

English Working title: 1-2-3-GO!

Original Danish title: En-to-tre-NU!

Publisher: Dansk lærerforeningsforlag, 2016 (first published, 2001, 2010), Copenhagen, 199 pages

Author: Jesper Wung-Sung

Foreign Rights: Louise Langhoff Koch, lolk@artpeople.dk

Synopsis

How large is a life?

Jeppé and Cecilie meet at the beginning of their first year at Gymnasium in the coastal town of Svendborg. It is a meeting which changes both their lives irrevocably.

Jeppé is painfully shy, but very tall and an ace at playing basketball. The L.A Lakers star Shaquille O' Neal is his idol, and he dreams of becoming a professional basketball player. With the exception of his best friend Jack, who is an apprentice bricklayer, Jeppé largely keeps his thoughts to himself, relying on basketball as a means of expressing himself and living a balanced life. But he is fascinated by the mysterious and beautiful Cecilie, of whom he knows nothing other than that she is 1,68 m tall and lives with her family on the nearby island of Thurø.

After Jeppé sees Cecilie singing Leonard Cohen's 'A bird on the Wire' in front of the entire school, he plucks up the courage to ask her out, and they soon get together. But Cecilie is often absent from school, behaves strangely and unpredictably towards him, and after a raucous party at Jack's trucker-uncle's house she breaks off their relationship without explanation and cuts off all further communication with Jeppé.

Due to his exceptional talent and promise in the junior league, Jeppé is selected to play for the Odense 'Eagles' in the senior basketball league in Funen's capital city. Cecilie unexpectedly shows up to watch his first game, and afterwards she tells him that she has been diagnosed with a lymphoma.

Jeppé is distraught and tries to help Cecilie the only way he knows how: by playing basketball. He imagines that he can help to combat her cancer by scoring goals on the basketball court; he starts playing his games for her. Cecilie knows that every day may be her last, and Jeppé is happy to share her life to the full: they do things together, which Jeppé normally wouldn't have dared doing, like taking a trip to Copenhagen on

their own, staying at a hotel together and Cecilie gets a tattoo. But their happiness is short-lived. Despite periods of recovery and Jeppe's increasing success on the basketball court, Cecilie's condition deteriorates and ultimately she is hospitalized in Odense again.

Cecilie has her own way of coping with her illness. She imagines that there are little beings in her body, the aggressive Tutgilaens, who are at war with other tribes in her body; they destroy and devour all the good cells – or citizens – in her body. Her only hope is a rebellious and peace-loving Tutgilaen, Nono, who tries to persuade his fellow citizens to stop their carnage. But both Cecilie and Nono lose their battle, and after a trip to the Canary Isles with Jeppe, Cecilie becomes seriously ill and is hospitalized once more.

Jeppe is barely able to function in his everyday life. This time, not even basketball can save him. He loses his lust for life, and in the final match of the season he plays as if it were his last; he seeks out every confrontation, hoping that the next tackle will literally be the death of him. As a result, he plays brilliantly, scores 32 points, and is selected by American scouts for a training session in the USA. His dream comes true.

At Odense hospital the doctors give up hope of saving Cecilie's life, but they prescribe an arbitrary date – June 14th – when she will be released from hospital. Jeppe goes along with this strategy and he and Cecilie devise a plan, whereby they clip off a centimetre of a measuring tape for each day she survives and will be able go home to Thurø. But Cecilie does not live to see the 14th of June.

After Cecilie's death Jeppe destroys everything related to basketball. He has no idea where his life is heading, but he does know that this is not his moment to become a professional basketball player, and he knows that right now, his best friend needs his help. So Jeppe looks up Jack and together they set off on that road-trip they had dreamed of doing since they were boys.

Lin Falk van Rooyen, Translator
Rudkøbing, June 2016

*