just before Christmas. At first the nightly snow had melted by the end of the day. But soon it covered the ground just getting deeper with each fall. Clearing the yard every morning was added to my chores. Making paths with shovels and moving piles with the tractor. In the village brightly colored tourists walked around. Ski's on their back or with shopping bags from the boutique. More of them arriving with every train. It was strange to see the village waking up. Shops opening that I not even knew existed, the supermarket fully stocked. Even some apartments, dark all year now, had the light of Christmas trees shining from the windows. When the snow first started to pile up suddenly a winter fair rose in the main park. Small brightly lit stalls selling hot chocolate and Glühwein. In the distance I could see the cable cars going up and down the mountain. No doubt filled with tourists. The family of Grethe and Dieter had come over for Christmas. Staying with us until new year. I could hear them in their rooms above me in the evenings.

And here I was looking at literal piles of work. The shed with the big saw had been used for storage the past years. Stuff that was not used anymore being thrown in and thrown about if something was suddenly needed. I had reversed the van close to the shed so I could put everything that had to go in the bed. This was not going to get better without some work so, with a sigh, I got to it. I picked up the first thing. Some siding for a shed. Rusty with some holes in it leaning against some other boxes. With a grunt I threw it in the back of the van. So, I worked through all the stuff making three piles. One for things we needed to keep. I even found some new saw belts and a box of oil filters. The garbage went straight onto the van. The third pile was for stuff I could not identify or did not know I could throw away. What to do with a hobbyhorse that looked handmade? After lunch Dieter came with me to look at the third pile. Most of it I could throw away. I sighed in relief when he walked away with the hobbyhorse under his arm. What if he started picking in the trash? It was his old stuff I was throwing out. The van fully loaded I tied everything down and drove to the dumpsite a short drive outside town. When I got back it was dark already. I parked next to the shed. The headlights showing the work that was still left. Time for the evening chores.

Dieter came outside just as I finished. "I will take care of the morning jobs. You can sleep in tomorrow." "Okey, thank you." I said not sure where this was going. "No problem." He said walking back inside and closing the door. I was still puzzled after I finished my dinner and the washing up. Still a morning off, that had been months ago. The next morning, I woke up at the normal time. As I stepped out of bed and got dressed, I remembered that I had the morning off. Instead, I drank some water. As I was standing by the sink, I heard small steps coming down the stairs and passing my room going further down. The front door opened and closed. Looking out the window I saw Dieter picking up his granddaughter. She was dressed in warm clothes wearing a big coat and earmuffs. They went towards the barn and out of sight. I saw them reappear carrying snow shovels. There was only a thin layer of fresh snow, but they got to work clearing the paths. Dieter getting big shovels full and she walking behind "Helping". That done I heard the Lindner start and saw them sitting inside as it drove to the rear of the yard. Coming back they drove a bale in the cow shed and disappeared inside. Smiling I went back to bed.

A couple of hours later I was back at work in the shed. The big things had been done yesterday. As usual, the last few things took the most work. There was a lot less to throw onto the pickup. I filled a wheelbarrow with some things we wanted to keep and took it to the garage. There I had to find a place for everything. The next load went into another shed. Dieter helped me sort everything and find places to put it. Erika came with him. The small girl diving into piles and finding interesting things. The daughter of Monica she was introduced to me hiding behind her mother. Now it seemed I was still scary but not scary enough to keep her away from granddad. Bonde hair peeking from under her hat she picked up a small box and carefully put it in the wheelbarrow. "Thank you." I said. That was enough to send her back to hiding behind Dieter. This way we spent the rest of the afternoon in the yard. Leaning on a broom I looked around. The sawmill was mostly empty. Black and yellow markings on the floor visible again. This used to be a well-organized workspace. The saw was standing in the back corner with room for new logs right next to it. Bright orange, it looked brand new. The other side of the sawmill was empty now. The markers seemed to show places to sort the different products. For now, we would use the space to park the Fendt and the log carrier making room in the other sheds.

As I walked up the stairs to my room, I heard the family having fun in the kitchen. The chores for the day were finished and I was looking forward to a shower and dinner. I took off my overalls and turned on the water. It always took a while to warm up. From the fridge I got a microwave dinner and poked some holes in the lid before putting it in the machine. Going back, I took off the rest of my clothes and got into the shower. In the hot water I wondered whether I would stay awake until midnight. I stepped out, dried myself off and put on some comfy clothes. Then the bell rang. I paused. I did not even know I had a bell. Outside stood Dieter and Erika. "Will you join us?" Dieter asked. "We have got raclette and there is some room left at the table." I stood in the opening thinking. "Please join us, Grethe and Monica would mind if you were up there alone." I put on my shoes and went with them. The kitchen table was loaded with plates of cheese and dishes with vegetables and small cuts of meat. In the middle stood an electric grill with small pans. Everyone was already sitting, and I took a seat next to Peter, Monica's husband. A heavyset man a little balding, he scooted over to give me some more room. Monica sat next to him with Erika between her and Dieter. Grethe was still walking around getting this and that.

I got a beer and Grethe sat down as well. Everyone went quiet. Dieter raised his glass. "It has been a year for all of us. Selling the farm, retiring. Starting over in a new country. Family life with everything that comes with it." He looked around the table before continuing. "Jasper is busy with his job, but I am sure he wanted to be here tonight." The others drummed on the table with their hands. "I will keep it short, John must be hungry." More table drumming, I had to join. "I am happy to be here with you all at the end of this year. It was a good one. Let’s make the next one even better. Prost!" We clinked our glasses together and everyone started putting food in their little pans. Peter explained how to grill the food, the kinds of cheeses and when to put them on the other things. Soon we were talking about his job and how I got on at the farm. With dinner done we went to the living room to eat dessert and watch TV. We talked and ate until midnight and after champagne and some fireworks Peter had brought, I went to bed. The next morning, I fed the cows, tired and with a headache. But as the sun peeked over the mountains, I did feel like this might just be a good year.

# Chapter 7

\*\*Where we cut some big trees/Learn to use a crane/Load a trailer/unload the logs\*\*

"We have to be careful today." Dieter said while we were walking. "Trees can be unpredictable. It is best to let experts do this, but we want you to become an expert so today we will practice." I had my own chain axe now and Dieter carried his. "I will cut the trees down, you can take off the branches." I nodded. We arrived at the rear of the yard. With the small trees removed, there was room for us to work. Today we would cut down some of the bigger trees still left and put them in the wood storage. The first one was a big spruce. As I looked at it towering over us, I got a bit nervous. Nervous enough to not look where I was going. I tripped over a small stump and nearly set my chainsaw flying. He looked over his shoulder and my face heated up. Luckily my face shield hid the coloring of my face. Dieter put the chainsaw down and took a good look at the tree and surrounding area. "You need to make a plan. There are two important parts. Where the tree will fall and where you will run if it goes wrong. Those need to be in different directions." He walked back from the tree checking where he could trip. "For now, just watch." He said starting the saw. He made a v shaped cut on the uphill side of the tree. Then after checking I was reading, he started the saw on the other side. Moving back and forth, the saw slowly ate trough the wood. Some movement and quickly Dieter pulled the saw back and took a few rapid steps back. Creaking and groaning the tree leant more and more before falling down, hitting the ground with a crash.

I went to work sawing off the branches of the felled tree. Dieter meanwhile was looking at a second tree a bit further on. I kept an eye on him as he cut some undergrowth to make room to work. My job was the same as with the smaller trees. Cut the branches starting at the bottom and working towards the top. Easy enough. As I cut one of the big lower limbs the saw got stuck and stopped. I tried to pull it out but it was held in place by the tree. Dieter saw me struggling and came over. "Step back a couple of steps and watch." He started from the other side. As he came close to the stuck saw the branch snapped and he jumped back just as the tree rolled towards him. My chainsaw sprang loose and disappeared beneath the rolling mess. I had not noticed how much the tree leant on that limb. I went below the tree to retrieve my saw, and Dieter went back to his work. Lesson learnt I worked a lot slower on the next cuts. Looking at the way the spruce lay and making plans to run away. My saw did get stuck a couple of times but after a while I started noticing the sound just before that happened and pulled back to change the angle. I kept an eye on Dieter and stopped working as he downed the second tree. This way we worked the rest of the morning. The white of the snow getting covered in green piles of spruce branches.

After lunch I drove the Lindner to the sawmill and reversed up to the yellow Anderson trailer parked inside. First connecting and securing the hitch I then went to work on the hydraulic hoses. Two times yellow on one group to supply the oil white one yellow marked hose on the return. The same for the hoses marked green. With everything connected I got back in the tractor and increased the engine rpm while opening the valves. This made the oil pump work harder and let everything warm up. Dieter walked up from the house and checked the connections. After he gave me the thumbs up, I drove out of the shed and reversed towards the woods stopping at the edge of the yard. "I am going to cut the trees so they will fit. You can practice with the loader over here." I got out of the tractor and walked to front of the trailer. There was a small box with five leavers bolted to the frame. I spent the last evening reading the manual for the loader. First I lowered the supports at the front of the frame. With these stabilizing the trailer I opened the grapple and raised the arm. I swung the arm back and forth to get a feel how fast it responded. Then I pretended there was a log next to the trailer I had to pick up. Playing around like this I heard the chainsaw suddenly stop. Dieter had got the saw stuck in the tree he was trying to cut to pieces and was waving for me to come over.

I walked up to him. "Think you can work with that crane?" He asked as I came closer. "I Think so." "Good, my saw is stuck because the tree is not touching the ground down here." I looked and there was a small depression in the slope underneath the tree. "Because it wants to break into that space it has put pressure on the saw causing it to get stuck." I went up to the tractor and raised the supports. Then I carefully backed up the hill with Dieter guiding me. Stopping next to the tree, I put the parking brake on and went out to lower the supports. That done I raised the crane and moved it over the tree. Lowering the front part of the arm I could reach the tree easily. I grabbed the trunk with the claw and lifted it just a little bit. With the stress taken off the cut Dieter could pull the saw out. He started it and started cutting. The trailer shook as the trunk split and one side fell to the ground. The other side was still hanging from my log fork. "Put it down and grab it in the middle." Dieter called as he stepped back. I did what he said. And started to lift. Now the log balanced as I raised it higher. Turning the crane I smashed it into one of the supports. I clearly misjudged the speed it could turn while loaded. A bit slower and more careful I turned the log and gently put it down at the bottom of the trailer. Then I picked up the other side of the tree and put it on the wagon.

I tried to reach the next log, but it was just a little too far away. "Time to reposition." "I have raise the supports and drive the tractor after every piece?" I asked. "Yes," Dieter said "and then you have to lower them pick it up and do that all again. Without making mistakes. Just take it easy and do not expect to finish this today." With that he walked over to cut the next tree leaving me with the tractor. I straightened the arm and raised the supports. Got in the tractor and slowly drove forward. Got out lowered the stands. Picked up the thickest part of the tree and put it on top of the others. Then I had to do this all again except I had to reverse even further up the hill to reach the top part of the tree. Dieter meanwhile had finished with the second tree. Carefully I drove back down and positioned to reverse up the hill in another place. With these logs loaded the trailer was full. I drove down to the bunks and unloaded them one by one. We continued loading and cutting. I was getting dark as we got to the last tree. I switched the work lights on. The forest lighting up and the snow sparkling around us. Dieter had to guide me to the last tree. The shadows and light making it nearly impossible to see where I was diving. A wheel hit a stump the logs bouncing around in the trailer as the tractor pushed through. I got back on the crane and with Dieter pointing and gesturing picked everything up. Unloading it was easier. Floodlights lighting the bunks and me just having to put one tree on top of the others. I put the trailer back in the sawmill and Dieter went to clean and oil the chainsaws. We had finished it all in one day. Tired but happy I started the normal evening chores.

# Chapter 8

\*\*Where we see the spring/Hire help/Load manure/Plant some trees\*\*

The birds where singing when I woke up. It was the first time since the start of winter that I noticed. As I walked outside, I could see the sky getting lighter. The snow in the yard had melted with only patches left under the trees. I shivered and quickly zipped up my coat. Spring may be on its way, but the wind was still cold. The light brightened as I worked. First checking the food for the chickens and then mucking the cow barn and feeding the cows. Around the yard tree had started to show some green. Budding leaves making giving them a green haze. The winter had not been as quiet as I expected. The small and bigger jobs taking up all my time and leaving me tired in the evenings. My computer room was still a mess. I had unpacked but the machine was standing there not connected to the monitors I put on the desk. I parked the tractor in the shed and went over to the forestry shed to start the Fendt. In the cold it took a couple of tries before it started. Sitting inside I let the engine and cabin warm up. With everything warm enough, I put the machine in gear and drove to the shed to pick up the bucket. Angling the front down I carefully fit the top bar in the hooks. This time I got it first time. Then I slowly tilted it up. The bottom connected with a snap. Putting the parking brake on, I got out and secured the safety pins. All set to go. Just as I drove up to the house a green tractor and trailer came driving up beacons flashing. Right on time.

A couple of days before we had discussed the work for the coming months. This would be my first spring on a farm, and I had no idea what was coming up. The first few months I just did was Dieter said had to be done and it was time I started looking ahead and making plans. We met in the kitchen downstairs. Dieter explaining while I made notes on my laptop. With such a small farm it was all small jobs, but they had to be done at just the right time. To early or late and the work would go to waste. I thought I had bought the farm to get away from the stress. Getting back to my apartment I sat down to organize my notes and plan. A couple of hours later I got up. I stretched happy with my first version. It was strange to plan knowing that the weather could still change everything. Rain on the wrong days would mean changing everything. I picked up my phone and dialed the number from my notes. Lise picked up after a couple of rings. After the greetings I got to the point. "We have manure that needs to be spread on our fields. Dieter said that I should call you.”: And did Dieter say anything else?" she asked. "No, he did not, just told me to call you." It was silent for a bit. I thought I could hear a smile in her voice as she replied. "So, he wants you to learn for yourself. At my expense." I did not understand what she was saying. "Send me a mail with the details. I'll write a quote, and you can see what you think about it." "A quote?" I asked. "He really did not explain anything. We are contractors. You hire us to do a job, and we send a bill." I suddenly understood what she was saying. "And Dieter did not tell me this because he thought it was funny if I found out for myself."

"The man who thinks we work for free." The man said as he climbed out of the John Deere. "Oh no, is that going around?" "Yes, it is." He replied, shaking my hand. "Don't worry Liz is sure to find a way to get Dieter back. My name is Robert. Nice to meet you." After introductions we made a plan. I drove the Fendt to the manure pit behind the cow. Robert got himself turned around and positioned the manure trailer for loading. To use the front loader, it needed oil pressure. I pushed the throttle lever forward and selected a low gear. With the lever I lowered the bucket and slowly drove in into the manure pile. With the lever I curled it up to pick up the load. Then I put the tractor in reverse, backed up. Switched back to forwards. Started driving forward while raising the arm so I could tip the manure into the trailer. Dieter came outside with a cup of coffee for Robert, and they watched me not having enough arms and legs. In the machine I was trying to steer, change gear and control the arm at the same time. And I tried not to hit anything or tip over. With the trailer loaded I got out sweating. Robert climbed back in the green tractor and drove off. "I'll fill the next load." Dieter said. "You go get a drink." When I got back with my coffee Dieter was putting the second load in the trailer. In no time it was full and underway to the fields. We switched and I waited for Robert to come back.

I heard the tractor growling up the hill. Robert reversed and I started loading again. Driving back and forth, big buckets of manure went into the green spreader. Robert turned the engine off and sat waiting in the cab. After the last load I beeped the horn, and he left again. I stretched and filled the bucket before settling down to wait. He was working the field farthest away, so it took him a little longer to get back. This load was the last and he waited for me as I put the Fendt at the pressure washer for cleaning. I then climbed into the John Deere and sat down on the passenger seat. Robert drove off. When we got to the field he opened the backboard. In the right position he pressed two switches. The first started the spreader. When he hit the second one the floor of the trailer started moving. Pushing the muck into the spreaders and throwing it on the field. In no time at all the trailer was empty. "Job done?" He asked. "I think so." I said looking at the grass covered in muck. He gave me the work order to sign and drove us back to the farm. "You need to get faster with the loader." He focused on the road while talking. "This should be about a two hour job." It was almost lunch. We had taken a lot more than two hours. "Get the little trailer and practice with it. Just fill and dump." He stopped in front of the driveway, and I got out. "Make sure you clean the trailer well after practice." He drove off and I walked back to the house for a shower and food.

I was still eating when a small truck pulled up. Stuffing the last bites of the sandwich in my mouth, I went outside. The driver opened the back door, and I saw crates of saplings. "The new trees." Dieter said coming out of the house. I unloaded the pallets and put them in a shed. A lot of the ground was still frozen zo we left them standing there. Later in the month we would plant them to replace what we cut down at the start of winter. After the truck drove away, I went into the workshop and found the sideboards of the little Strautmann trailer. I attached it to the Buhrer and put the boards on. Changing it from a flatbed to a dumper. I drove it to the manure pit and walked back to pick the Fendt. The next hour was spend filling the trailer and dumping the manure back. The wagon was a lot smaller than the spreader. Every four or five buckets I had to get out, reverse the Brührer and empty the trailer. I did get a bit more familiar with the controls and a little faster at loading. Afterwards I cleaned the tractors and implements and put them back in their sheds.

# Chapter 9

\*\*Where we are very tired/Mow the grass/Make bales/Have new calves arrive/Wrap the bales\*\*

I said bye to the cows and Dieter and walked out of the barn. Rubbing my eyes, I went inside the house to get something to eat. Taking my boots off at the bottom of the stairs I had trouble keeping my balance. In the end I sat down to get them off my feed. Upstairs I started the electric kettle and got noodles from the cupboard. With them soaking in hot water I remembered to start a timer and sat down. The last days there had been no time for proper sleep. The cows started calving and someone had to be awake at all times to help if necessary. I took the night shift because Dieter needed his "Beauty sleep". So, from sunset until dawn, I sat in the barn waiting and taking care of the cows. After Dieter took over, I went to do the other things on the farm and maybe take a little nap. My phone beeped. I was halfway to the door before I remembered the noodles. Checking, it was indeed the timer and not Dieter calling because another calf was coming. I poured some of the water out and added the packet of spices and ate the noodles standing at the counter. With my breakfast finished I took off my overalls and socks. Time to get a short nap until the dew had gone from the grass.

Feeling a little better getting up. My overalls and socks were lying on the floor of the living room. Putting them back on I went outside. The Lindner was waiting for me. I had put the mower on the evening before. A quick check of the connections and we were off. Dieter waved as I drove out of the yard. The first job was mowing the lower pasture. I pulled off the road, into the grass. Outside I lowered the sides of the mower and fixed the skirts. By now I had mown this a couple of times and knew the right pattern for the fields. After about half an hour it was done. I put the mower back into the transport position and went around up the mountain to the higher field. Carefully we went off the road down into the field. The muck we had put on last month had made the grass grow beautifully. I got out and looked at the tall gras with flowers here and there. The sun on my face took away my tiredness and I prepared the mower and got back in. Driving back and forth over the fields we left the grass in swaths behind us. Soon I would have to trim the trees next to the field. The branches almost close enough to scratch the tractor. In what felt like no time at all I finished the field. Neat rows of grass drying in the sun. I got out and pulled some grass from a swath. This would take no time to dry at all and be ready to bail tomorrow. After driving the tractor back, I cleaned the grass from the mower and put it away.

Heinz and Dieter where in the stable when I got back. They stood at the stalls we built for the calves. Two more little ones, still a bit unsteady on their feet. White and black looking around at this new world. "It went well, just one more to go." Heinz said. "She was always a bit late." Dieter added. We looked at Heidi, our last pregnant cow. She looked back and moo'ed at us. "Tonight or tomorrow. It won't be long." Heinz paused. "You are keeping them all this year?" "I have to grow the farm." I replied. "There are more people making a living off it and you never know how long equipment will last." "It is a good batch of calves this year. And Dieter took care of his equipment. About as well as he takes care of the cows. I think you'll be fine." Heinz was looking tired as well. In this season he was just as busy if not busier. All farmers had new calves for him to take care of. "Coffee?" I asked him. Just then his phone rang. "I'll be right over." He hung up and went to his car. "Duty calls. Just one more night and you can get some proper sleep again." With that he got in and sped off. I told Dieter I'd be back later. Went upstairs and took a shower before diving into bed.

That night I went to check on the barn every thirty minutes. It was nice to be out in the cool spring air. In the yard the stars looked almost close enough to touch. In between the checks I watched YouTube on the laptop just to stay awake. At around two o'clock the algorithm was done with me. No new suggestions appeared so I went outside to check on Heidi. It had begun. She was right in the middle of giving birth. The last weeks I had learned what to do. If the cow did not seem to be in trouble, just wait and watch. If there was no progress for thirty minutes, wake Dieter and he would tell me what to do. If there were real problems call Heinz. This time all went well and fast. Half an hour later I was watching Heidi lick the newborn calf clean. After a little bit I got the little one and put it in the last of the small pens. There I made a bottle with milk and a special supplement to start her immune system. Clamping her between my legs I put the nipple in her mouth until she started sucking. I did not let her go until the bottle was finished. It was half past three before I was done cleaning up and giving Heidi fresh water. Still full of energy I just sat down on the hay and watched my cows and calves. I felt a happiness unlike any I felt before. I woke up in the sunlight. A small beam crept just over the mountain and through the door to hit me in the face. Dieter stood leaning on the fence. "No problems?" was all he asked. "No problems." I replied.

Dieter took the Brührer to windrow the fields while I went back inside. My overalls were dirty, and my clothes filled with hay. Putting everything in the wash basket I took a shower and made myself breakfast. After that it was back to bed until afternoon. Hitching the bailer behind the Lindner I drove back out to the fields. There I checked I had enough twine and started going down the field. The bailer ate the grass, beeping when it was almost full. When that happened, I slowed down to let it eat the last bits. Then coming to a stop I opened the back and let the bail roll onto the ground. Driving off again only to stop when the beeping started again. Starting and stopping I went across the field several times until all the grass was gone. This done I went up to the higher field and did the same. Now I went back to the yard to drop off the baler. I left it in the workshop so I could clean it sometime later. Finally, it was time to use the new equipment I got months ago. In the garage I backed up to the bale wrapper and connected it to the thee point and hydraulic couplings. It had been standing there for a while with even the wrap already loaded. In the field I tested the controls. Then I backed up to a bale and lowered the Groweil machine. The prongs slid under the bail, picking it up as I closed them. Pushing a button on the remote the bail started to rotate while an arm spun around it wrapping it in foil. This done it cut the foil automatically and I lowered the wrapped bale to the ground. In a couple of weeks, we could start feeding our cows silage together with the hay they were already used to. The rest of the afternoon I got used to the wrapper. In the top field I even put the wrapped bales in a neat line ready for pick up. That could wait though. Today I just needed to finish this and enjoy the warm spring sun.

# Chapter 10

\*\*Where we watch the cows dance/Get a call/Hurry before the rain comes/Get paid for our work\*\*

With the troughs filled with water I got back on the tractor and drove the tank out of the pasture. Some people arrived early, their cars parked on both sides of the road. I waved at them in passing. They waved back and watched me drive past. As I passed the farmhouse Grethe and Dieter just came out with a table and a tray of paper cups. Stopping the tractor, I went to help them. I took the table from Dieter, and he went back in to get the coffee kettle. Grethe and I walked to the entrance of the farm, and she told me where to put the table. Going back for a chair I left the arrangement to her. When I got back, they were handing out coffee to the visitors. I put the chair down and went to talk to the neighbors. When it was time Dieter and got the fences. We put small poles in the ground and stretched the barrier tape between them. The path ready we went over to the cow barn. The guests standing along the barriers or at the field edge. We opened the doors. Carefully one cow poked her head out. Spooked by the tape fluttering in the wind she edged back. Another, braver, cow went outside following the path into the field. The others following. After the months inside they jumped around in the field. Calves rolling around in the grass. Soon the whole herd was outside and exploring the field. With the show over we closed the gate and removed the fence. The guests went back to their cars knowing that spring was really here.

We were busy cleaning up when my phone rang. Picking up I saw that it was Lize calling. "Hello, John speaking." Holding the phone in one hand and a tray in the other I walked into the kitchen. "Hello, this Lize." Grethe took the tray from mee before I dropped it. "Is it a good time?" I told her it was a good time, and she got straight to business. "We have one field left to mow and hay in the valley. But there is rain coming and we are too busy right now." Walking outside I nodded and made a "Hmm" sound. "Could you mow and bale the field for us before the rain." It was sunny now, but the forecast said it would start raining tomorrow evening. Dieter was looking questioningly in my direction. "Lize needs a field mowed and baled in the next two days." I told him. He nodded and gave a thumbs up. "We'll do it" I told Lize. She gave me the location and where we had to deliver the bales, thanked me, and hung up. "This will be tight." I said to Dieter. "We will be fine. You do not say no when Lize asks for help." I looked at him. "Get that mower on the Lindner and get out there!" he snapped and grinned. I turned away and went to the barn.

I was about half done mowing the field when Dieter drove up with the Brührer. I finished the row shut down my tractor and walked over to him. He had put the tedder on the back and maneuvered to start work. "I thought I could help a bit. With this being a rush job." He looked sheepish. "And me telling you to do this." "Happy with the help." I just replied. Getting back in the Lindner I heard the engine revs increasing as he started tedding the first row. I restarted the engine and got it turned around. With a push on the button the front pto started. When the mower was up to speed I gently lowered it. Pushing down on the dial engaged LDrive so I only had to keep the machine straight. Near the end of the field, I twisted the dial to the left, slowing the tractor. I raised the mower and turned around before lowering it again. Dieter was just starting on his second row. Grass flying behind and spreading over the field. In just an hour and a half I was at the end of the field. Dieter a couple of rows behind me. I made room for him and turned the tractor off. Sitting on the fender I waited for Dieter to finish his work. Together we drove back to the farm. I used the air compressor to clean the worst of the grass and dirt off the machines and parked them back in the shed.

The next day we started late. Both of us wanted to get to work but it made no sense to windrow the grass before the dew dried off. So we both did our chores watching the weather. The wind chased clouds across the sky. The wind was good for drying the grass. The clouds worried us. When Dieter went off with the windrower, I connected the Pottinger bailer to the Lindner and picked up the front loader. Then I drove to the field as well. The first rows of grass were laying there ready for bailing. Quickly I checked how much string was left in the bailer. Something I should have done in the yard. There was enough so I started everything. Lowered the pickup and went to work. The clouds got darker and darker, hiding the sun. Dieter finished the rows and drove away to get the trailer. I was only halfway done. He came back and waited for me to finish. After the last bale rolled out of the bailer we disconnected it and I started loading the trailer. Dieter strapping the bales down. The sky was so dark that I needed the work lights. There was no way all the bales would fit in one load. We were not going to make it.

Just then lights appeared on the dirt road. A big green Deere parked behind our trailer. A large flatbed behind. The door opened and Lize got out. She pointed at her trailer, and I gave her a thumbs up. Dieter and she strapped down the bales on our trailer while I put the rest of the bales on the other. A drop of rain hit my face when I got out of the Lindner. Lize and Dieter put the last strap on the bales and came over. "I'll take the Lindner back." Dieter said. "You go with her." I nodded and climbed into the Fendt. Lize going back to her tractor. I followed Lize to the main road and we drove to her yard. Big drops of rain on my windscreen but not enough to need the wipers yet. We reversed into a shed. Then the storm broke. Rain lashed down on the roof and we ran to the office. Lize handed me a towel and went off to make coffee. We both sat at the table in the breakroom with our mugs. She had not switched on the lights, and we listened to the rain in the dim room. "I'll transfer the money." Lize broke the silence. Surprised I replied "The money?" "Yes, for the job you did." I started to interrupt but she went on. "Your time, fuel, hours on the tractors. What would happen to the people working here if you did their job for free? Neither of us is running a charity." I nodded. "You are a farmer now. You need to think about these kinds of things. For now, I will pay you the same price we would charge for a rush job. I won't hire you again until you have set your rates." She suddenly stood up and went into one of the offices. I sat a bit longer before going back out into the rain. Thinking, I drove back to the farm leaving the trailer behind.

# Chapter 11

\*\*Where we find a bargain/Refurbish something/Cut some planks/Hire help/Install the platform\*\*

It was raining when I got back. My cargo was lying in the bed of the van covered by a blue tarp. One of the wiper blades needed replacing. The rubber squeaking every time it went back and forth leaving one stripe of water. It started raining last night. Kept up all the way to my destination and was still coming down heavily. I drove up to the workshop and got out to open the door. Dripping water, I went inside and pushed some things away to make room for my package. I opened the sideboards of the bed and got the Fendt from the sawmill shed. Two straps under the package and around the pallet forks and I was ready to pick it up. The bed was slippery from the rain, and I climbed down carefully. Lifting the forks the parcel lifted off the van tarp and all. Driving slowly, I went into the workshop and lowered the arm to put it down. I took the straps off and pulled the tarp away leaking water all over the shop floor. Then I used the forks to push it upright. A square frame with some pieces of wood left where the bed used to be. This would be a lot of work, but I was lucky that I had found it online for a good price. The wood and hydraulic rams needed replacing the rusted bolts just keeping it together. After covering it with the tarp to hide it I put the machines away and went inside to dry.

We had the gas heater blasting. Heating the workshop even with the doors open. It had been raining on and off the last days making us retreat from the fields and chasing us into the workshop. Dieter was building the platform. Bolting planks together to make a deck. I was working with the angle grinder to strip the old paint off the frame. The old rams where on the shop floor next to a box from Fendt. Finishing the last metal bar, I stepped back to look at my work. It looked clean and ready for some paint. Dieter had put the deck together and came over to take a look. We got the sideboards and went to work on the rusty bolts holding the old planks. "Robert used to work here." Dieter said. I waited wondering where this came from. "The guy who was here for the manure. He used to run the sawmill." I grunted. The bolt I was loosening rusted stuck to the frame. "We have got a lot of timber laying around." Dieter held the sideboard as I leaned on the wrench. With a squeak the bolt came loose. "You think he wants to come back?" I asked, starting on the next bolt. "I think so. And it is a shame to just leave the sawmill standing there." I thought while we removed the planks, and I started grinding the paint and rust off. When all the metal parts were cleaned I got the basecoat and painted everything petrol blue. Leaving the parts to dry we went to eat. "Could you ask him." I asked Dieter underway to the house. "I will give him a call." He replied.

A couple of days later Robert and I walked over to the sawmill. "You cleaned it out?" He asked when we arrived at the shed. "Yes, we even used it last winter." He went over to the saw. "This looks good. Shall we get to work?" I got started the Fendt and picked up the log forks. Robert watched as I picked one of the tree trunks from the lumber pile and drove it to the saw. Carefully I put it on the bed and pulled the leaver to let it go. He walked over to inspect the trunk. "Get a couple more so we can keep working." I did as he said, building a little pile while Robert was prepping the saw. Then I turned the tractor off and went over to join him. We used the clamps to fix the tree in place. Then he put the saw at the right high to cut the top off. With the saw on he turned a crank to push the blade across the trunk. Raising the blade, he pushed the saw back while I took the top off and put it aside. Together we turned the trunk one quarter, and he made another cut. After four times we had a square beam without any bark left on the side. The next cut was through the middle of the beam. We took one of the beams off and turned the other on its side. Robert carefully measured the height of the next cut and prepared the saw. Cranking trough, the wood he cut a slice off the top of the beam. I put the plank on a pallet while he prepared for the next slice. Soon the beam was gone. Together we put the other one on the machine. With the first trunk gone we had half a pallet of planks. We rolled the next tree to the machine and repeated the with the saw on he turned a crank to push the blade across the trunk. Raising the blade, he pushed the saw back while I took the top off and put it aside. Together we turned the trunk one quarter, and he made another cut. After four times we had a square beam without any bark left on the side. The next cut was through the middle of the beam. We took one of the beams off and turned the other on its side. Robert carefully measured the height of the next cut and prepared the saw. Cranking trough, the wood he cut a slice off the top of the beam. I put the plank on a pallet while he prepared for the next slice. Soon the beam was gone. Together we put the other one on the machine. With the first trunk gone we had half a pallet of planks. We rolled the next tree to the machine and repeated the process.

"You used to work for Dieter?" I asked Robert while we were rolling another log to the machine. "I mostly ran the sawmill but sometimes helped when there was a lot of work." We both grunted rolling the tree onto the bed. "You saw the state of the woods. Dieter didn’t have the time or energy to maintain the forests anymore." Tightening the clamp he continued. "We did buy wood a couple of years but we could not make a profit that way. Stuff stacked up and even cleaning up the mill became too much work." He got his tape measure and started fiddling with the saw. "So, I went to work driving tractors for Lize. I also bought the other machine and took it home." "The other machine?" "There used to be another saw for smaller logs over there." Looking closer I could see prints on the floor in the other half of the shed. "My wife hates the noise, so I don't run it often. Maybe once or twice a year." "I could use someone to run the sawmill." I said. Robert started the saw and made the first cut on this log. "I don't know how to run the saw like that, and I don't really have the time for it." I continued when the noise stopped. Picking up the board and putting it on the garbage pile. The sun was setting. In a little while it would disappear behind the mountains on the other side of the valley. We had only a few logs left in the sawmill. "I'll think about it." he finally said. "I've got my other work to think about." We finished the last logs as the sun set. I swept the sawdust on the pile and then we stood there looking at the pallets of planks we made today. “Maybe cut some more next week?" Robert asked. "That would be good." We went over to his van. I pulled out my wallet and paid him the money Dieter had told me to pay. He took it and put it in his pocket without counting it before getting in. He drove off and I closed the gate behind him.

# Chapter 12

\*\*Where play a game/Eat lunch in town/Prepare for the party/Hire someone/Enjoy the night\*\*

Sleeping in was the best. Or it would be if I had not been wide awake at six o'clock in the morning. The daylight peeking through the curtains and birds whistling in the trees outside my window. With a sigh I got up and opened the windows. The air felt cool, but the blue sky promised another hot day. I made coffee and walked over to my office. Putting the mug on the desk I looked around. I had finally had some time to put this room in order. My work desk was right in front of the window. I had put the gaming rig across the room next to the door. There were a couple of framed posters still leaning against the wall, waiting to be hung. Switching on the gaming computer I put my coffee down next to the steering wheel. As I started the game, I heard the Brührer start out in the yard. Jasper would take care of the cows today. While they went to work for real, I went to work on my virtual farm. After a bit of gaming, I made breakfast and ate it behind the steering wheel. The game sure made farming a lot easier than real life. Spending my morning this way was nice for a change of pace. It reminded me why I came here one year ago.

At lunchtime I closed the game and shut down the computer. Time to go. Outside the others had gathered. Monica, Peter, and Erika would take their own car, Jasper jumped in the van with me. "Thank you for taking care of the chores this morning." I said driving the van out of the garage and waiting for the other car. "No problem. It's fun, if you don't have to do it every day." Monica pulled out and drove down the driveway in front of us. I followed her. "My real job is so different that I could use the exercise." Jasper continued. "You like your job, don't you?" I asked. "I like my life in the city. Being stuck here having to take care of everything every dat. I think I would hate that." I had no reply to that following Monica’s blue car into town. The square we normally parked at was closed off. Parking at the train station we got out of our cars and walked back to the city center. Around the church people were putting up market stalls. Erika pointed at them. "They are for the party tomorrow." She explained to me. "You can't buy anything today and have to wait." "That is a shame." I said. "Then we'll have to go back tomorrow." She nodded and pulled on Peters hand. He let himself be dragged along. Monica, Jasper, and I followed them. Crossing the street into the town square. Tomorrow this would be filled with food trucks.

"Thank you for inviting me along." "You're welcome." Monica responded. "This is something of a thanks for everything you have done the last year." "What I did?" I was surprised. "We have not seen dad this happy in a while." Jasper nodded. "The farm must have been weighing on his mind. We also don't have to worry anymore. He really wanted someone to take over but we both have our own life." He looked at Peter and Monica walking a little ahead of us. "It also is nice to have someone living at the farm." Monica added. "With mom and dad getting older and all." I did not know what to say. Taking a left, we walked over to the restaurant. It was warm enough and not too hot to sit outside so we chose a table on the terrace. Soon we had our drinks in front of us. I raised my glass "I'm not sure what to say right now. Hearing that you don't feel like I took your farm is nice." I paused. "You will be welcome when you want or need to, even in the future." "Prost!" Monica said and we clinked glasses. "Me too!" We all clinked with Erika's bottle of lemonade. We kept the conversation light. Talking about work and our hobbies while eating our lunches. Afterwards we drove back with our stomachs full.

At the farm Grethe and Dieter had prepared the sitting area at the barbeque. I went to get wood for the fire pit. When I got back the cows had wandered over and Erika and Grethe where giving them scratches. Peter and Jasper started arranging the wood I dumped out of the wheelbarrow. Seeing that we would need more I went back to the wood pile for a second load. "That is going to be quite some fire." Dieter said as he came out the door, bottles in his hands. He handed me one and continued over to the others. Not having enough hands for a bottle and steering the cart I put mine in the shadow for when I got back. A white van parked just as I picked the wheelbarrow up again. The doors opened and Robert and Lize got out. Lize waved at me and went over to Dieter. Robert walked up to me. "Getting more wood for the fire." I said. "I'll help." Was his reply. At the wood pile we started loading logs. "Before the party starts and we can't talk business anymore." I listened. "I talked it over with Lize. And I can join you when it is not too busy over there." "Welcome aboard." I held out my hand and we shook. "One condition." He added. I looked at him questioningly. "You buy back the saw I have at home. That would make my wife happy." "Done!" Was all I had to say to that.

The sun had gone down, but it was still warm. We had let the cows back in the barn before the barbeque. Cooking steak in front of them seemed mean. Full and happy we sat talking around the fire. I just listened looking out over my field and at the mountains in the distance. The wind shifted blowing smoke in my face. The others laughed. Erika was almost asleep in her chair. Monica picked her up. "We will go to bed. It is way past her bedtime." Peter also stood up and joined them. A little later Jasper also went to bed saying he had to get up early. Grethe had gone inside a while before, so it was just the four of us left. We sat in a row looking at the fire. "Who needs another drink?" Everyone could use another, so I went inside to get the bottles and one cola. When I got back the others were talking about the new tractor Lize was thinking about buying. "I thought we had said no shop talk?" I said handing out the drinks. "That is just so we don't bore the others." Lize said. "We don't get bored talking shop, right?" They looked at mee. "No, we don't." I agreed. Dieter held out his drink and we clinked the bottles together. They went back to talking about the new tractor. I just listened. Together we sat around the fire looking at the flames. Above us the stars shone brightly. In a lull in the conversation, I took a breath. Lize caught on. "Speech, speech!" she laughed. Everyone was looking at me now. "I'll keep it short." I started. "I came here a year ago in a strange county, not knowing anything about farming. Now I can sit here on the farm with the people who helped me land on my feed. Thank you!" "That was short indeed." Robert mumbled. We laughed, raised our drinks, and toasted to another good year. After that we sat talking deep into the night.

# Epilogue

\*\*Where we get back to work/are happy about the finances/get a surprise visitor\*\*

Maybe today should feel like a Monday. I thought. but it really did not. Everyone was back home so my alarm rang at five in the morning. I felt happy to be back at work. Checking on the cows and chickens. Opening the workshop door and getting the tractor connected to the feed mixer. Now I was driving the Brührer. Bringing fresh water to the cows in the pasture. The sun was only just peeking over the mountain, but I could already feel the warmth. I stopped the tractor and opened the gate. Driving into the field the cows were watching me. I put the hose in the trough and opened the valve. Caterine came over for scratches. I felt the soft fur as I patted her flank. She was really growing. One of the new calves we had decided to keep. Somehow, she got attached to me and always came over when I was working nearby. I did not know cows did this and it made me happy. Closing the valve, I rolled up the hose and drove out of the field. Making sure I closed the gate behind me. I left tractor and water trailer at the well.

The barn needed mucking, so I got the Lindner and attached the bucket. Scraping along the floor I picked up manure and old straw to put it on the manure pile. Driving back and forth gave me some time to think. The family had taken care of the farm chores giving me some time to do other things. I slept in and played games but also went through the finances. To my surprise the farm made a small profit last year. It was only a little bit, and I had to assume that the new machines would last five years. But it was a profit in my first year of farming. The coming year the new cows would start making milk. And we were restarting the sawmill. The barn was full of bales and the chickens laid eggs every day. It was looking very good. The coming months would be mostly about winter prep. Cutting the grass one or two more times and bailing it for storage or sale. I felt like I got the hang of farming. And the barn was clean.

I put the bucket at the pressure washer and attached the bale spike. The straw blower was in the shed next to the sawmill. I pulled it out and lowered the rear door leaving it in the middle of the yard. Getting a straw bale from the rear barn I loaded the machine before picking it up again. Climbing out of the cab once more I stretched a bit before walking to the back and cutting the strings on the bale. Then I connected the driveshaft and hoses before getting back in the cab. I had just closed the rear door and had started driving to the cowshed when a white car drove up to the house and parked in front. I changed course and drove up. The doors of the station wagon opened, and two men got out. I shut the Lindner off and got out as well. We shook hands and the driver introduced himself. "My name is Clark from the farming agency. We will be conducting an audit today."