

## Synopsis: Nothing To Hide by Espen Skjerven

### 1. Author Espen Skjerven

Espen Skjerven is 51 years old and grew up in Oslo, Norway. He lives in Sandnes with his spouse and two children.

Skjerven is educated as a lawyer. He works as a district court judge at Sør-Rogaland District Court and serves as media spokesperson for the courts in Norway. He has a background as a prosecutor in the national investigative units Økokrim and Kripos, as well as a business lawyer/litigator.

In his spare time, he is an author. He has written four books in the crime series about police officer Tom Grayston: *Slakt* (2019), *Blod er tykkere enn vann* (Blood is Thicker than Water, 2021), *Kleptokratiet* (The Kleptocracy, 2022), and *Svikere* (Traitors, 2024).

With *Svikere*, he won the Sølvpkniven (Silver Knife) award for best crime novel of the year. He was also nominated for the same award for *Kleptokratiet*. The crime series is available on all technical platforms in Norway.

*Ingenting å skjule* (*Nothing to Hide*, 2025) is Skjerven's first literary novel about alopecia. Skjerven himself experienced hair loss as a child. He lost his hair at the age of seven and wore a wig until he threw it away at seventeen, during his second year of high school. Although the novel is fictional, it is inspired by his own experiences.

### 2. *Nothing to Hide* – Genre, Target Audience, and Style

*Nothing to Hide* was published in Norway in October 2025.

- It is a literary novel for adults, but can also be recommended for young adults.
- The target audience is not only those affected by the condition. Family, relatives, friends, neighbors, teachers – everyone – may find interest and value in the book.
- It is written in the first person. The narrative alternates between present tense and flashbacks to childhood.
- The style is easy to read, with short and effective sentences.
- The setting is geographically neutral. The focus is on the inner emotional life. A few chapters describe Easter holidays in a mountain cabin in Norway – which may feel exotic to readers outside Norway. Otherwise, the story could take place in almost any country.

### 3. The Story in Brief

The book follows Oscar, a 50-year-old teacher living a good and harmonious life with his wife Maria and their son Erik.

Just before the Easter holiday, the principal asks him to talk to a student at school who has received a wig. Oscar feels caught off guard, because he has never shared his own story with anyone at school. He lost his hair at age seven and wore a wig for many years.

During the Easter holiday, Oscar also comes across an article about a new, promising medicine – a treatment the state refuses to fund. All of this stirs something within him. He feels the need to put his emotions into words – feelings he has barely shared with anyone.

The book describes a series of challenging events from Oscar's childhood and youth, including:

- losing his hair
- visiting the doctor
- receiving his first wig
- attending school with a wig
- spending time with friends
- swimming lessons with a wig
- playing football with a wig
- going through puberty without body hair
- relationships and sexuality
- the wig as a constant problem
- deciding to stop wearing a wig
- building his identity

In the present, Oscar reflects on a lifetime with alopecia, mostly kept secret. He feels shame. He has hidden his thoughts and emotions even from himself. He regrets not speaking openly about the condition and its challenges. Today, he is a middle-aged bald man with glasses who looks like many others, but Oscar has always felt different. His wife and teenage son do not truly know what he has been through.

The present-day storyline builds toward the day Oscar, now a teacher, meets the boy with a wig at school. This encounter sparks positive change in him.

The childhood storyline builds toward the day Oscar decides to stop wearing a wig. But the challenges do not end there. He must find a new identity. He finds comfort and strength in writing music and lyrics, and one day he stands on the school stage, bald and without a wig, performing a song he has written himself.

#### 4. Characters

- **Oscar** – the main character, both as a child and adult.
- **Maria, Oscar's wife** – highlights the contrast that others are less concerned about the condition than Oscar himself. She loves him as he is.
- **Erik, Oscar's teenage son** – the novel portrays the father-son relationship and Oscar's difficulty in sharing his feelings.
- **Hanna and Christian, Oscar's childhood friends** – supportive, but also struggling with their own self-image. They show that hair is just one of many reasons someone might feel different.
- **Teachers** – illustrate how difficult it can be for educators to handle such situations.
- **Other students** – both bullies and supporters.
- **Oscar's younger sister (childhood)** – adds tension to Oscar's story.
- **Oscar's grandmother (childhood)** – a safe and wise caregiver.

- **Oscar's father (childhood)** – an unstable caregiver involved in crime. Oscar wonders if family conflicts caused his hair loss. Research cannot confirm the cause of alopecia, but psychological stress is one theory that has been discussed.

## 5. Message

The novel explores the feeling of growing up and living life while feeling different.

It is intended as an honest and thought-provoking story about growing up with alopecia, wearing a wig during adolescence, discarding it, and aging with the condition. The purpose is to encourage greater openness about alopecia and its consequences.

Although the protagonist is a man, women will also recognize themselves in the story. However, it is a fact that many men struggle to talk about their emotions.

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Espen Skjerven