

Rebels of love



Grimån, which *is* a movement - a coil of wind filled with water - flows slowly by. All the events that have taken place in and around the water, are brought along. The hypnotic reflection of the trees above. If the vision of Friskeröd came from the encounter with this friendly water. From a prayer for benevolence and coexistence. What then is my task? It can't just be about managing to make ends meet. To maintain the structure.

It must be about something else. About the cracks in the ground, perhaps? About the dreams beneath the surface. **Rebell**, a big and towering horse, was born somewhere up in the Austrian Alps. He remembers a cold and clear, almost harsh air. As if his body was cutting out little pieces of time, when he was trying to find his place in the world. Nothing was obvious.

Was there a place in the world, where he could live; just as himself. And if so, how? He's kind, and a little clumsy. And he has no idea how to get around in the world. The whole project feels insurmountable. He travels the trailer, he tries to do what the people ask him to do. But where does he belong?

The memory of that frosty cold against the skin. Stepping into a body is also stepping into the world. To be able to feel the cold. To experience resistance and limitations. To feel fear. Kindness is not always obvious. He steps off trailers and gets on them again, like a never ending repetition. He only has himself, but he really has no idea who he is/what that means.

The air changes. During all these journeys, that's what he notices most. The cold changes and becomes milder. The days pass. That's how a life is slowly shaped, in obscurity.

The next image is much more dramatic. It looks like Rebel is struggling, almost hitting a wall. You can see fences breaking. The feeling inside is one of sheer panic. He has nowhere to go. He's nobody. There is no way. There's only disconnected images and an air he doesn't recognize. He wants to wake up from this dream, but he can't. Will he never ever get to his final destination?

I'm leaving my dream here, please take care of it. So said the mare **Nastja** before she left. We don't really take horses for short periods. It's too painful and unsafe when individuals in the herd need to be separated from each other. But we made an exception for Nastja, as she had so much to teach and share with the world.



Secretly, there was perhaps a hope that the limited time could be a little longer, but that didn't happen. There are circumstances that cannot be helped. And as long as we live, we will experience parting...

I'm leaving my dream here, please take care of it. Hooves, moving seemingly at random. Following the rhythm of the grass and the mycelium of the fungi. Gently meeting the elasticity of the tree roots. Paths that were perhaps never meant to reach their destination.

The dream of "The Great Kindness". The underlying fabric, and what lies beyond it. To move through the world in full trust is to walk blindly. Which is exactly what Rebel did, in the part of the story where we meet him. A place without direction or connection. It's not uncommon for horses and other animals to suffer from anxiety. Both panic attacks and varying degrees of post-traumatic stress are part of my daily work. And just like for us humans, the only path to recovery (in the long run) is to dare to stand and face these emotions. It's just that; how on earth can you stand still when the whole world is spinning, and there are no fixed points?

Rebell stands behind a wooden fence of some kind. Somehow, he has to get away from the feeling he carries inside, but he doesn't know how. He's so big and strong, even at six months old, that he barely notices the resistance. The boards just become splinters when he puts his weight against them. And he realizes that he is made of brute power. Maybe he's not so powerless after all? But he can't control this force either. He can't run away from himself and what's inside, but he can be temporarily distracted. Running and lashing out becomes like a rush, a short-term pain relief.



It gives him a sense of ownership of the world and himself. But as soon as the moment of acceleration is over, the feeling of being lost comes back again. Another journey on transport and then he is apparently at the place where he will live. I suppose that in this part of the story he is describing his journey from Austria to Sweden, the stopover at a friend's house and then arriving at our neighbour's farm.

Since we didn't have any free space at home at the time, and our neighbour had a young horse of his age, it was a good solution to start with. Because Rebell is one of all those Noric horses (an Austrian, domestic breed), which go to slaughter every year because there is no market to sell them. The government gives out subsidies for breeding native breeds, but the demand to then buy them, is not as great. For this reason, many of them end up in slaughterhouses, where they are locked up and live out their lives, waiting for horse meat to be needed. Rebell never made it to a slaughterhouse but was bought by a private individual beforehand. But maybe that uncertainty he describes at the beginning has something to do with that situation? The question of whether there really is any place in the world where you are welcome and wanted - just the way you are.

Even at the new location it is cold. But it's a more damp kind of coldness. And then he experiences an unpleasant, almost panicky feeling of not being able to experience any geographical directions. It's as if his internal compass is completely out of order. He would never be able to find his way back to the place where he was born, or anywhere else for that matter.

This is something we humans rarely think about as we move horses (and other animals) back and forth across the world - how this affects the built-in ability to orientate ourselves. For Rebell, it made him feel like he was in a room without doors. Without a directions, there was no way, no possibility of existing. Hence the anxiety.

He ran away a lot in the beginning and trotted along the dirt roads, without being approachable. He could never explain what he was experiencing. Not exactly that. Then it was just emotions and sensations in a mess. There was really no connection.



Before Nastja leaves, she asks for a meeting. We stand a bit apart in the pasture. Between us are the Ural Mountains and a long line of ancestors. Most clearly, I see a horse with a light brownish-black colour. Until now, contact with these horses has been through Nastja, but now she steps out of the picture. The landscape is barren, and the cold is pervasive, endless. It takes perseverance to live here. A different kind of strength. You see young horses with shaggy coats and older, more emaciated horses. What is most evident in the picture is the sense of their community. It's unspoken and undeniable. Like a tough, tight fabric.

If you stay in this place long enough, over time you may notice a kind of background sound. Like a soft song, inside the mountain. It's magical. You can listen to it for as long as you like. It makes the cold move, and it dissolves time. Suddenly it doesn't feel at all like you're standing around, all winter long, waiting for the frost to let up and the grass to start growing again. Suddenly time doesn't matter at all.

The brownish black horse turns around and blows warm air through the frost. That melody is like an unbroken story. It is sung through the mountains because they remember. It becomes like an echo, a reverberation of everything that has ever happened. It's like being lulled to sleep, in a deep sense of acceptance. There is something greater in everything, and in that moment, it is immensely comforting.

Now the contact is established and Nastja is happy. Now the stories will live on.

A small group of scraggly, windswept horses huddle up at the foot of the mountain. Is that where Nasty's dream comes from? From the songs of the mountain. There's a kindness there, in all that is barren and unyielding. There's a real knowledge there, and a certainty of what it's like to really *live*.

No words are really needed, it's enough that we see each other. If you're going to accept a story, you must do it with your whole being. There is no room for opinions or ideas. Not at that moment. Then there is only the way in between. And Nastja has opened it up for us.

I must let go of all ideas of control, of what is good or bad. In time you get used to the cold. You find a balance between circulation, movement, and acceptance/rest. With cold, you can never let it in completely. But you still have to befriend it. Everything moves slowly. You must never get sweaty; you could die in that climate. The horses warm each other up. And wait.

Their contact with the mountain is the most fundamental. Moving from there would be unthinkable. They are an extension of the mountain and its songs. They are inseparable. You see images of humans in constant motion. Humans fighting and seeming to experience a kind of restless discontent. As if we are a species that has never really found our place.

Man's restlessness comes from a lack of balance, say the horses in the herd. As if we were halted halfway and forgotten where we're going. It's as if we only remember fragments of history, which increases the risk of misunderstandings and disputes.

I'm thinking of the restlessness of Rebell, and especially the rootlessness. When do we cut the threads? And I remember **Dina** and **Haboub**, two memory-bearing mares in Jordan. How they stood there close to each other - for months, before Haboub passed out of time. They never said much to each other. That's not how the transfer happened. It was the shared presence in the meeting that tied the times together.

Maybe that's the case now as well. Nastja's task in relation to me is complete, at least for now. She will set out on her next journey, and I will return to my task.

The horses in Sigvard's large pasture are eagerly waiting for the students of this weekend's course to show up. As the people walk from the car park up to the farm, the whole herd comes rushing.

It's drizzling and autumn is making herself known. This weekend's theme is about redoing things that have gone wrong in your life, or trying something completely new. It takes courage and vulnerability, for both horses and humans. Many of us will be on the edge of our stretch boundary this weekend.

Felix, one of the horses in Rebell's herd, is not sure how to design his exercise. He's terrified of intimacy. At the same time, he craves it more than anything.

Occasionally, he has outbursts, which he does not control. He is made up of conflicting forces, which he does not know how to reconcile in one body. He never had the opportunity to test his own strength in a phase of development when it was necessary. Then it becomes difficult to mature and grow further. He is searching for a sense of reconciliation, but he does not know where to find it. Maybe he's just looking for an encounter. To dare to stand next to someone.



We start there; by just standing together. With Nastja's ancestors and the big, friendly mountain in the background. Listening is not necessarily about understanding everything you hear/perceive. It's as much about just holding the room. To stand in the silence.

*Last night
I begged the Wise One to tell me
the secret of the world.
Gently, gently he whispered.
"Be quiet.
the secret cannot be spoken.
It is wrapped up in silence."*

(Rumi)

The horses have offered us small pieces of horsehair, which have now gathered into a thick tuft. In silence we receive their wisdom and presence. The pieces of horsehair are a reminder, something tangible. We send out a prayer, each in our own way. As a hope and a longing that humankind (as a species), will one day dare to step into the web - and not just stand by.

That we will finally be able to reach each other and break the isolation. And that, in the long term, it might reduce suffering in the world. No one should have to be born feeling unwanted. Rebell is one of the most loving individuals I have ever met. It is unreasonable that this kind of unconditional love should not have a place in this world.

There was a parting in Rebell's life that affected him more than anything else. And that was when he left his mother. The most painful thing about it was the thought of her being alone - until the next foal came along. Every spring she had a foal, which was then sold in the autumn. She spent the winter as a lone horse on the farm, and so it went on. Rebell had no choice, but he still felt guilty.

He remembers her scent. The waves of her mane and the rough feel against the nose as he tried to bite her tail. The pace and sound of her steps. But no matter how hard he tried to keep the memories alive, reminding himself of them as often as possible, it was as if they were slowly falling apart. He became uncertain. Did her mane really look just like that, or had he tried to recreate the image so many times that the original faded away?

Time created a distance that could not be counteracted. Perhaps it was just his imagination trying to bridge the gap?

Is the present the only thing we can really be sure of? Rebell concluded that you can never catch time. It may even have the opposite effect if you try. The feeling when he tries to grab his mother's tail. The taste and feel in his mouth. Right then, there she is, in that flash. But she's not *there*. It doesn't help.

Do we really have to reconcile ourselves to the fact that sooner or later we will lose all our memories? That everything we experience, even the most important, will eventually be forgotten? Is there really any point, or meaning, to life at all? But what would you do with all the memories if you could preserve them? What would the future be for, other than to create new memories?

What does it mean to let go? Would he never be able to smell that scent again? He has to accept the flow; that the memory changes with every thought. That the present grinds down and destroys the timeline - and lets eternity in, bit by bit. He can't reframe this greatness. *Life is incomprehensible.*

A certain calm sets in. The grief remains, and the missing. The memories fade and change shape. But there is another centre to him now. He has certainly lost his direction and he doesn't know where he is going. But that doesn't matter, not right now.

Eldvaki is still standing in the pasture, by the valley, looking at the empty space where Nastja used to be. It has become like a hole in time, a crack in the fabric. Before he got to know her, he couldn't possibly miss her. But from now on, she will always *not* be there.

He has been well prepared for this. The idea all along was that he would take over her role as memory carrier when she left. And now it has happened. Now he's helping people, just like Funny, thanks to Nastja opening the way. All of that is grand and beautiful. But then there's the personal grief too. And all the emotions, which you never really know what to do with. *Eldvaki, the one who ignites the fire.*

Usually he is wild, but now there is a different stillness around him. Each and everyone of us holds the end of a story. We carry different parts of Nastja's memories. Only it doesn't quite add up. We're not *carrying* anything. We can never ever take it with us. We don't own our memories, or any other part of the past. At the same time, all our experiences leave their mark on the world around us. Unforgettable glimpses, perhaps preserved in a larger consciousness.

The memory carrier clears away all that stands in the way, leaving only this one great universal consciousness. The memory carrier *remembers* nothing. The whole idea of ownership and identity has dissolved. Only the difference remains. The small, delimited, which is the only thing that can hold an infinity within itself. Without the limitation of the individual, there could never be a single lived experience of life. What a waste!

Nastja appears to be content. It doesn't really matter where she is, actually.

Life is mostly about everyday things. Repetition. Feeding, dog walking, cleaning, even the letters to the hay sponsors constitute repetition. But there's also an irresistible joy in that. Like the complete delight of ducklings every morning, while we fill up the little pools with fresh water. Or the guinea pigs, who sing every time you mow new grass for them. The horses that come running when they see their students. Or Simon the Angora goat, who always lies in ambush and breaks into the bread bin - every morning. And every morning I play the part of trying to lure him out again.

What will become of all these memories, when none of us are here anymore? Will they be on the walls, like Teodor's witty humor? The old man who passed away 20 years before I moved here. Who played a two-row accordion and treated visitors to pickled plums. He also opened the barn door every morning and closed the manure lid with the same little crank. Maybe he even made that hatch himself?

All the little gestures. When do we cut the threads, and forget our place in life? I don't think it's so much about what we do, but more about the silence. The space in between.



What ties the threads together and makes us remember is what we all have in common. Impermanence, the change that passes through us. Everything is on the inside, as Rebell puts it. When we die, we fall out of ourselves. There is no more inside. No difference. The image of a thread is just that; a dividing line. What brings us together is exactly the same thing that divides us. The road between and the separation. *We are made up of longing.*

Now the grief will be easier to bear, both for Rebell, Eldvaki, Nastja and me. We will never be without it, and that's just as it should be.



"Your heart knows the way, run in that direction"

Rumi



What Rebell craves now is to dance. Preferably with a human being. It's almost remarkable how strong his love for humans is. There's no explanation, he himself has no idea why. He loves humans, that's all.

His body is so big and strong. In the years that have passed since he came here, he has grown to almost full size. A draft horse who measures over 170 cm in height. He's a big, friendly giant. He is happy to carry more than one person on his back at a time. What he looks for in dancing is the interaction itself. The meeting of different expressions of life.

It's all about that, really. From the very first time he reached down with his nose into the grass and could feel the tickling blades of grass in his mouth. Until now, when his rider stands up, barefoot on his broad back - on a sunny September day. It's a shivering sensation, and the clouds in the sky shape themselves to her backbone. She is floating.

He can enclose so much. His generosity is endless. He has given all of himself to the world. For where else would he go?



The waters of Grimån are full of yellow leaves this time of year. What is my task, and how can I cope with all the partings, the sorrow (and the almost painful beauty hidden within)? My task is about silence, listening and repetition. But most of all it consists of carrying so many stories.

And grief, what do you do with it? According to Eldvaki, it is a gate, something we must inevitably pass through on our way out into the void. The unknown, what is on the other side of the line. New times, and new worlds await.



The small horses remain at the foot of the mountain. There is nothing in your world that interests me. So said Nastja, at our first meeting. But if you want to come to where I am, the door is always open. Now I know that it's true.