**Vanished**

**MAI DOES NOT FULLY** understand Faroese. Well, she does, but occasionally some phrases pop up that she doesn’t understand. Normal Faroese is not a problem for her. She sounds Faroese when she speaks, or at least that’s what they all tell her. But sounding Faroese isn’t the same as being Faroese, is it? Last time they attended a cup tournament in Skála and Mai sat eating her packed lunch, a girl who was adopted from Korea asked her if she was also adopted. Mai replied abruptly “No!” She’s from Thailand. She then wrapped up her packed lunch and walked away from the girl. She had not acted like a nice and polite girl – the two words that her neighbours in Vestmanna always used to describe her. Mai was a bit surprised by her own behaviour. Why had she been so rude? Or perhaps she hadn’t. Perhaps she simply walked away? After meeting this girl, Mai had played poorly in the match, and she felt bad about letting her team down because this was the qualifying match for the final! But what was she supposed to say? It wasn’t the simplest question to answer! Well, it’s actually really simple: “My dad adopted me, but my mum is my biological mum.” The question felt weird, which is why she had walked away. Because who is she? Whose daughter is she?” It wasn’t her decision that Jóannes would adopt her. She had a real dad. How come she suddenly had a new dad without having a say about it? The girl from Korea probably just wanted to say hi and have a chat, perhaps a chat about looking different from everyone else. Quite a few children look different from the pale Faroese kids, but in Mai’s class there are only three: herself, a girl from Romania and a boy whose dad is from Kenya. Adopted children… those who come from somewhere to brand new parents… they are really treasured. The parents have really wished to have these children in their lives – they haven’t just adopted them out of duty because their mums had them before. They are filled with love and gratitude when they see and hear their child singing *Silent Night* at the school Christmas concert. If only she had been adopted by someone else, someone new… someone who looked at her with love and gratitude… A phone notification informs her she has received a Snapchat message. Mai clicks on the video clip that Emma sent her.

“Mai, where are you? I can’t find you…”

Emma is a cat with an earring in one ear.

Mai does not reply immediately. She doesn’t want anyone to see what she writes. Emma is probably still at the youth centre.

She types “Call me” along with a photo of the window in her room.

Mai doesn’t know how her mum and Jóannes met. Could it be true that her mum had come to the Faroes to have a better life? Was life in Thailand not good? Does she not love Jóannes? The phone rings. It’s Emma. Mai picks up the phone and puts it on speakerphone.

“Hi!”

“Hi! Are you home? We’re thinking about starting a band and a podcast. And... Mai?”

Emma stops as there is no reply from Mai.

“What’s wrong?”

Mai doesn’t know what to say. Should she tell Emma what just happened?

“They were so mean...”

Mai cannot get another word out. She’s choked up.

“Who?” asks Emma, clearly clueless about what’s going on.

“Those boys in my group... Jákup and Dia,” Mai says, her voice breaking as tears well up in her eyes.

“What did they do?”

Emma’s voice is cold. She’s always willing to help and protect her friend. Mai doesn’t want her protection – she doesn’t want her to say anything at all. But she continues:

“They said we are lice... mum and I...”

“Lice?”

“They said... some really nasty things... about my mum!”

Her tears drop down on her phone.

“What?! How dare they? I’m going to tell the people at the youth centre!”

“No, please don’t tell anyone. I don’t want everyone to know about it!”

Mai wipes her phone with her sleeve.

“I won’t have anyone saying bad things about you, Mai, you hear me?”

“Please don’t say a thing,” Mai pleads.

“Of course I won’t say anything if you don’t want me to. But let’s go out! We shouldn’t let those stupid boys ruin everything. Mai... you are the sweetest girl in Vestmanna! Let’s go out and do something...”

“I don’t live in Vestmanna...”

“Haha... okay, the sweetest girl in Kvívík! Let’s go out. I promise I won’t say a thing until I’ve convinced you it’s the right thing to do. I’ll be by your side. Mai!!! Please, let’s go out!

“Maybe...”

Mai puts down the phone and picks up the picture on shelf of her grandma and grandpa. She really misses them right now. Her grandpa would know exactly what to say. Why couldn’t she just stay with them in Thailand? Why should she come here?

Mai thinks back to the stewardess who led her by the hand from the plane to her mother. Her shoes were beautiful, with diamonds on the heels. Mai had worn a badge around her neck indicating that she was travelling alone. A stewardess had been looking after her on the first flight and the one with the beautiful shoes in the second. But Mai was unable to speak to the shoe woman.

Her grandma cried and her grandpa was silent when they drove her to the airport. Her grandpa squeezed her tightly before handing her over to the first stewardess. He almost found it impossible to let go of her.

“You have many new experiences ahead of you,” he said, looking deep into her eyes.

“And I want you to be happy.”

Her grandma hugged and kissed her, unable to say goodbye in words. Mai also cried, although she didn’t fully understand that her grandma and grandpa may have felt this was the last time they would see her. She thought she would be seeing them again soon. But so far, she has only seen them on her phone and her laptop. But it wasn’t quite the same... the way she used to talk to her mum. Now things had reversed. She hasn’t seen them for five years. She’s hoping they will come to visit next summer. This has been her wish every year.

She pulls out her diary notebook from under her mattress. This is her secret diary, for her eyes only. Turning to the page with a drawing of the boys and all the snakes, she sharpens her pencil and draws a moon... “We see the same moon wherever you are, Mai,” her grandpa had reassured her. At the bottom of the page, she draws a lonely girl staring at the moon.

*oh night, how dark you are
spellbound shadows drifting far
a weight of loneliness, heavy and slow
drains my spirit, a constant woe*

*why aren't you here to ease my pain?
I long for you, my heart in chains
my dreams wander without aim
yet the same moon shines where you remain*

*roaring waves and a vast universe
ignore our fate, a cruel curse
crushing hope within my heart
as we remain worlds apart*

*gazing at the moonlit sky
I feel your presence close by
tender thoughts of love, sincere and true
roam through the universe straight to you*

“Hi!”

Emma is standing in the entryway. She’s relentless. She really wants Mai to come out of her room.

“Hi,” Mai’s mum shouts from the kitchen.

It’s good that Emma came, even though Mai doesn’t always want to talk about the things Emma wants to talk about. Mai wants to be alone now. She wants to forget about the nasty words and think about something else.

“Is Mai in her room?”

“Yes, she went straight to her room when she came in. The few times she goes out, she returns immediately. I don’t know what’s wrong with her.”

“That’s understandable because there were two boys who...”

What was she saying?! Mai dashes into the kitchen to get her friend to shut up. Why does she always have to talk so much? Not all mums are like Emma’s mum.

“Emma!” she shouts.

“Hi! I ran over. What did they say to...”

“EMMA! My room! Now!”

She had not told her mum about what had happened. Why couldn’t Emma understand that?

“Boys, eh?” says Mai’s mum. “That’s early...”

“Emma! Let’s go!”

They go into the room and Mai and shuts the door and leans against it.

“Why do Faroese people talk so much? Everyone in our class says their parents are annoying and that it’s cold and boring here in the Faroes... How come you never say anything nice?”

“You neversay *anything* negative! There’s got to be some negative things.”

“Even if there are negative things, there’s no need to say it out loud to everyone.”

“Yes, there is! Because it helps!”

There’s no point in arguing with Emma because she always knows best. But Mai knows she loves her.

“Whom does it help? If you say nice things, then perhaps nice things will happen. At least you show respect to those you talk about. Don’t always talk about the bad things. Why not also mention the good things?”

“Okay, we’re not getting anywhere with this. But what did those boys say to you?”

“We went down to the computer room...”

Mai is interrupted by the front door opening abruptly.

“Did you hear?” Jóannes asks in a loud and exasperated voice.

“What?” his wife asks.

Mai half-opens the door to hear what they are talking about. Emma also goes to the door to listen.

“A child has disappeared... abducted here in Vestmanna! This afternoon! My boss called me while I was driving. I must go investigate, take photos and write an article for the website. No-one has broken the news yet... I’ve got to run...”

“Child abducted?” the mum asks in a trembling voice. “That’s horrible! Who is it? Who owns it? How old is it?”

“That’s all I know right now. I’ll go and check it out. Tell you later. There’s always someone who knows something. Got to run!”

Mai quietly closes the door and turns to Emma. They look at each other with shocked looks on their faces. The front door slams shut and the car speeds up the crooked hill.

**Snap**

**“A CHILD?”** asks Mai.

“Abducted in Vestmanna!” Emma puts her hands up to her cheeks and looks like her favourite monkey emoji.

“Here in our little town? Nothing ever happens here in Vestmanna!”

Emma looks surprised and excited.

“Who could it be?”

Mai looks at Emma. It’s as if a shadow covers her face.

“It better not be Jana... I’ll ask my mum.”

Emma’s fingers dance across her phone, and seconds later the message is sent.

“What did you write?”

“Just ‘Where is Jana?’” Emma says, with her eyes still glued to the phone.

A Snapchat chime breaks the silence.

“Oh, she’s at home,” says Emma as a relieved smile spreads across her face. “Mum asks why I want to know.”

“Can I have dinner at your place?” Emma asks Mai with a pleading look. “I want to hear what Jóannes says when he returns.”

Mai opens the door a bit and calls out to her mum: “Can Emma join us for dinner?”

“Yes, of course. If you come and help me with the cooking,” her mum replies.

“Sure,” says Mai.

Emma looks down on her phone again.

“I just wrote, ‘I don’t want to come home if she’s there. Eating at Mai’s...”

Mai puts her hands on her hips and stares at Emma, waiting for her to look up from the phone.

“You were scared! Scared that she was the one who was abducted?”

“Yes, but I don’t want them to know that!”

Emma winks at Mai, but her gaze quickly returns to her phone.

“How do we find out who it is?”

Good old Emma is back. It’s as if she never worried about her little sister.

“I got it! I’ll snap all my friends in Vestmanna.”

“Really?” says Mai. “Do you think...?”

“I *need* to know who it is…”

Emma quickly messages everyone on her Snapchat friend list, and within seconds the chimes start rolling in.

“Jeez, they all reply ‘What?’ and ‘What are you talking about?’. Come on! Someone *must* know something.”

Emma slams the mattress so hard that the cushions fall down on the floor.

“You sound just like Jóannes,” Mai says with a laugh.

“I don’t know why he bothers going out to investigate. All the work can be done with a phone.”

Emma glances at her phone again. “Look! OMG… Durita says it’s Jákup’s little brother!”

Emma looks at Mai with huge eyes as the phone continues to chime.

“Jákup who?” asks Mai. “I don’t know any Jákup.”

“Jákup, Poulina’s son.”

“Huh?”

“You know… Jákup. He was at the youth centre – Dia’s friend. The guys we wanted to gossip about.”

The lump in Mai’s throat returns and all the words ring in her ears. Jákup. Jákup with the hoodie… Jákup with the mean words…”

“Oh… him,” says Mai as she quickly blinks the upcoming tears away. Emma does not notice anything as her eyes are fixed on her phone.

“He has three little brothers. They’re all really young, below school age, Durita says here. She doesn’t know which one of them was abducted.”

Emma’s fingers run at double speed across the phone screen.

“Come here, girls,” Mai’s mum calls from the kitchen.

Mai gets up immediately, but Emma remains sitting on the bed with the phone in her hands.

“Leave the phone here while we prepare dinner.”

“But… I’m chatting with lots of people… about Jákup’s little brother,” Emma says with a look of slight desperation.

“That’s how we do things in here. Jóannes doesn’t want phones at the dinner table.”

“But… he’s not here.”

“Emma!”

“Alright then.”

Emma puts her phone on silent and hesitantly puts it down on the bed.

**CHILD ABDUCTED IN VESTMANNA**

Two hours ago, a child was snatched from a baby pram. Eleven-month-old Olivur was laid in the pram at 3pm and put outside his home. The mother soon noticed an unusual silence and went out to check on her little boy. To her shock, she found that the boy had disappeared. The baby alarm was still in the pram, but the quilt has been moved to the side and the safety belt had been undone. We have spoken to the neighbour, who reported the incident to the police at 4.47pm. She says that the boy’s mother came running and screaming out onto the road. The incident took place in the old-town district of Sjóvarbø, where the child had been put down for a nap in the yard. The pram had been placed behind a tall hedgerow. The mother says she did not notice anyone abducting the child, despite the baby alarm being on.

Anyone who may have seen or heard anything unusual in the area around this time is urged to contact the police.

Updates will be posted here on the website.

Mai cuts fruit for dessert. Her mum wants her to cut pretty little pieces, not big chunky ones. But Mai has got this: she’s always been good at cutting fruit and making it look pretty. They often have fruit for dessert. Jón stands behind her. He wants a piece.

“I want!”

He lifts both arms up toward Mai, his face alight with excitement. He almost gets up on his toes. It’s as if the bright colours on the table are begging him to join in the feast.

“I’m almost done. But you must eat dinner first!”

“I want!”

His tiny hands open and clench – anything to make his sister understand that he wants some fruit *now*.

“Wow, that’s pretty,” says Emma as she picks up a piece of melon and secretly hands it over to Jón. No-one notices.

“Thanks,” says Mai. Just as she starts explaining how she cut it, the front door opens. They all look on with excitement as Jóannes enters.

“Hi!” he says.

“Hi,” his wife replies.

“I’ve posted the first news piece on the website. It’s already had 9,000 clicks. I’ll write more about it tomorrow for the newspaper and the website. I have a photo of the boy. His name is Olivur.”

Jóannes takes off his jacket and shoes and enters the kitchen.

“Who would steal a child?” his wife says while staring at the photo on his phone.

“Come here, Jón. Daddy needs a hug. This child theft has done something to me. Stolen directly from the pram! And the baby alarm was on… just the thought of someone stealing you…”

He hugs and kisses his little boy.

“Daddy!” Jón giggles as he pinches his dad’s nose.

“Here’s the photo of little Olivur. You guys want to see?”

“Oh, he’s adorable,” says Emma. “Check out those cute white curls.”

Mai elbows her way past her mum to see the photo on the phone – a blurry image of a baby boy with lots of white curls.

“Behave like a good Thai girl,” her mum whispers, probably referring to Mai elbowing past her. She doesn’t like such behaviour. Children should remain seated while the adults are seated. Mai knows this, but she really wants to see the photo.

Her mum’s words feel like a punch in the face. A good Thai girl? Mai thinks she’s a good girl but never good enough for her mum! She’s a lot more helpful around the home than any of her friends. Thai? How come she is Thai and Jón is not? They are both her children, aren’t they? Sure, he’s tiny, but he gets to complain and scream and do whatever he likes. Mai was never allowed to do any of that when she was little. So, just because she doesn’t behave like her mum wants her to, she’s not a good girl? She just has to say yes and do what she’s told! Wash this, clean that…! Why did she have to come to the Faroes if she’s not allowed to behave like the Faroese do, at least a bit? Emma just lazes on the sofa with her phone when she comes home from school. Mai feels like a housemaid compared to Emma… and everyone else. Nobody helps out as much as Mai does. Perhaps that’s why she was asked to come to the Faroes – because her mum needed a helper? “Well, I do have another child… we can just get Mai to help out at home so we won’t need to pay anyone to do it.” How clever! So much for the idea that her mum missed her so much that she cried every night because Mai was not with her.

Things were different with grandma and grandpa: she could do everything without having to think about it. She picked fruit with grandpa and made omelettes. She was really young, but she could do it all by herself. Just a bit of oil on the frying pan, then eggs… cut fruit. The three of them did everything together. Her grandma never said she was not a good girl. Emma and her sister just laze on the sofa with their iPads and their phones while their parents do all the cooking.

Why can’t things be as easy as they were when she was six? Why does she always feel like a rebel? As if she always wants to complain whenever she disagrees with her mum. Why is she so annoyed and angry? Strange, because she really wants her mum to think she’s a good girl and that they love each other. She really wants… She wants to be a little girl again… She wishes that her beautiful and smiling mum, the mum she missed so much when she lived with her grandma, would come back – come running toward her and hug her tightly forever.

This updated version of her mum does not match the image of the mum that she had tried so hard to hold on to when they were thousands of miles apart. The mum that Mai longed for in Thailand was kind and gentle. Now, her mum no longer smiles like she used to do in Thailand. Mai remembers how everyone used to look at her mum and wanted to talk to her. Now she’s so cold, or that’s how it seems because she very rarely smiles at Mai. She probably regrets bringing her to the Faroes. But she also no longer looks radiant when she’s out, like she used to do in Thailand. She has become almost invisible…