

The Green Mountains

Fieldwork 1

By Spoon 404

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Prologue

Cold air blew into the room as he came in from the hallway. "The cows are fed, and I have cleared the snow around the yard." The old man said, rubbing his hands together to warm them up. Then he sat down at the table with a sigh. His wife was at the counter preparing breakfast. She took the coffeepot from the stove and filled his mug. "Drink, warm up." He took a sip. "It seems colder every year" Putting the basket of bread on the table, she sat down. It was still dark outside, but she could feel the cold snow covered mountains all around.

She saw it hurt him to hold the hot mug with his cold hands. Taking a bun from the basket, she cut it and put cheese between the halves before handing it to him. "Clara had something wrong with her foot 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 must 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." "He will be fine. I know he does not just want to sit at home." When they were done eating, he went back into the cold to do more of his chores.

Heinz went into the house after taking a look at the limping cow. Dieter wanted to stay in the stables sending Heinz inside for coffee. "Hello!" He called in the hallway while taking off his boots. "Come in, come in." He heard Grethe call from the kitchen. His mug was already waiting for him. A chip in the edge from when he dropped it years ago. "How is Clara?" Grethe asked after his first sip. "She will be fine. I took care of her hooves. She is just getting a bit older." As we all are, he finished the sentence inside his head. "We are putting the farm up for sale." Grethe suddenly said. He looked at her. "It is time. The children do not want to take over and we are getting too old." "How does Dieter feel about it?" He finally asked. "He is angry, I think. But he knows we need to do this."

"And you?" She got up and rinsed her cup in the sink. Her back to him. "I'll manage. It's a shame the family farm will end with us." "There is a reason yours is the last in the valley." Heinz said. "I know, and times are changing, and we cannot force the children to take over." Her words came out in a flood. "Especially not after we send them away to study and let them build their own lives." He listened, over the years there had been many times he sat in kitchens like this, and just listened. "I know we did not send them away." Grethe turned around and refilled his coffee. "I just feel bad, it's sad to have it end this way."

"I won! I really won!" Lying in bed the thought kept me awake. The winning ticket 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 then. Maybe a little farm. And thinking about the green fields and riding around on tractors I finally fell asleep.

Chapter 1

August, Summer

The train was slowing down. Outside the windows the valley was opening up. Cliffs on one side. On the other side, across the stream they gave way to fields. Grass meadows lying in the sunshine. "Erlengrat, nächste halt, Erlengrat Bahnhof." An automated voice called out. The cliffs on the other side of the tracks receded, and I caught my first glimpse of the village. A loading platform with a small road leading further into the mountain. A little further, apartments standing next to the main road. I felt the train slow down and got up, taking my bag from the overhead compartment. At the platform, the doors opened, and I stepped outside. The stifling air hit me as I left the air conditioning. Behind me, the doors closed, and the train drove off. Leaving me standing on the platform, looking around. A few other people had gotten off the train as well. I followed the group, up the stairs, and over the bridge across the tracks.

The group in front of me went down the stairs and left, into the parking lot. They got into a small van that had been waiting for them. Their driver packing the luggage in the trunk. 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 put my bag down and we shook hands. He was a lot smaller than me, with a firm grip. A comb-over trying to hide the bald spot on his head. Tanned and skinny. Clearly used to working outside in the weather. "Follow me, to the Doschwö." A small yellow car was waiting for us in the furthest parking spot. Dieter opened the trunk of the ugly duckling. My bag only just fit inside. I slid onto my chair. Dieter getting in next to me. Our elbows almost touching. The car was old, but clearly well cared for and it started on the first try.

Dieter backed out of the parking spot and smoothly pulled away. "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. We drove out of town and went right at a roundabout. "This is not the quickest route but this way we can see the whole farm." The car worked hard to climb the hill. At the top we took a left and passed some traditional Swiss houses. At a field just past them, Dieter stopped the car in the middle of the road. "Here on the right is our high field. Behind those trees are the house and the farmyard." It was a grassy field with mountain flowers and a small wooden fence in the middle. A dense forest stood between the field and the farm. Blocking my view.

We drove past the rear entrance. A red and white barrier blocking access. We were heading downhill now. A right turn at the bottom. "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 peeking through the trees. Another turn. With a bump, the springs squeaking, me holding on and Dieter shifting down we drove up a small road. Even with the run up, the car almost did not make it to the top. We came to a stop in front of a classic Swiss wooden house. It was three stories high with a sloped roof. A classic wood timber shed stood next to the big house. The front wheels of a tractor just visible in one of the bays.

Dieter led me inside and into the kitchen. The room was cool and pretty dark. The small windows not letting in a lot of light. 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?" Grethe looked about the same age as Dieter. I thought she was just bent over the stove but as she walked over, I saw she was walking with a crooked back. Shoulders hunched up. She sat down across from me, next to Dieter. Putting a basket of cake on the table she motioned me to take a slice. We ate in silence and drank our coffee. After finishing his cup, Dieter was ready to show me around the farmhouse. The first floor was where Grethe and he lived. The rooms for the children and their family were in the attic.

I would live on the second floor and had my own door at the back of the house. We went back outside, through the door, and up the steep stairs. The apartment took up the whole floor. Most of the room was for the combined kitchen and living room. The walls freshly painted. Windows on all sides made it pretty bright compared to the kitchen downstairs. Mountains visible in the distance. A small dinner table, and a lounge set made it look pretty comfortable. My boxes had arrived before me and took up most of the space. The long wall on the far side had three doors. Two led to smaller rooms. The one on the corner already had 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." Dieter left me to unpack my belongings.

Dieter and Grethe asked me to have dinner with them. Sitting down at the table, I found a big bunch of keys, waiting for me. "We did not want to wait until tomorrow. These are the keys to the farm. Please look after them." We ate dinner in uncomfortable silence. After the food was gone Dieter got up. "Time to feed our cows." I started to stand up as well, but he gestured at me to sit down. "Tomorrow, today is the last day we can do this." Grethe started to clear the table and ran water to wash the plates. I hear a tractor start outside. I saw him arrive at the front of the house. Grethe went outside 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.

Chapter 2

September, Fall

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 was the first day of my new life. As I opened the curtains some light came into the room. The sky was blue, but the sun was still hidden behind the mountains. This was something I would have to get used to. I got dressed and went into the kitchen to drink some water. An empty fridge, no breakfast for me. Going back to my bedroom I took one of the new overalls from its plastic wrap and put it on. At the bottom of the stairs, I put on my work boots. Dieter was already waiting for me. We said good morning, and Dieter used one of the tractors to get a hay bale. I stood there trying to wake up. He came back and drove into the open cowshed. The cows came up to the fence for some fresh food. We cut the strings and spread the hay in the trough. It was hard work picking up and moving the hay around. Careful not to hit any of the noses of the cows, I moved the hay up to the fence with a 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 the hitch. Backing up he opened the rear window. I waved him back until he was in the right spot. Then I put the pin in to connect the trailer to the Lindner. Dieter got out of the cab and was watching me. 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. I found the hole at the bottom of the drawbar and put it in. Dieter, watching, nodded. He got back in the tractor, and I walked to the field ahead of him. The cows looked up as I opened the gate. Dieter put the bale down and backed the trailer up to one of the water troughs. We put a hose into a square tank and started the pump. That done we repeated that at another trough. The cows had already started munching. Grabbing big mouthfuls straight from the bale. We unrolled the hay, the cows watching as we spread it out in the field. "Don't they have grass?" I asked. "It is a bit of an extra for them. Keeps them happy." 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.

"I have to get food and some other things first." I told Dieter. He followed me to the barn with the van. The keys were hanging on a nail in the wall. The cab was unlocked, and I climbed in. "This feels more like a truck than a van to me." I said. He leaned through the window as I was putting my seatbelt on. "It is warm enough, so no choke needed. You should drive off in second gear. First is only for heavy loads or when you pull a trailer." I turned the key in the ignition, twisted, and it fired right up. Then I had to search for 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 me off. I gave it a bit of gas and slowly let go of the clutch. Slowly it started driving and I turned right to the exit of the yard. Downhill. The road was very steep. Panicked, I pushed the brakes and came to a stop just before the end of the driveway. A deep breath and then I took a left turn towards the main road. "First right into town, Across the bridge and then left at the roundabout." With these directions I soon found the supermarket. Inside 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 half empty with just 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. Next to the hardware I saw a bakery

section. Bread first, walking around I gathered the rest. I put my groceries in the cabin in front of the passenger seat.

After eating it was time for the first lesson on driving tractors. The Brühler 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 on the left. "Clutch" Then the long black pedal just to the right of it. "Brake. If you panic. Press those two." At the bottom, almost under my seat was a selection lever. "That does not shift the gears." he pointed at another gearstick just in front of me. "That does. The other one lets you pick the gear group. Reverse and low, medium, and high. In the higher groups you have more speed but less power." I nodded even though I was not sure I understood. "Ok, Press the clutch and start the tractor." I did this. It felt a lot noisier, sitting here in the driver's seat rather 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." Maybe I should just listen. I put the machine in low and first. "You control the speed of the engine with that small lever at your right hand." I saw it, a short selector with a black knob. As I pushed it forward 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 rolling. The engine was working hard but the tractor only moved slowly. "One and one is crawl speed. A lot of power and noise. Not much speed.

I felt a big smile appear on my face. The first time driving a tractor, my own tractor. "You can shift from first to third now." I pressed the clutch and shifted. "Well done. You don't need to change the speed of the engine." Letting go of the clutch we did go a bit faster. "I think you are ready for reverse." I looked up from the controls, the chicken coop suddenly very close. Fumbling for the gas lever I pressed down on the clutch and brake pedal. We stopped, I took a breath. "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, faster and faster. I even tried connecting to the water tank we'd left next to the well. You could pick any gear and drive off. I found out I could use the gas pedal to accelerate, letting go to slow down. The sun had come out from behind the mountain, and I was happily driving in the sun. 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 got to work.

Chapter 3

October, Fall

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 had to switch on the lights in the yard on the more overcast days. With the morning chores finished, I went back inside. The door to my computer room was open and I looked at the empty desk and unpacked boxes. Maybe I would have some time and energy for that this winter. Cold air was coming in from the room, so I closed the door. After preparing breakfast I sat down at the dinner table and opened my laptop. Dieter had sent me the documents with the farms finances and explained how it all worked. The last few days I'd 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 it would not be fair to give him nothing for all the things he did. Almost all the money I had won, I put in the farm and there was very little left. But with working all the time there had also been no time to spend any either. With no rent and no debt. I could live like this for a while longer. In the end 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. Dieter and Grethe sold the newborn calves every year. If we kept them we would have more milk and more calves the next year. They had got rid of all the chickens as well because they did not have enough time for them. The coop was still there and ready for some new inhabitants. I had already seen that the supermarket stocked local eggs and maybe Dieter knew another buyer for them. A little bit more work in the 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 produce more? I sat, wondering, and opened up my laptop to do some more research. Maybe silage bales could also be sold somewhere. The shed was already pretty full of hay for the winter and next month we would get another cut off the grass 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 the little car and drove to town.

We soon got to the dealership and Dieter parked the car. It was inside a big building at the edge of town, right next to the chocolate factory. Fendt and Claas banners waving in the wind. They had a couple of second hand, and a few 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. I recognized most of the equipment from my farming game. It felt a lot bigger in real life. As Dieter went inside. I hung around a bit more to look at the tractors. 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, sitting down on the passenger seat. The next few minutes he explained the buttons and functions. 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. "You are the new farmer?" The salesman asked. I nodded and introduced myself before we got out of the cab. He walked over to the car with me. "Come again sometime. I'm sure your farm could use some new equipment."

Back at the farm, Dieter parked next to the maintenance shed. He opened the roll-up door, and I got the box from the back seat. Inside, the Lindner was already waiting for us. The hood up so we could get at the engine. 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 he put on the workbench, and the book he gave to me. "Lindtrack 130 maintenance manual" was printed on the front together with a picture of the tractor. "There is a new air filter inside that box. 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 the box open and put some other parts on the workbench. I sat down on an old chair in the corner and went back to the table of contents. For a while we worked in silence. I found the location of the air filter and opened the protective cover. The filter inside was very dusty. Just as I had got it out, Dieter reached out with some work gloves from the box. I put the dirty filter outside and washed my hands before putting on the new gloves. Following the instructions in the book, I installed the filter and closed the protective lid. On the other side of the tractor, Dieter was lubricating the machine with the grease gun.

Maintenance done, I watched Dieter working on the different parts 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 the 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 paint had worn away and nodded. He continued checking every part. Putting grease where needed and tightening bolts. I went to the back of the shed and went through the things stored there. Under a tarp, all the way in the back I found a metal frame with a wooden bed. I noticed it because I saw a piece of metal poking out. The same color as the tractor we saw this morning. Dieter meanwhile had finished with the tractor and called me over to look at the maintenance forms in the binder. I put all the paperwork back on the shelves, and we went around the other sheds to check the rest of the equipment. In the evening, after milking and feeding the cows, I went back to grab an armful of books. I took them back to my apartment to see how much more I still had to learn.

Chapter 4

November, Fall

"We need to go." I stood in front of the house yelling for Dieter to come out. He closed the door behind him, still putting on his jacket. We walked over to the Lindner and got in. Dieter behind the wheel and I sat next to him. When we got to the dealer, the new equipment was waiting for us. "Park in front of that feeding wagon." I told Dieter. We both got out. The Fendt 380 was parked next to us. Dieter walked around the Lindner, to the other tractor and looked at the equipment on the trailer behind it. Then he looked over at me. "You did not?" I nodded. "We will need it if we both want to work at the same time." He shook his head. "And we already have the front bed at the farm." "You found that?" Still shaking his head, he went over to the trailer to see what else I bought. The salesman came outside. A packet of papers under his arm. We shook hands and he looked over at Dieter. "Did he know?" I told him he did not. He gave me the keys and papers and went to talk to Dieter. I put the papers in the Lindner and joined them at the trailer. "You said spreading the straw was hard work." I heard him say. Dieter saw me coming and kept his mouth shut. They were talking about the Anderson straw blower on the trailer. A power washer and bale wrapper were strapped down behind it. We got coffee, but I drank it in a hurry. Time to get back to the farm and use the new equipment. We connected the feed mixer to the Lindner and I handed Dieter the keys to the Fendt.

Back in the yard we got to work, unloading the new machines. I put the feed wagon in front of the workshop so we could prepare it for the next day. Then I drove to the rear of the trailer while Dieter put the ramps down. The Göweil bale wrapper was first. I slowly reversed up the ramp until I could reach it with the three-point hitch. First raising the lower arms to connect and then getting out to connect the top. Carefully I lifted the machine off the bed, and slowly drove down. I put it in one of the sheds for now. We would not need it for a while yet. The Kärcher power washer was easier. It had a normal trailer attachment, I could just drive up to it and raise the ball hitch. I parked it next to the workshop where it would live. The bale spreader was last. I connected the hitch. The oil lines and the cable for the lights were taped to the trailer for transport. I cut the tape and plugged them in. Then I drove down the ramp and parked next to the cow shed. Dieter had put the ramp back up and was standing next to the trailer. "Will we really need the trailer?" He asked me. "Yes, to transport bales. Getting them from the field one by one will be too much work." I showed him the special function of this trailer. Normally the back of the trailer sloped down to the ramp for loading and unloading. With a small lever we could raise this part and level it, giving us a bigger flat surface for another row of bales. Despite himself he looked pretty impressed. He parked the trailer next to the sawmill. We spent the rest of the afternoon unpacking the new machines and figuring out how they worked.

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 hay bale in the wagon. We both watched as it 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 drove straight out the doors on the other side and got back to Dieter. He had stepped out of the Fendt and watched the cows eating the fresh food. Were it had spilled 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 can just use the Lindner and the Fendt instead of the Brührer." He went to get breakfast while I refilled the water for the cows out in the field. After that I also went to eat my breakfast. After that 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. I could feel winter coming in the cold wind.

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. The cows had just moved from the field into the barn when the forecast gave us two clear days. Cold but with some wind and sunshine. Enough time 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 it 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 front. Behind the second door. After opening that door, I reversed and lined the tractor up. This 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. With everything connected I reversed out of the shed and parked in front of the house.

That afternoon the grass was dry enough to mow the grass. We got in the tractor together and started down the driveway. Arriving in the field, Dieter put the mower down and engaged the PTO. The engine revved up and the blades of the mower started spinning, shaking the small tractor. We drove down the field lengthwise. A long way leaving a swath of cut grass behind us. At the other end he raised the mower and got us turned around. Then we went back the way we came, right to the lane we cut before. The mower seeming to float above the ground raising and lowering as we got to bumps in the field. "Would this make good silage?" I asked him. He nodded in reply. "So, we could wrap the bales and feed the cows silage next year." I got excited. "I saw them do that at home and when I read about it, I found that the cows give more milk if you give that to them. There are some additives we could add as well to make them healthier." Dieter nodded and took a breath. "That is all true." I could feel a but coming. "But, our contracts are for hay milk. You know, the kind of milk Switzerland is known for. Yes, we could get more milk but we would get less money for it. And we would have to drive further to deliver it or get a company to pick it up." I felt my face heating up. "You can not just do things the way they do where you are from or the way it plays in your game." I just sat there quietly. "But" He continued. "We can probably sell silage bales to others." That made me feel a little better and gave me something to look into. We finished the field and drove up the mountain to our second field. It was getting dark when we finished there, and Dieter dropped me off before parking the tractor.

Chapter 5

December, Winter

In the mornings and evenings, I was still pretty busy. Feeding the cows, mucking out the barn, and milking in the afternoon. The first thing every morning was switching on the lights in the chicken coop. The young chicks had arrived a while ago. Grethe had adopted them, so I only had to take care of the lights and move the pallets of chicken feed with the forklift. The wind blowing down from the mountain was chilling me to the bone. Even while wearing another layer of clothes under my overalls. No snow yet but the trees had all shed their leaves. In the afternoon it started to get dark when I started the evening chores. Dieter and Grethe mostly stayed 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 we did not need in winter in 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 was still inside its box.

With the cows fed, I stepped out of the barn looking forward to working on my computer room. Then I noticed the workshop door standing open and Dieter working on something inside. I 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 was 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 have not done that the past years. But now with a strong young man around, we can." I sighed. He really seemed to be looking forward to it. Leaving me no way to escape to my computer. "I'm just checking the chainsaw and oiling the parts. You go get breakfast and I will see you later." Before going back to the house, I went and took a look at the trees on the slope behind the sheds. Tall trees and smaller saplings were standing close together. Mostly spruce with a few oaks and birch in some places. The branches so close that it was hard to see to which tree they belonged. Underneath it it was dark with no other plants growing. I tried to get through to the meadow a bit higher up the slope but with the trees so close I could not push through. When one of the branches sprang back and hit me in the face I had 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. I can see you already know why." I felt the scratch on my face. It had not bled but there was a bright red welt on my cheek and the area around it was still reddening. 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 hay bales. 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 got to work. The small trees went 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 would grab the small tree, dragging it down the hill and putting it on a pile at the bottom. The next tree was 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, 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 to life. Dieter gave some more 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 to 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. We made two piles. One big load of branches and one stack 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 last three small spruces in the clearing and cut them down. He pointed at the largest of them. "Put this one next to the pile of branches." I dragged the other two to the house as Dieter went looking for something in the sawmill. That evening I saw the yard suddenly light up. Dieter had put one tree upright in front of the house and decorated it with Christmas light. The other one ended up in the kitchen. Just after lighting the tree, a green tractor and trailer came up the driveway. A blonde woman, about my age, climbed out of the cab. She surprised me by going over to Dieter and hugging him. Then she got back in the tractor and drove to the back of the yard. Dieter saw me standing at the window and waved me over. Together we walked to the pile 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. After that, 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. She comes over every year to pick up a Christmas tree." "Nice to meet you John. I have to get back now. Trees don't decorate themselves." She got in the tractor and drove off with a wave of her hand. "You can close your mouth now." Dieter said walking off in the direction of the house.

Chapter 6

January, Winter

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 another chore. Making paths with shovels and moving piles with the tractor. In the village brightly colored tourists walked around. Skis on their back, or with shopping bags from the boutiques. More of them arriving with every train. It was strange to see the village waking up. Shops opening that I did not even know 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 more tourists. Some of the family had come over for Christmas. Grethe and Dieter's daughter, her husband and their granddaughter were staying with us until new year. I could hear them in their rooms above me in the evenings.

And here I was looking at piles of work. Literally. The shed with the big saw had been used for storage the past years. No longer a sawmill. Stuff that was not used anymore being thrown in and thrown about if something was suddenly needed. I had parked 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, and with a sigh, I got to business. I picked up the first thing. Some siding for a shed. Rusty with holes in it, leaning against some other boxes. With a grunt, I threw it in the back of the van. I worked through the morning, building three piles. One for things we needed to keep. I even found some new saw belts and a box of oil filters. The garbage pile was on the bed of 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. "You can throw all of this out." I sighed in relief when he walked away with only the hobbyhorse under his arm. What if he'd started picking in the trash? 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. I parked next to the shed again. Time for the evening chores.

Dieter came outside just as I finished cleaning the stable. "I will take care of the morning jobs. You can sleep in tomorrow." "Okay, thank you." I said, not sure where this was going. "No problem." He said, going back inside and closing the door behind him. I was still puzzled after I'd finished my dinner and the washing up. Still, a morning off, it had been months ago. The next morning, I woke up at my normal time. As I stepped out of bed and got dressed, I remembered that I did not have to work. Instead, I drank some water, planning to get back in bed. As I was standing by the sink, I heard small steps coming down the stairs, passing my room and 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 a little later carrying snow shovels. There was only a thin layer of fresh snow, but they got to work anyway, clearing the paths. Dieter getting big shovels full, and the girl behind him, helping. After the paths were cleared, I heard the Lindner start and saw them sitting inside it driving to the rear of the yard. Coming back, they drove a bale in the cow shed. Smiling, I went back to bed.

A couple of hours later I was back to work in the sawmill. I had taken care of the big items 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 and Erika helped me sort everything and find places to put it. The small girl diving into piles and finding interesting things. Her mother Monica had introduced us, but she was busy hiding behind her at the time. Now it seemed I was still scary but not scary enough to keep her away from granddad. Blonde hair peeking out 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, now behind Dieter. We spent the rest of the afternoon in the shed like this. Leaning on a broom I looked around. The sawmill was mostly empty. This was 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 for now. Markings on the floor showed where things used to go. For now, we could 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 below. 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 stepped into the shower. In the hot water I wondered whether I would stay awake until midnight. I got 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 here 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 heavysset 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 drink 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 fists. "I will keep it short, John must be hungry." More table drumming, I had to join in. "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 in the pan. Soon we were talking about his job and how I got on at the farm. With dinner finished, 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

February, Winter

"We will 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 the expert." I had my own chainsaw now and Dieter carried his. "I will cut the trees down. You can clear the branches off of them." I nodded. We arrived at the rear of the yard. With the smaller growth removed, there was enough room for us to work. Today we would fell some of the bigger ones and put the logs in the bunks to dry out. The first tree was a big spruce. I got nervous looking at it, towering over us. Nervous enough to not look where I was going. Tripping over a small stump and nearly sending my chainsaw flying. Dieter looked over his shoulder and I felt my face heat up. Luckily the helmet 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. A plan with two important parts. Where the tree will fall and where you will run if it goes wrong. Those need to be different directions." He walked back from the tree checking where he could trip. "For now, just watch." He said, pulling on the chord to start the saw. With it he made a V-shaped cut on the uphill side of the tree. Then, after checking I was ready, he started a cut on the other side. Moving back and forth, the saw slowly ate through the wood. Some movement in the trunk and Dieter quickly pulled the saw back and took a few rapid steps back. Creaking and groaning, the tree leaned more and more before falling down, hitting the ground with a crash.

I climbed on the fallen log and got to work sawing off 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. It was like the job last time, only bigger trees. I cut the branches starting at the bottom and working towards the top. Easy enough. Working on 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. "Get 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 ducked under 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 in case I had to run away. My saw did get stuck another 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 needles.

After lunch, I drove the Lindner to the sawmill and reversed up to the yellow Anderson wood trailer parked inside. First connecting and securing the hitch, I then went to work on the hydraulic hoses. Two hoses with yellow markings went on one group of connectors for the hydraulics. 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 flow. 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 the front of the trailer. There was a small box with five levers bolted to the frame. I had spent the previous evening reading the manual. First, I lowered

the supports at the front of the frame. The feet lowering to the ground as I pulled that lever. With these stabilizing the trailer, I pulled another lever to open the grapple and raised the arm with yet another. The next one swung the arm back and forth and I tried to get a feel for it, how fast it responded. Then I pretended there was a log next to the trailer I had to pick up. Playing around like this for a while 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 leaning on it." I looked and there was a small depression in the slope underneath it. "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 reached over to the tree and grabbed the trunk with the claw. The trailer rocked and shifted when I lifted the trunk a little bit. With the stress taken off the cut, Dieter could pull the saw out. He started it again 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 now." 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 sending bark flying. I clearly misjudged the speed it could turn while loaded. More slowly and more carefully 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 to 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 to get on with it. 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. By the time I got to the last tree it was getting dark. I switched the work lights on. The forest lighting up, the snow sparkling around us. Dieter had to guide me again. 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 I made the tractor push through. I got back on the crane, and with Dieter pointing and gesturing picked everything up. Unloading it was easier. We had floodlights on poles lighting the bunks and I just had 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. Just in time for the evening chores.

Chapter 8

March, Spring

The birds were 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, only small patches left under the trees. I shivered and quickly zipped up my coat. Spring could 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. The trees around the yard started to show some green. Budding leaves giving them a green haze. The winter had not been as quiet as I'd expected. The smaller and bigger jobs taking up all my time and leaving me tired in the evenings. My computer room still a mess. I had unpacked but the machine was just standing there, not connected to the monitors I'd put on the desk. I parked the Lindner in the shed and went over to the sawmill to start the Fendt. In the cold it took a couple of tries to start it. 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 up the hill, 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 what Dieter said. It was time for me to start looking ahead and making plans myself. We met in the kitchen downstairs. Dieter explaining, while I made notes on my laptop. The farm being so small it was all odd jobs, but they had to be done at just the right time. Too early or late and our work would go to waste. I thought I had bought the farm to get away from the stress. Getting back to my apartment afterwards I sat down to organize my notes and make a plan. Hours later, I got up from my seat, stretched, feeling happy with my first version. It was strange to plan all this, knowing that the weather could still change everything. Rain on the wrong days would mean new plans or failure. I picked up my phone and dialed the number from the note in front of me. Lize 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 didn't explain anything, did he? 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 driver said as he climbed out of the John Deere. "Oh no, is that story going around?" "Yes, it is." He replied smiling, shaking my hand. "Don't worry, Lize is sure to find a way to get Dieter back for that little joke. My name is Robert. Nice to meet you." After the introductions, I drove the Fendt to the manure pit behind the cow. Robert got himself turned around and positioned the manure trailer ready for loading. To use the front loader, it needed oil pressure. I pushed the throttle lever forward and selected a low gear. With another lever I lowered the bucket and slowly drove it into the manure pile. I angled the bucket 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, all at the same time. And not to hit anything or tip the tractor over. With the trailer loaded I got out sweating. Robert climbed back into 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 busy putting the second load in the trailer. In no time it was full, and Robert drove out to the fields. We switched and I waited for him to come back.

I heard the tractor growling coming up the hill. Robert parked and I started loading it again. Driving back and forth, big buckets of manure went into the green spreader. Robert turned the engine off and there, waiting. After the last load I beeped the horn, and he was off 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 would be the last, and he waited for me after filling as I put the Fendt at the pressure washer for cleaning. I then climbed into the John Deere and sat down next to him. 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 discs at the rear throwing it on the field. The trailer was empty in no time at all. "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. It had taken a lot more than just 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.

After lunch I got the Brürher and the small trailer from the sheds. I put the sideboards on in the workshop. Now I could put manure inside it. Driving up to the manure pit I parked in a place where I could load it. Then I had to walk over to the Fendt at the power washer. I started it and drove it over to start practicing. The trailer was a lot smaller than the muck spreader this morning. Making it easier to see what I was doing. But I had switch tractors every four scoops to empty it. Reversing up to the pit to dump the manure. I practiced this way for about two hours. Getting faster and faster each time. Strangely it did not become boring. It felt like playing with a sandcastle. A dirty smelly sandcastle. When I felt I could not go faster, without causing an accident, I stopped for the day. Driving both tractors over to the power washer. I raised the bed of the trailer so the water and dirt would flow out and sprayed everything down. Then I put the trailer back in its shed and parked the tractor in its place at the back of the workshop. I refueled the Fendt, put the bucket back and parked in the sawmill.

Chapter 9

March, Spring

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 feet. 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. Feeling tired. Not enough sleep in the last week. 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 of the bowl and added the packet of spices. I ate my noodles standing at the counters. With breakfast finished I took off my overalls and socks. Time to take a short nap until the dew had evaporated from the grass.

I got up from my nap feeling a little better. 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. 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, I drove off the road down into the meadow. The muck we had put on last month had made it grow beautifully. I got out and looked at the tall grass with flowers here and there. The sun on my face took away my tiredness and I got back in the tractor. Driving back and forth over the fields, leaving swaths of cut grass behind me. 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 drying in the sun. I got out and pulled some grass from a swath. This could be ready to bail tomorrow. After driving the tractor back, I cleaned the green stains off of the mower and put it away.

Heinz and Dieter were in the stable when I got back. They stood at the stalls we built for the calves. Two more little cows, 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 mooed 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 his car and sped off. We stood there looking at all the new cows for a while before I told Dieter I'd be back later. This time I took a shower before I went to sleep for a couple of hours.

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. The new calve was coming. I had learned what to do, and last week had been plenty of practice. 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 it 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 the immune system. Clamping her between my legs I put the nipple in her mouth until she started sucking. I did not let 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 strange kind of happiness. Never before had I felt like this. I decided to just sit here a while before going to bed. The sunlight woke me up. A small beam had crept 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 bale roll onto the ground. Driving off again only to stop when the beeping started again. Starting and stopping, I went up and down the field several times until all the grass was gone. After checking the machine, I went up to the higher ground and did the same. Then I drove back to the yard to drop off the baler. I left it in the workshop for maintenance and to 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 three point. It had been standing there for a while with the wrap already loaded. Out in the field I tested the controls. Then I backed up to a bale and lowered the Göweil 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. It cut the foil automatically and I lowered the wrapped bale to the ground. I had found a buyer for our first bales in a village nearby. The rest of the afternoon I got used to the wrapper. In the top field I even put the 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

May, Spring

With the troughs filled with water I got back on the tractor and drove the tank out of the pasture. Some people had arrived early, their cars parked on both sides of the road. I waved at them as I drove by. They waved back while they waited. 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 it down. Heading back for a chair I left the rest of the arrangements 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 almost time, Dieter and I got to work on 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. Together we slid the doors open. 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 still busy cleaning up after the event 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 is Lize." Grethe took the tray from me before I dropped it. "Is it a good time?" I told her I had some 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 before the rain comes." 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 and saw the rakes spinning. He started tedding the first row. I started the engine and got myself 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. Easy work, just turning around at the end of the field and keeping the tractor straight. In just an hour and a half I had mowed all of the grass. Dieter spreading the grass to let it dry out. When I was done, he was a couple of rows behind

me. I drove onto the gravel path, turned the tractor off and got out. 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 we 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 was gone. 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. I checked the weather app on my phone. There was rain coming for sure. "The grass should be dry now." Dieter said, and off he went, with the wind rower, I connected the Pottinger bailer to the Lindner and picked up the front loader. Then I drove to the field as well. Dieter had about a quarter of the field done. The first rows of grass lying there, ready for bailing. I drove to the first of them and started the bailer. Then I lowered the pickup and went to work. The clouds got darker and darker, hiding the sun. Dieter finished windrowing and drove off to go and get the trailer. I was only halfway done and there was no point to working faster. The bailer picked up the grass as fast as it could. Any faster and I would leave hay behind on the field. After the last bale rolled out of the bailer we disconnected it, Dieter had come back with the trailer hanging behind the Fendt. I used the bale spike on the Lindner to start loading the trailer. Picking up bales and bringing them over with Dieter strapping them down. The sky was so dark that I needed the work lights. There was no way all the bales would fit on one trailer. We were not going to make it.

Just then lights appeared on the gravel path between the fields. A big green Deere parked behind our trailer. Pulling a large flatbed behind it. The door opened and Lize got out. She pointed at her trailer, and I gave her a thumbs up. Dieter and her finished strapping down the bales on our trailer while I put the rest on the other flatbed. A drop of rain hit my face when I got out of the Lindner. Lize and Dieter secured the last of 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 her to the main road, and we drove across the pass and down to her yard. Big drops of rain on my windscreen but not enough to need the wipers yet. We reversed both trailers next to each other 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 break room 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 full trailer behind.

Chapter 11

June, Summer

It was raining. And raining and some more water fell. This was supposed to be summer. The wind and the moisture in the air made it feel cold and clammy. We had retreated from the fields for now. The ground soggy, our tractors leaving deep ruts were we drove. Most of the little jobs in the yard were done as well. We just had to take care of the animals and wait for better weather. I had finally started on my big project. Pulling the tarp off and using the front loader on the Lindner to put it in the middle of the workshop. There it stood. Rusty and rotten. I would have to put in a lot of work before we could use it as the front bed for the Fendt. I had read up on the tractor before buying it. It was kind of a special model. The cab and engine positioned above the rear wheels, leaving the front an empty frame. We used it as a front loader now. But it was easy to take the arms off and attach the bed instead. There even was a special mower that could be mounted in the middle of the frame, but I had not been able to find one of those. With the bed repaired we could use the machine for small transport jobs around the farm. Dieter came in and looked at the mess. "That will be a lot of work."

We had the gas heater blasting. Heating the workshop even with the doors open. Dieter had joined the project. Together we had taken everything apart and started the rebuild. He was building a new deck for the platform. Bolting planks together so we could attach them to the frame. I was working with the angle grinder to strip the old paint off the metal parts. The old rams were on the shop floor, next to a box with new ones 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 finished with one plank and came over to take a look. We got the sideboards, and I went to work on the rusty bolts holding the old planks in place. "Robert used to work here." Dieter said. I waited wondering where this was going. "The guy who was here for the manure. He used to run the sawmill." I grunted. The bolt I was working on was rusted and stuck in 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. "Could you give him a call? Maybe have him come over to take a look?" "I already did. He will be here after lunch."

Robert and I walked over to the sawmill. "You cleaned it out?" He asked when we arrived at the shed. "Yes, last winter." I said. He went over to the saw. "This looks good. Shall we get to work?" I 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 down and pulled the lever 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 parked the tractor and went over to help him. Together we rolled the trunk to the machine and onto the frame. Then we used the clamps to fix the tree in place. He put the blade at the right high to cut the bark off the top of the log. Switching the saw on, he turned a crank to push it across. Raising the blade, he pushed the saw back while I lifted 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 straight through the middle. 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 through, 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.

We rolled the next log over to the machine. The first one had made about half a pallet of planks. We lifted this one and Robert got to work. "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 could not maintain the forests anymore." Tightening the clamp he continued. "We did buy the logs a couple of years but 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 even 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. Picking up the board and putting it on the garbage pile. The sun was going down. In a little while it would disappear behind the mountains on the other side of the valley. We had only one more log left in the sawmill. "I'll think about it." he finally said. "I've got my other work as well."

We finished the last log 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 I could come over next week and we could process some more logs?" Robert asked. "That would be good." We walked to his van. I pulled out my wallet and paid him the money Dieter had told me to pay. Robert took it and put it in his pocket without counting. He drove off and I closed the gate behind him. Dieter came outside. "He'll think about it." I said. "How do you plan these things?" He grinned. "It used to be a lot busier around here. We even had exchange students living and working here." Walking over to the workshop, he continued. "Maybe I missed the hustle and bustle." I followed him. "Maybe it took someone else to show me that." I saw him shrug. "Let's go, we've got some painting to do."

Chapter 12

July, Summer

Sleeping in was the best. Or it would be, if I had not been wide awake at six o'clock in the morning. 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. I looked around, putting the mug on my desk. Over the past few days, I had unpacked everything. Unexpectedly the summertime was more quiet than the winter. The afternoons too hot for work and the grass growing all by itself. My work desk was right in front of the window. I had put the gaming rig across the room from it, right 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 got my coffee and sat down behind the steering wheel. As I started the game, I heard the Brühler fire up out in the yard. Jasper, taking care of the cows for today. While they went to work for real, I went to work on my virtual farm. After a little while, I made breakfast and ate it behind the wheel. The game sure made farming a lot easier than it was in real life. Spending my morning this way was a nice 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 day. I think I would hate that." I had no reply to that. We followed Monica's blue car into town. The square we normally parked was closed off. Parking at the train station instead, we got out of our cars and walked back to the city center. The townspeople were putting up stalls in front of their shops and around the church. Erika pointed at the booths. "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, ran off to grab Peter's hand and pulled him ahead. Talking, and pointing at different things. 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 and people.

"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 in agreement. "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 else 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 but 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. I am happy you don't feel like I took your inheritance from you." 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 for the rest of lunch. Talking about work and our hobbies while eating our food.

Peter paid and we got up. The sun had risen in the sky. Burning down on the pavement. We hurried from shadow to shadow back to the cars.

It was cooler at the farm than it had been in the village. An advantage of sitting on the mountain, and the forests growing around it. Grethe and Dieter had prepared the sitting area at the barbecue. I went to get wood for the fire pit. When I got back the cows had wandered over, and Erika and Grethe were 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 both a bottle and steering the cart I put mine in the shadow of the house for now. A white van pulled up just as I picked the wheelbarrow up. The doors opened and Robert and Lize got out. Lize waved at me and went over to say hi to Dieter. He greeted her and took her to take a look at the Fendt. It was standing in front of the shed. All washed up and with the new bed installed. 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 to him. "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. "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, and we shook on it.

The sun had gone down, but it was still warm. We had let the cows back in the barn before the barbecue. Cooking steak in front of them seemed mean. Full and happy we sat around the fire, talking. 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 one, 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 me. "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. Together we sat around the fire looking at the flames. Just a couple of farmers talking about farming things, looking out over a field. And I was one of them. The stars shone brightly above us. A light breeze rustling the trees. There would be more work tomorrow. And the days after that. Always more grass to cut, cows to feed. And more nights like this.

Epilogue

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 chickens and cows. 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, got off and opened the gate. Driving into the field, the cows were watching me. I put the hose in the trough and opened the valve. Catherine came over for scratches. I felt 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. Parking the tractor and water trailer next to the well for now.

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 the past days. I used this to do some other chores. Yes, I slept in and played games but had gone through the finances as well. To my surprise the farm made a small profit last year. It was only a little bit of money, 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 producing 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'd almost gotten the hang of farming. As I thought that I finished cleaning the barn.

I put the dirty muck 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 before leaving it in the middle of the yard. Getting a straw bale from the rear barn, I loaded the machine. Then I drove around it so I could reattach. Climbing out of the cab, 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. I had just closed the rear door and started driving to the cowshed. When a white car drove up to the house and parked in front. I changed course and drove up to it. 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 as the driver introduced himself. "My name is Clark from the national nature and farming agency. We will be conducting an audit today."

Afterword

Thank you for reading this book. I hope you enjoyed it.

I wrote this because I love playing Farming Simulator and wanted to read a comfy book about this kind of farming. I could not find one, so I had to write it myself. Right now, the next FS is about to drop so I'm really looking forward to that.

Thanks to my proofreaders for their feedback. Any mistakes in this book are my own.

This is my first book. I really must thank the people around me who supported me and/or listened to me blabbering about writing and other stuff. You know who you are. Thank you.

There will be more to come. There is a reason the subtitle is Fieldwork 1. For now, I'm off to read the Giants blog. If you want, we'll see each other again in a couple of months. Until next time in Riverbend Springs.

Spoon404