

## Winter letter

Dear family

Winter came and then Christmas, New Year and now March has already begun. This winter has not been the easiest for me and not for our world either. In January I was in Switzerland for a few weeks and saw many of you. I got reminded of the huge family I have. Making me feel the web of all the old, middle-old and new friendships that connect me to so many wonderful people in so many different places on this planet. Connections that remain even when we don't see each other for a long time. There is a gratitude in me for this that I cannot describe in words. Being able to share my experiences and stories with you, whether in spoken or written words, carries me and helps me more than you might think to find my way in this complicated and wondrous human life.

All my love

Selina

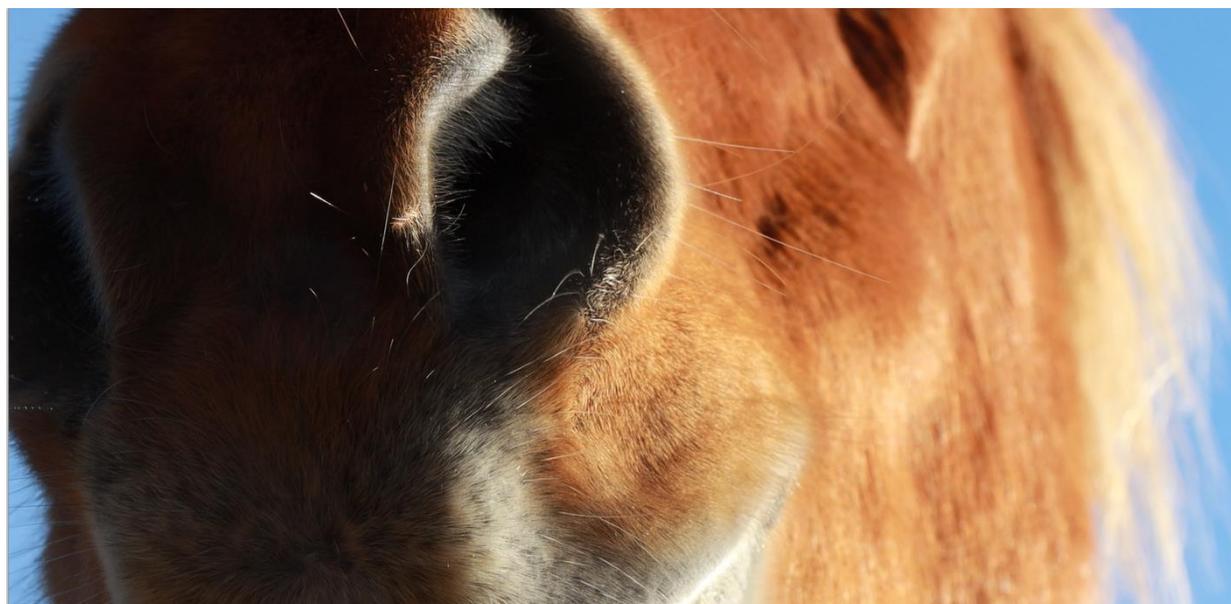


## **The simplicity of belonging**

for the herd

Hello  
Hello little nose  
Pushing gently against my back  
Soft nostrils tickling my ears  
Who are you?  
I can't see you  
But wait  
I can feel you  
Even better with closed eyes  
Your nose touches my cheek  
With infinite sweetness  
Trickling all over me  
Releasing my breath  
To match yours  
My lips smile in bliss  
Expecting this moment to be over in a second  
But you rest your head  
With your nose leaning against my cheek  
Exactly as it is  
Breathing sunlight onto my skin

I remain as still as I can  
In your touch  
Not wanting the tiniest muscle movement  
To interrupt  
Feeling with amazement  
And wonder  
The warmth spreading  
From the point of touch  
Out to every member of the herd  
Until it envelopes  
The entire winter field  
This touch  
Is not ours  
But everyone's  
It sinks into me  
Anchoring in my body memory  
The softness of your nose  
Imprinted on my cheek  
The simplicity of belonging



## Darkness

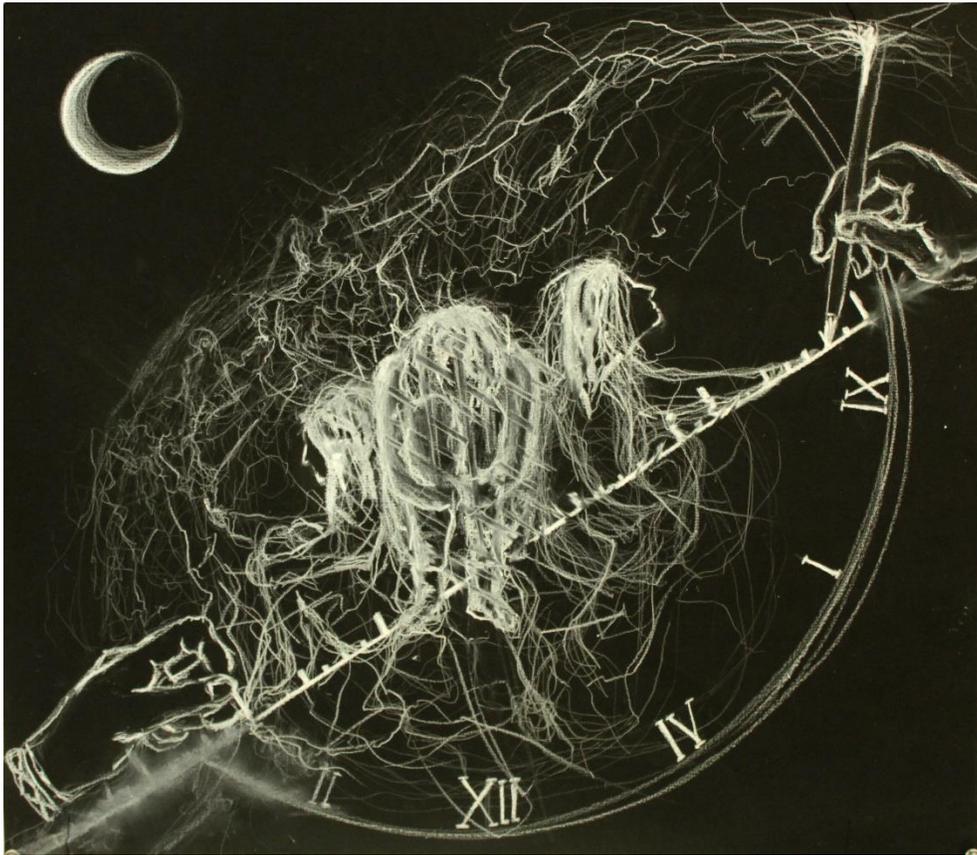
I don't think I particularly like the short winter days. But I have started to love the darkness. In December and January, the sun sets at 15:30. It is dark at 16:00. And then it is as if a completely new day begins. The darkness embraces everything, gently covering the trees, the roof tops, the little pebbles on the gravel road to Surtung. Erasing time. During the dark day, it doesn't matter when I eat. When I go to sleep. How many episodes of Sherlock Holmes we watch in a row. Because it's dark anyway. A bit like the lockdown a few years ago, the darkness creates a space where it's okay to be introverted. To be inside. To be alone. To be slow. While the grass in the field outside rests deep within itself. Horses gather around hay bales and slowly chew the stored summer sunlight. The stars of Orion's belt travel across the sky.

The darkness makes it easier for me to remember what rest means. Rest is deeper and somehow goes beyond a break, relaxation, meditation or sleep. Rest is a state. Rest lies in the gaps between emotions, but is not the same as emotional emptiness. Rest lies before every beginning, but is not part of a timeline. Rest is the motionlessness from which a new movement, a new idea can emerge. Rest is timeless like darkness. Tiny ice crystals fly through the light cone of my headlamp. Footsteps crunch on the frosty grass. I stand still. Hear the water of a not entirely frozen stream trickle. See my breath dancing with the ice crystals. See how the headlamp light loses itself in the darkness. How could I have forgotten so much about how to find rest?



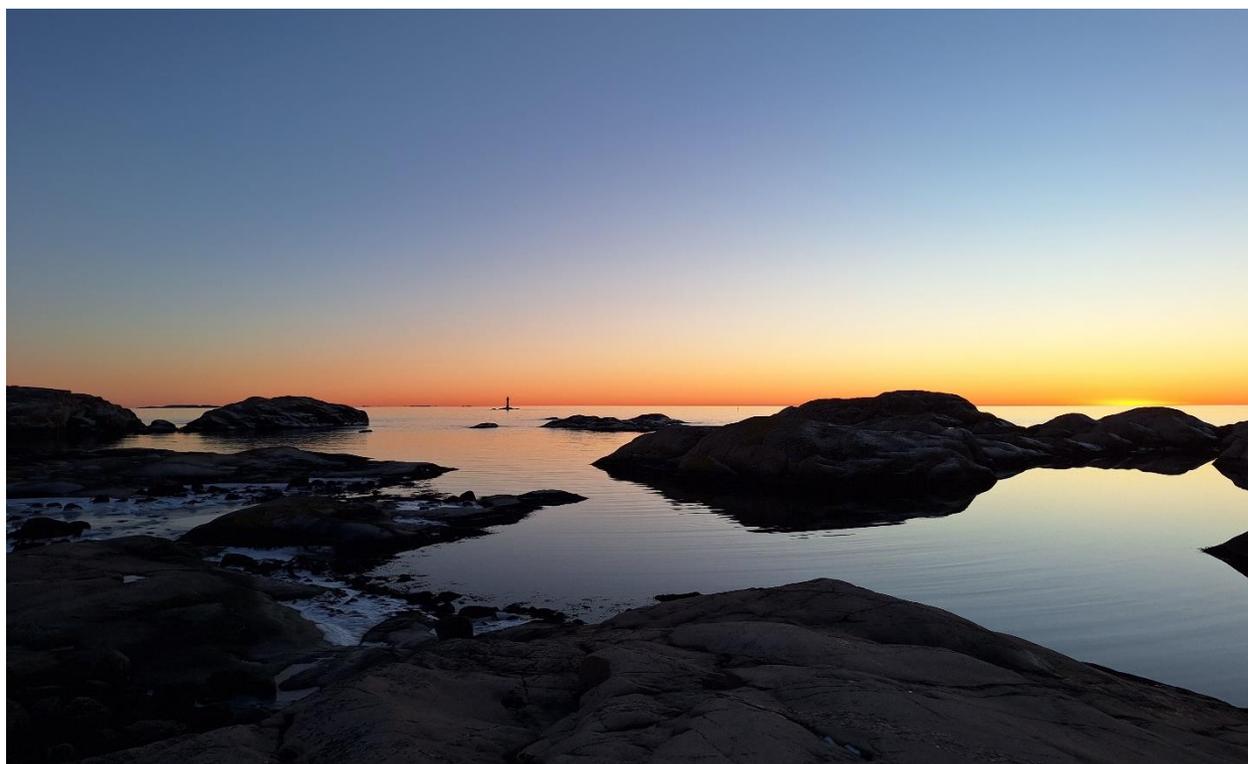
For months now, I've been in a place where I can determine the quantity, intensity and rhythm of my work myself most of the time. And I think I'm actually rather good at feeling when I need a break. And then taking that break. Aren't these exactly the circumstances that should make it possible to find balance? Today is February 24. It's 17:46 and there is still twilight outside. The light is coming back. A few minutes less darkness every day. Nature is blinking, very gently and still invisible to the eyes. I realize that I want to hold on to the darkness. Longing for the rest I didn't find. I don't want to wake up yet. I am still tired. I don't want to go out into this difficult world just yet. Let me stay a tiny bit longer. Please.

I spend so much time running behind my mind who is always 10 steps in front of me and at the same time chasing me from the back. Being faster must mean having more time for the next thing. Hoping that the race is over after the next curve. But it never is. The different human made systems like schools, university and work places I have lived in so far have cheered me on. In wanting to be good, better, endlessly productive, efficient, finishing things, all things on the to-do list, no matter what. Now the cheering has faded. There are a million things that need to be done on the farm every day. But no single animal, plant or human here appreciates me chasing an imaginary finish line. Apparently the athlete in me has finally realized the absence of competition and expectation. I became slow enough to take a look around. To feel a bit ridiculous. And to dare trying something else.



This is a drawing I made when I was 18. I was thinking about how social norms tell me who I can and can't be then. When I found this again now I realized that it captured something that also reflects this text here.

The darkness helped me to see the fundamental difference between taking a break and resting. You can't take a rest. Rest cannot be planned. Rest is not the result of lying down and doing nothing or of a schedule-free, self-determined day. A second of rest might contribute more to the recovery of mind and body than a week of vacation. Rest is an elementary part of every cycle. Winter is rest. It dawns in on me that I will only find rest if I orient on the seasons. Like every non-human species does. Like my body has understood long before my mind. Engage and live with all the different cycles that happen inside and around me. I don't think that this will mean that I can no longer live in a human made system. Just that I could probably do it better that way.



Some days ago I found Emelie in the kitchen baking cheese cake. I sit down to warm up a little. Our conversation went here and there and everywhere as usual. At some point Emelie said that she is actually having a migraine. A pretty bad one. But Emelie being Emelie tries to find another way to get through it than laying in the dark until it's over. She tells me about figuring out how any goal oriented movement or action creates tension that feeds the migraine. So a possible solution might be to take away all thoughts that plan the future ahead of the present moment. All movement that follows these thoughts. And stay exactly with what is happening in the moment it is happening. The difference is tiny. Now I'm here, I take a step towards the door. My thought jumps to what is outside and there it is, the tension. One could think that this conversation is really not that special since living in the present moment is in one or the other way part of everything the non-human inhabitants of this place share with humans. But somehow my mind was ready to be really hit by it that morning. Since I am a child, there is tension in my shoulders and neck. With any emotional, social or physical tension or pressure

added, it closes my neck and gives me headaches. The question of why this happens and what I can do about it is with me since I can remember.

The rest of that day I practiced to notice every point where my mind would cross the boundary of the now and how that would affect my shoulders and neck. It happened all the time. And I probably only noticed a small fraction of the times it happened. I felt like a big pendulum swaying back and forth without any rhythm. But in the few points where it was possible to rest, yes, there it is the rest, in the present moment, were a little revelation. It was not only the tension that didn't build up. I also felt like I was plugged into a source of energy that made a constant and very intelligent exchange between me and the world around me possible without getting tired. And it didn't mean that I was moving particularly slow. At one point I was running in a moment I probably wouldn't have if I was stuck in the plan of my mind. A thought I had in theory since a while now started to become painfully real. What if I could be of so much more and accurate service to all aspects of myself, life and the world around me by giving up linearity and ultimately all control I thought to have over time? The answer to that is an agonized and panicky cry of my mind. It throws pictures of chaos at me. Of a Selina floating in space, utterly unreliable and failing in life, of use to none. Underneath the tantrum, I know that living in the present moment in connection with all that is in and around me, will ground me in a way that is not possible otherwise. It would make me even more reliable seen from a larger perspective. Because I would be able to be more exactly in the point where what is needed and what I can do best intersect. Because it is not the few effects that my mind attaches to my actions that count. But the infinite ripples that go out to the entirety that my mind would never be able to perceive and calculate. My mind is in agony because it knows that there isn't really a going back anymore. I know too deeply now that the best and smartest planned break in my everyday life will not solve anything in the long term. None of my destructive patterns will change if I take well timed breaks, only to remove enough exhaustion and tension to repeat it all over. Only to reinforce the illusion that everything will be fine if I just have enough control over time. It freaks me out. But there is nothing I can do, other than taking one step at a time into spring. Together with all the awakening seeds. With the horses. The dogs and cats. Simon. And the chickens.



## The right conditions

The absence of light, the resting nature and the hours of the dark day have created an empty space where slowly my creativity started to bloom again. Like a flower that had closed itself to wait for the right conditions. It had to wait long this time. University years were filled to the top with assigned readings, not yet written essays, upcoming exams, volunteer work and student jobs. I remember the introduction week at Leiden University when I started my bachelor. There were all kinds of events happening for the new students. From time to time I saw a group that looked like art students. Red and blue died hair, clothing styles ranging from punk, artsy hipster to very undefinable but definitely not boring, tattoos, piercings. I remember a strange confusion. Why am I not part of that group? Not because I looked like them. But because I felt like them inside. Looking back in my life, every time I have been left alone enough by societal expectations, I became creative. As if that is a natural state I return to if conditions allow for it. Creativity then becomes a room around me in which my brain stops dissecting the situation from yesterday where I wasn't sure if I did something wrong. Where focus turns my cheeks red. A focus held by the flow of what my hands create. It is a room I always only realize how much I have missed when I find myself back in it. There is no recipe or strategy that would ever bring me there. It would never let itself be corrupted by my wanting. I wonder if this is why we perceive some art as beautiful. Because something in us can sense the absence of manipulation and greed.





### **For Surtung**

The wild is not waiting for me  
And it will not be mad  
If I don't come  
The wild doesn't need me  
To be complete  
And yet, it hears my silent scream  
Like no human ears have ever heard me  
And responds with a thousand howls  
Echoing between the stars  
And tree shadows

Thank you