Blood drops started dripping from the cut on my hand. The man, who joined me in falling down on the pavement, when we bumped into each other, was mumbling some words I couldn't quite understand. This was definitely the high peek of all the catastrophes that happened during the entire day.

Why wasn't I looking in front of me? I had to stare around looking for a way just when I was turning into the corner... I surely can pick the right moment. Jesus, am I that lost. It was strange. Annoyance was building up in me and that rarely happened. I suppose that it is due to my believing that a er parting ways with mum and Fred nothing else would be able to make me feel more miserable. Clearly it seemed I was wrong, utterly and completely. A er all when that moron of the cabby, who didn't know a word of English except "I will take you there..." despite my primary contrary belief since he apparently learned the accent on that one perfectly, dropped me o at a wrong address I realized that the atmosphere wasn't going to get any brighter soon.

I was basically lost, without company and no possible way to call a cab, since I knew no word in Norwegian. And now this, as if all that's happened by now wasn't enough. But there was a bright side to what just happened and hopefully maybe things would start improving somehow. At least I could ask this man I just knocked out where I was. If he could understand me or wish to answer my question. A er what I did, if I were him, I wouldn't even look at me. And most definitely if I were some old drunk guy as he was. I got o the ground, sliding my scarf o of my neck hastily and immediately covering my hand with it trying to avoid infection on the cut and turned to help this stranger to get up, fearing that he might be hurt as well and truly hoping he wasn't.

As I grasped him tightly trying to pull him up I became aware that it was highly likely that I would end up on the ground again instead. Apparently despite being skinny he couldn't actually stand on his feet, tripping over on nothing a few times before finally grabbing a hold of himself and standing up on his feet. And when he finally got up, and looked me in the eyes I realized that it was actually a much younger man I was helping. I smiled to the fact that I was far too disoriented to observe his age. Or anything else for that matter, like where I was or where I should go.

It was a bit ridiculous and even mad that I refused the family to come and pick me up, with the excuse that I could easily find my way and didn't want to disturb them. And upon their insisting on that point I permanently refused all help that was o ered.

God, this man was my last hope. The only chance of not ending up in the cold in some park of a half ruined bench; since I have been walking on the empty streets of Oslo for nearly half an hour meeting some random people that I doubtfully approached asking for help. Seeing that people that just passed me on the street were unpredictable, as well as dangerous, most of the times I couldn't bring myself to ask. From those few I addressed – those that spoke my language, didn't know the address and those that presumably knew the place I was seeking didn't speak my language. It was a bummer. So, this drunk guy I just bumped into was the only person that might be able to help out.

I must admit I was even really freaked out. As I walked around in circles I was freaked out completely. And it was spelled all over me, so very obviously. I couldn't stop considering that if someone stepped out of the dark, there would be no one to help me. No one to run to my aid. It was the same situation now. No one could help me at this moment either, but the countenance of this guy made me feel he was not going to harm me. It was something about his eyes. Although drunk, his gaze radiated with honesty and decency.

"Oh, God! Please give me this one at least." – I desperately begged silently, every one of my cells screaming for support. I closed my eyes for only a split of a second and thought of dad. I needed him so much, he surely would have been my savior as always. A tear rolled down my cheek as I opened my eyes. I hurried to wipe it clean before it was noticed and while this stranger was cleaning up his clothes from who knows what since the ground we fell on was cement.

I thought that it would be nice to begin this conversation with an apology and I was genuinely afraid that I might have done some damage. And I was hoping that the only wound tonight was going to be the cut on my hand.

I squeezed the scarf to stop the blood since I could still feel it was slipping down. As soon as he looked up from whatever he was initially doing, I said:

"I am so sorry. I wasn't looking at all. Are you okay?"

A er a moment of silence and blank staring into my eyes he uttered a single 'no'. I scanned his entire body, but could not notice a single red flag. And he was grave silent and surely had no intention to help me or show what was wrong. That single harsh 'no' managed to cause panic in my heart. And my nerves started trembling and it was no good sensation. Nearly screaming I inquired:

"You are not? Well, what is wrong? Are you hurt? I am so sorry. I wasn't looking. Really sorry... What is wrong? Where are you hurt? Can I help?" – I went on blabbing like a little girl, until I realized that my nerves were getting to me. When I became aware of that I managed to calm down a bit, and stop myself at restating the same exact things again and again. I always did that, despite the fact that my dad tried to reason with me for so many times. He used to say "Kitty cat, you mustn't allow yourself to get so easily annoyed. Firstly, because it is not good for you and secondly because people could notice it. And they would use it against you. Kitty cat, promise me that you will try." He would say that at least once in a month, and a er each one of those conversations I would solemnly swear both to him and myself that I would control it but sometimes I would just lose it. I couldn't avoid it, just like now. Worst of it was that it was happening to me over some stranger I randomly bumped into.

"Bloody hell..." – I thought, but my thoughts were cut short by his calm reply.

"I wish I knew what is wrong. But, I can tell you it was not certainly from this fall." – He finally spoke.

Jesus, he was mumbling about his troubles and not the consequences of the fall. He could have been clearer in his reply. And not say the first thing that came to his mind, sending me into a shock. I was not his therapist to talk about life troubles, I was asking for injuries. Despite being so angry to him for his reply, I was nevertheless glad and relieved that he was fine, right away. And upon remembering my reaction I felt somewhat silly. I could have been entirely certain that even this guy would die of laughter if only he were a bit more sober.

He didn't look well all things considered, but he was no loafer. He was far too well dressed to be one. And his words though uncertain and drunken, were still pointing to an educated guy. No idiot would wonder what was wrong with him.

This was an entirely new situation for me. A little crooked smile

appeared on his lips, his eyes turning dim while he rushed his hand through his shoulder-length hair. He fixed his deep blue eyes in my gaze; captivating my attention to the fullest and then he barely mumbled: "British, huh? I am sorry Sherlock girl." And then I smiled slightly as well. Sherlock, out of all things. This one was a first. He continued: "It was my fault. It was me that wasn't looking. I thought it would be a good idea to count the stars right now."

I couldn't decipher whether he was making a point, trying to be irritably funny or whether it was in fact drunken nattering. Therefore, being completely confused, having nothing clever to say and certainly incapable of thinking of something witty in reply without sounding as if mocking him I went with the truth: "No that was my fault. I was looking God knows where. Somewhere..."

I let my voice diminish at the last word, kind of desperately... My companion not quite freely and somewhat teasingly asked: "Where were you looking?"

I waved my hand pointlessly in the air and added: "Uhm, for directions... Any kind of... Speaking of which, maybe you could help me..." He must have notice the lack of decisiveness in my voice and realized my doubting him entirely, since the very next moment he said: "I might be drunk, but I know my way around the city... Besides I don't think anyone else could help you... Do you speak Norwegian?" "No" – I whispered, half-embarrassed. This was awkward. At the beginning I wanted to ask him despite all and now I thought him to be a bad choice.

He smirked and said: "You have a point. I might not be the best choice for an instruction guy, but I honestly think that I can help you find what you are looking for. Am I right?"

"No, yeah you are." – I admitted, more to myself rather than to him. There was no denying that he could definitely get around Oslo in his state better than me in my flawless soberness. Having this guy staring at me while I was trying to make up my mind I hastily exhaled: "You may not be the best one, but you are certainly the only one. The only that knows English, anyway. At least I can put you to a test. Besides it is not like I could get more lost than what I am at the present. So..." My comment made him smile. His smile was charming, far too much to be ignored even though he was just a stranger. Our gazes were still interlocked, when he steadily continued our conversation: "Okay, I think that you do have a good point. If I were sober I would try to

I threw my head back a bit since I didn't understand what he was trying to say. "Shoot what?" – I recited.

argue it. But as it is... Anyway, shoot..."

"The directions, remember?" – He rather ironically mumbled, but a thin smile was traceable in his expression. – "Where do you have to go?"

"Oh" – I twaddle, while thinking whether I could be so confused to get lost in my own language. Did this day really wear me o as much? It was so embarrassing that I closed my eyes for a second furrowing my eyebrows and shaking my head trying to throw those thought out. I was focusing to stop the blood flow that was heading towards my face, and prevent the blood rush and the flush on my cheeks. Try as I might, focused as I was it couldn't be stopped nor helped nor avoided. My face, undoubtedly, undertook a notable shade of crimson.

I lowered my head staring at the map, letting the hair fall and cover my face and my shame. In fact, it seemed that I was using this entire situation to my absolute advantage.

"I am supposed to get to 'Frederik Stangs' Street. And according to this thing it should be just around the corner on the right. But I have been at it for hours and I couldn't find it. I even started to doubt my intelligence." – I admitted shyly, however brightly.

He made a few steps and came closer to me, positioning his shoulder next to mine and pointed his gaze towards the map. He stared into it moving his face further towards the map, trying to read. The smell of beer reached my senses irritating them to the fullest. I hated the smell of alcohol. I just now perceived that he was for real undoubtedly drunk. He reached his conclusion:

"Okay, yeah, the map is fine... Which can't be said about the owner. Which way do you turn?"

"Right, like I said. And what do you mean with that?" – I blustered at him.

"And that there is your problem." - He a irmatively concluded, smiling lightly. – "You should go le . And didn't you realize that you are holding the map upside down? God, and you thought I was the drunk one here."

And there it was. I figured out, well he helped me figure out, what went wrong in the last hundred attempts. Turning the wrong way around...

"Clearly, I was right to doubt my intelligence," – I mumbled with a shrug, another red shade painting my cheeks. "Thank you so much. Grateful."

At that he moved away from my side, stumbling a little but still managing to keep balance. He supported the weight of his body on the closest street-lamp. I jumped up at his tripping and said: "Are you sure you are fine?"

"Yeah, except for a bruised ego." – He gasped out and a er calming down he addressed me a question: "Do you think you could find your way to that address now?" I gave it a short thought and calmly replied:

"A er the last hour venture I am not exactly sure, but I can try. If by any chance I get lost again I will return here and hope to bump into you again." – At which he quite quietly, but boisterously enough for someone in his state, said: "Oh, please no... I beg you!!! It was more than enough for one evening. No more..."

I turned around and took my suitcase and the bag, since I threw the laptop in the suitcase previously when the cabby dropped me o, I had only two things to carry now. I placed the bag on my shoulder and grabbed the handle of the case, I was ready to get going. I thanked this guy and made my first step. When I was only few steps away though, I heard him say: "Just a second, do you want me to walk there?"

I turned towards him at the sound of his voice. He was still leaning over the same spot, using it as a resting place. Considering that I have already ruined his night and that he could barely stand, I had to tell him no. I tried to.

"Oh, please no. I have disturbed you long enough. I can find my way." "I wouldn't mind it at all. Besides I can find my way back... I hope."

He smoothly threw a swi smile, convincing me in less than a second. I smiled as well. It was ridiculously funny. This entire ironic situation – the blind one leading the one that couldn't see. He threw himself away from the lamp and joined me.

We remained silent as we walked along the street. As the wind was playing with my hair, the only sound audible was the squeaking of the suitcase I was dragging behind me. The pain in my hand was increasing with each next moment, but I remained silent. It was unbearable to drag the case with that cut on my hand, so I switched my hand. None of us dared to say something, to interrupt the silence of the night. To ruin the scent of the fresh night, to cut through the moon light. The breeze was cheerfully playing with my hair and as I could see from the corner of my eye it was engaging in a similar action with my companion's hair as well. His abrupt movement caught my attention and I looked at him. He had his twitched in a way so that he could look at the sky above us, while still walking next to me. He made no noise, his movements so silent. Just staring at the

sky, looking all mysterious. I tried to join him in that, but I couldn't partly because in just a few seconds I got dizzy from the way I held my head backwards and inasmuch because I couldn't walk without stumbling from the luggage which I couldn't quite pull any longer. As if he could read my thoughts, in the next instant he o ered to carry it for me with the words:

I was afraid that he couldn't carry his own weight, let alone the weight of my loaded suitcase as well. Therefore I just said no, even though a help would be welcome. My legs were killing me and so were my hands. My entire body was in an ache, as much as from the pressure of this entire trip as from the walk I took over the last hour. I seemingly lost track of time, when lost in these thoughts.

"Allow me, I can take it. We are close anyway. Less than 5 minutes."

I returned to reality when I realized that he had stopped, so I looked at him. He seemed to read my thought thanks to the expression on my face. He raised his hand pointing on the le , while saying:

"That way, you can find the number you are looking for on your own." "Yeah, that I can, unless the numbers are written in a dierent way here. Are they?"

"Not when you are sober." – He articulated trough a laugh. "Good night, Sherlock girl. Have a lovely stay."

I smiled and nodded towards him, mildly saying: "Thanks a lot. Good night to you too."

And then he le .

## \*\*\*

I rang on the doorbell on the house labeled as number 15, slightly fearing that its inhabitants might have already gone to bed. A scream from inside the house, proved me wrong. The same voice reached my ears only this time around I understood what was said: "She arrived..."

A girl my age opened the door for me, dressed in her jammies. Her hair was up in a ponytail and she had a painted smile on her face. She was joined by her dad and mum soon enough. Yep, I relaxed. I arrived at the correct place. I knew them already since I contacted them previously and we conversed for hours. The girl's name is Adela, and her mother Netta and her father Paal were going to be my host family while I am in Norway.

"Welcome" they all said in a choir, as if they had rehearsed it. Adela and her mum moved on the side to let me in and her dad was

reaching for the suitcase before I realized that he stepped out. "Thank you"- I replied, feeling the need to explain why I was hour later without making anyone worried: "Sorry I am late. Airport

clearance took longer than supposed."

"No need to apologize, we are just glad you are finally here." They were speaking as I was taking o my coat.

"Allow me!" - Her mum said taking of my coat.

"Never mind anything now. Your suitcase must be in your room. Let me show you where you will be."

She said leading me, as a true lady of the house, up the stairs. Her daughter followed us. While walking to my room she said: "You must be tired, so make yourself at home. If you are hungry I can make you a sandwich or maybe you would rather rest?"

She spoke in a rushed, excited manner, making a smile creep up the corners of my mouth. They were all indeed very welcoming and I couldn't help but feel thankful.

"Thank you so much, but don't bother helping me out. I am not hungry. It's late at night and I am tired, however, so I will go to bed. I don't need to keep you up any longer." – I told her honestly out of pure politeness.

"Are you sure there's nothing we could do to make you feel more comfortable right now?"

I shook my head no. "You are too kind. But I am quite alright. We'll talk in the morning, like you said."

"Alright dear. Have a good night." - She said when leaving the room accompanied by her daughter. My room, for the next year give or take.

My room. How weird did that sound? Nothing could explain that feeling... It was a cozy, comfortable and nicely set room, to be sure. However it lacked something crucial, something that everyone needs. It was missing that feeling of familiarity, that feeling of it knowing my story and my past. It was lacking the memories, the comfort of home. But that could easily be taken care of. That is what I was at least planning to do the following morning. Unpack and fix this into my little corner, my sanctuary.

I was far too tired to take care of that now, or to even mind it. Besides it wouldn't be nice of me to knock stu out and not let the family sleep properly. I, therefore, brushed my teeth, combed my hair and changed into my pajamas and slipped into the already made bed. Soon a er me the entire house silent. Its tenants followed my lead and went to bed as well. I made a mental note to remember to thank them for fixing it for me in the morning. It was as if I just found the best spot on Earth, since as soon as my head found its way on the pillow, I felt the sleepiness overtaking me. Just as I was dri ing away in the dreams, a bird started its song just under my pillow. The exhaustion overtook my body, drowning the strange feeling that was present in my chest the entire day, and I fell into the world of dreams.

A beam of light that was reaching inside my room, through the branches of the tree that was in front of my window, was playing with my eyelashes trying to force me to open my eyes. It was simply bidding me good morning, while tingling my senses. I stretched in bed, shi ing from my position a little. The attempt to open my eyes required more e ort than expected, but at last I managed to open them, raising myself up from the bed and look around me. I scanned the room, in search of my phone. Just as I got confused why I couldn't locate it anyway, I remembered that I placed it on the nightstand. Although that was the most logical location anyway, it took time to adjust to these unfamiliar surroundings. I turned that way and reached for it, intending to call mum.

As soon as I unlocked it, I became aware of the reason why it was so hard for me to open my eyes. The morning was, well, far too young to get up. It was only six o'clock which meant that I have slept less than five hours. I just ignored that fact and dialed my mum's number. I knew that wouldn't be a problem, considering that by now she must be up. As soon as she picked up, I so ly said:

"Morning, mum. Did you sleep well?"

The happiness in her voice was obvious, her tone indicating that she was gently smiling as she replied:

"Just fine, Katie. What about you? Did your find your way easily last night?" – She brought up the subject, which was obvious that she would. Before answering I considered telling her what happened and that I got somewhat lost, but then I realized that there was no need to worry her unnecessary. She had to worry far too much already, so I just uttered a white lie to calm her down:

"Yeah, slept well. And it took me no more than five minutes a er I got of the cab. Just had to find the right door number." – I hoped that she wouldn't notice the lie. She was really good at reading my every tone, every move and every breath. But I imagine since she couldn't see me she believed everything. That and because her heart wanted everything to be just fine. When the moment of tension and fear of being discovered passed, my muscles relaxed and my breathing evened. Now I dared to continue the conversation, without fearing that my voice would break in the middle of the sentence, and therefore I asked:

"How is Fred? Is he okay now?"

"Yeah, he is better." – My mum said through a sigh. Something was screaming in me to continue inquiring, but I figured I would regret knowing the source of the problem. Maybe later I will gather the strength to try fixing it.

"Okay. Mum I will go now. I just wanted to check on you. We will talk later okay."

"Sure..." – She so ly, sadly said. I knew she wanted to continue, but I felt as though I was about to burst into tears.

"Bye. Say hi to Fred, from me..." – I whispered, trying to hide the shakiness in my voice. I hung up the line and le my phone back where it was. I laid my head back on the pillow, letting out a deep arduous gasp. A tear slid down the side of my eye and I unconsciously ran my fingers wiping it o . Early or not, I had to get up. I simply couldn't allow myself to continue lying down, feeling sorry for myself. It was hard as it was already.

I jumped out of bed in a fast movement, grabbing my garter and pulling my hair up in a ponytail. I hated the fact that it tightened my head extremely hard, but this way it would be easier to work around the room faster. I unpacked my suitcase and arranged my things every one of them at the right place; all the while thinking what was I going to do for the next week, since the semester was bound to start the week a er that.

Only the last small details, which were the ones that would bring the magic of home in this new place, remained to be adjusted. I was, however, interrupted by a knock on my door. I heard Adela say: "Are you up? Can I come in?" I pressed the button on the phone. As I looked at the time I noticed that I was working for more than three hours. How fast time passes by when you are occupied. I had to find some diversion in the following week, something that would keep my mind o things.

"Yeah, come on it..." – I said as I broke my line of thinking. There will be more than enough time for that.

Adela slipped her head through the door, smirk on her face, saying: "You decent?"

I chucked at her in reply, responding: "Somewhat. What's up?" "Breakfast is ready. We are waiting for you. Come down." – She said, as though she was in a hurry. Maybe she was just hungry. I knew I was. Not just hungry, but famished. I gave her a nod, when saying: "Be right there." I zipped the now empty suitcase and shoved it under the bed. That will be its location while I was here. Being le without anything else to do or fix, I figured I should go down so that the family doesn't wait for me. Being a guest, such frustrations were forbidden. I ran down the stairs quite rapidly, but still trying to control the thuds of my feet on the stairs. This wasn't home and I couldn't allow myself such liberty. As I walked in the dining room, all eyes turned on me

and everyone greeted me. I greeted back as I pulled away the chair and sat down. The breakfast could finally start, as we were now all gathered at one place. The table was set and everything looked incredibly delicious. I only hoped that it will be, seeing that I would stay here for a while.

I waited for them to start and a er that I eagerly reached for the food as well. The conversation started right a er that. I was addressed by Adela's dad Paal.

"So, you are here for an exchange. What exactly is the course you are taking?"

"Applied mathematics." – I said in between bites. I knew that this conversation was something that sooner or later must happen, but I really just wanted to pass the breakfast in silence, from my side at least. I just hoped that we would find some other time to discuss this stu . However, I knew that it would continue regardless what of I wished. Questions are just going to start flowing as a river. I wished I was wrong, but...

"So, what exactly are you preparing and how long do you have until you finish it?" – Paal felt forced to continue.

"I am working on my PhD thesis. This is my last year of classes and I hope that by the end of it, I will have it ready and will be able to defend it."

"Aren't you a bit late with your classes? I mean, you are what 27 or…" – Now it was Adela's mother that spoke.

Here we go, explanations. Why? How? What? I wouldn't have minded speaking of it if it wasn't so private and painful. I just had to stir the conversation from this topic somehow. So, I just said:

"I am 28, actually and I paused for some time because I needed a break. That is why I am late with it."

Adela seemed to notice the inconvenience that was crawling on my back and the shivers that stroke every nerve in my body; since the very next moment she changed the subject.

"Do you have anything planned for this week?" – She asked me gently, not wishing to force me into anything. I smiled at her, nodding

to express my thankfulness for that favor. And then I replied: "No, nothing fixed. Nothing I couldn't full-heartedly abandon."

"Good, I am taking you out every day... We are going to have fun this week, before the torture starts. Agreed?" – With an enthusiasm in her voice she suggested.

Nothing in plan and far too much thoughts springing inside my head, not leaving me alone were reasons enough for me to accept her proposal. Besides not as if much could go wrong. We could get to know each other and I could gain a friend. It is why I came here for, partially. And although I have been friendless most of my life, I felt that this time just might be something di erent.

"Agreed." – I said, smiling back. To my great satisfaction, the rest of the breakfast passed in silence. When we were all finished I o ered to help, but I was informed that guests were not allowed to work at all. I used the fact that they were busy with cleaning up the table as an opportunity to slip back into my room unnoticed. As I shut the door behind my back and leaned on it I thought to myself that this was going to be a long week.