Thank goodness I had all my books closed and ready to pack, when hell took over him as he ran out of the library without answering my question and taking my phone in the process. I wanted to call a er him, but as I was about to do that very thing I realized that I had absolutely no idea how to address him. His name was a little too personal, the word professor combined with his last name somehow too long to be used at the moment. I could have just used the title, but somehow that wasn't much of a callout. Besides I couldn't just go through the library screaming 'professor' a er him. It seemed I was le without any other option apart from storming out of the place in vain hopes of catching him, so I packed my things in a rush, hastily checking not to forget anything. I imagine I wouldn't have ran a er him under any other condition, but I desperately needed my phone back. I knew that mum or Fred could call me at any moment, so the recovery of my phone was mandatory. When I stepped out of the library I impatiently looked around doing my best to spot him. The hallway wasn't as crowded as I expected it to be, but it was understandable judging by the time. My disappointment only increased when I couldn't recognize him amongst the few people that were passing by. Even though I didn't delay leaving the place that much a er him, I was still unable to locate him as I thoroughly scanned the hallway in both directions. "How fast did this man manage to skip out and how am I supposed to find him and retrieve my phone?" I murmured in frustration, immediately a erwards realizing my mistake considering that there were people around me. I started blushing, which wasn't anything new for me, as I snapped my gaze up to check whether my outburst attracted any attention. I was relieved to find everyone minding their own business, and not paying notice to the mumbling fool. At first I thought to look for him in his o ice, but then I realized that it might backfire on me. There was a possibility that he didn't go to his o ice in the first place, and even if he did I knew that by the time I got there, he would be long gone since he was both faster and had the time advantage. The fact that he surely didn't get at the university on foot, meant that there was definitely a car parked at the lot that belonged to him and if I rushed down I knew that I just might catch him before he le with my phone. So, with my bag over my shoulder I started running down the stairs, trying to avoid bumping into people and hastily apologizing when I accidently brushed someone along the way. Needless to say, I was completely out of breath when I pushed the door open and le the building. I saw him approaching his car, just as I arrived at the parking lot. I hurried towards him, barely breathing, in hope that I don't miss him a er the marathon I ran. When I got close to the car, he was opening the back door throwing his things on the seat. I knew I was flushed, I could feel my face burning and my throat was in no better position either. The unbearable thirst, which was causing an ache in my throat, was preventing me to speak. Honestly at that moment I didn't even know whether I would be capable of speaking in the following hour. I was certain if I were at home and had nothing important to say, that would have been the case. But as it was, I wasn't le with much of an option. As soon as he registered the hurried steps, accompanied by the heavy breathing; though himself in a rush he looked up and his gaze met mine. While trying to catch my breath and ask him for my phone; he beat me to the pulp and said: "You haven't been running a er me from the library, now have you?" I thought the answer to that question was quite apparent and I would have replied ironically had I have been conversing with a friend, but this was my professor so I simply confirmed: "Yeah, I did. You've got my phone." "Oh, shit. Well can't I give it to you tomorrow or something – it is somewhere in the back of the car. But I am in a rush. I am half hour late already," he explained, reaching for the front door and opening it, impatiently waiting for my reply, before slipping inside. "I wouldn't mind otherwise, but mum said she will call so I really need it." "Well, I can't look for it now. I have to be somewhere else. Had to be there thirty minutes ago, actually," he hurriedly and somewhat angrily replied. "Right. Okay, never mind. Go," I mumbled, exhaling in a disappointed manner. I would just have to make do by calling mum from Adela's phone as soon as I got home. It was unbelievable – I just ran three floors down to catch him and he was in that hurry so to not be able to hold on for a minute and give me back my phone. Dizziness was beginning to play with my mind, when I heard him say: "Get in the car." "What?" I asked again, not sure if I heard correctly, my voice hoarse as my roaming gaze once again landed on him. "Just get in the car," he swilly repeated once again, and took the driver's seat. I thought about it for less than a second. During that time thousand di erent thoughts passed through my head. Most frequent of all was the ongoing struggle between getting in the car with my professor a er university classes and the need to get my phone back. 'The hell with it, I thought, as I grabbed onto the door handle, slipping into the car. He already had the engine started, so when I was inside when he just drove away. I fastened my seatbelt as I got comfortable into the seat. We were out on the open road when I finally managed to catch my breath and recover from the running. He didn't seem to register my annoying presence and was clearly driving over the limit. Either he was far too captivated into something that he didn't notice me or he didn't really care about it at that moment. Me on the other hand. Well I was petrified, to say the least. I threw my glance on the hand over the gear-box, the long fingers loosened around it. He was driving at that speed without any tension whatsoever. My gaze was still fixed on the gear, when I felt the car turning le . 'Shit, did he just entered a crossroad in forth geal passed through my otherwise blank mind, and I could feel my breath hitching at that point. I tried to stabilize myself with a few deep breaths, before my anxiety grew in intensity, but I was incapable of doing so, since every next second I just saw blackness before my eyes. My fingers were trembling, my throat clenching and I pointlessly shut my eyes, stubbornly not intending to open them until he stopped the car. As if the closed eyes could possibly change anything. It rarely couldn't, and my head began spinning, my insides twisting in a knot, and my brain screaming for the car to miraculously stop before we end up in an accident. A flash of familiarity crossed my mind, as I heard the familiar squeal of the breaks when he brought the car to a halt. My wish to remain in one peace seemed to be on the edge of fulfillment, since soon a er that thought the car seemed to slow down until it finally stopped. I forced myself to open my eyes, swallowing hard. I realized it was the traic light that caused him to stop, not the fact that the person sitting next to him was pretty much having a seizure or a panic attack. Probably both. So many questions roamed through my head. I was puzzled and certainly had no idea with which one to begin. I had to ask him though. First of all, who was Mary and what was I doing on my way to meet her? Why did he act as if the end of the world happened when he saw the caller's ID? But before asking that I had to go with the one my instinct needed answered. I felt that this speed would definitely cause at least the urge to throw up in me, and I had to let him know what I felt and how my stomach twisted each time he pressed on the gas pedal. I had to do it while this light was red, before he started rushing through the streets of Oslo with that speed once again and I lose the ability to speak. I didn't want to just throw it in his face, so I smoothed the question a little and indirectly said, the words coming out in a slight tremble: "Hey, do you always drive this fast? Or is it this particular occasion that has you in such a rush?" For the first time since we sat in the car, well the first time I had noticed it, he turned to look in my direction. He opened his mouth to most likely answer my question, but stopped in middle of it as he seemed to notice something on my face. Something I didn't know was there. The next moment he said: "Are you okay? You look pale." "You should open the window. Fresh air might do you good," he impassively suggested, while shi ing in first gear and continuing the drive. "No, I am fine," I lied, even I was nowhere near fine. In fact, I was terrified. So much so, that I felt the numbness of my extremities increasing as the sti ness was unwillingly settling in again, brought back on as a consequence to the renewed motion of the car. "It is the speed, I think." "And there is the most common ladies lie that exists in the world," he

Catherine: Met Too Soon

pointless to do so seen what I said was actually a lie and he was straight on the point. And yet, there I was defending myself, not planning on simply admitting it to him. "Seriously?" his question sounded overwhelmed with concern. "You are pale as if you had seen a ghost. That is not fine." "I am fine. The speed is just freaking the hell out of me," I tried to maintain the calmness in my voice as long as it was possible, when in all honesty I only wanted to scream. "Why?" he asked, entirely relaxed, as if it was an ordinary thing to drive that fast. Uncertain whether he was ignoring the way he entered the crossroad or whether he didn't even notice he had done so, I snapped my head in his direction, my eyes widening with shock at his words. "Why?" I ironically exclaimed. "You entered a crossroad in 4th gear." "You saw that?" Turning his head in my direction, the surprise obvious in his gaze. "Yeah." "Sorry, I will slow down. Didn't mean to scare you," he mumbled so ly, trace of guilt in his expression and a ring of honesty in his voice. Appreciation immediately awoke in me, a er all it was not many people that would react in such a way. And, since I was in his car he could pretty much just stop at the end of the road and throw me out as a mode of getting rid of my presence. Yet, he not only adjusted his driving for me, but he also was polite and sent me absentminded smiles whenever he deemed it necessary. For it was rather obvious and understandable that his focus was entirely at some other place. "It is okay. And I am not lying about it." He chuckled at my comment. The speed was one I could bear this time around, so I continued the conversation, even though I noticed that he was replying to my questions out of politeness and in fact was on edge all the while. "So, are we meeting up with Mary?" I asked him, regretting it only seconds later. I had no business in his private life and no right to read his caller ID either. Shame washed over me, as he shot me a puzzled look hastily asking: "How did you," breaking mid line figuring it out by himself and roughly asking me: "You read the caller ID?"

"Yeah, sorry. I shouldn't have, I just, well, it sat there and I glanced," I started mumbling, relocating my glance out of the window being unable to hold his steady gaze. I felt the blush creeping up my neck and reaching my cheeks, increasing in power once I heard him sigh.

"It is fine, never mind that," he uncomfortably shi ed in his seat, the

'There is no way he didn't get upset because of it. I should have kept my mouth shut. My eyebrows were involuntarily furrowing, as I was trying to clear my dry throat without making any noise. Upon looking at him all I could notice was that he seemed to be furious, all about him said so. He went silent in a second, tensing up and his gaze got locked on the road ignoring my presence once again. I couldn't find a single reason for asking that question and it turned out that I just made the person, who helped me out of the goodness of his heart,

I sighed, beginning to grow nervous at the silence which awkwardly sneaked between the walls of the car, on my part at least. A er reflecting upon my foolish nosiness, I was about to once again apologize – it was a er all my fault – but he spoke before I got the chance to say what was on my mind. "No, we are not meeting Mary. We are going at my place. The kids have returned from school and there is no one at home to welcome them. They have no keys and I

"Hey, don't blame it on me." I replied, glad that he was speaking to me and happy that I was mistaken in the reason behind his silence.

"I never gave them one, I suppose," he whispered. "We are gonna be

Silence filled the car a er his words. He focused his attention on the road and I didn't want to continue disturbing him, but there was this nagging sensation and this question burning inside of my mind 'So, you are married? And you forget the time your kids come back from school?! Nevertheless I chose to ignore it not meaning to sound rude

rustling of the leather informing me of his actions.

mad at me.

lost track of time, thanks to you."

"Why don't the kids have keys?"

there soon anyway."

mumbled under his breath, which for a moment there had me thinking twice before realizing what he actually uttered.

"Huh?" I shi ed my gaze in his direction, becoming aware of his exact words, but still not comprehending the meaning of them all together.

"It is the most common," he went about repeating his words once again, but before he could get the entire sentence out on the open I

I opened the passenger window, the fresh air filling my senses, and

Blissfully aware of the swamped road before us, an entire convoy of cars each going to their destination – leaving the road or emerging from the intersected streets – was slowing us down, and it proved a powerful cure for the spasms which were grasping on every muscle in

"There was a research into the most used lies a while ago and this was the first one on the ladies list," he explained, his voice as calm as

"Doesn't mean I am lying," I defended myself, feeling the need to do so as if I was accused of conspiring against the kingdom. It was

ever, all the while not taking his eyes of the road.

cut him o: "No, I heard that. But I don't get your point."

making me sigh in relief.

my body.

and disrespectful by asking such a thing. There was no necessity to purposely make yet another mistake, or embarrass myself further. Still, this man was the equivalent of mystery, and even though I've been in contact on so many di erent occasions so far I still couldn't get a hold of how he actually operates. He slowed down a er another five minutes of driving and entered what seemed to be his driveway. He hastily turned o the roaring engine, unbuckled the belt and le the car. I did the same activities, following his lead, only not as hastily as he did it. When I stepped out of the car, I properly threw my glance on the house before me. It was my first glance at it and the sight which welcomed me was a shocking discovery. It couldn't even be categorized as a house. I was standing in front of a mansion. It became clear to me why money wasn't the issue and why he o ered to help me out without being paid. There was no way he was lacking money, not with a place like that. He ran inside while I was awkwardly oogling the entire yard, but in only seconds he rushed back out, exclaiming: "Fuck, they are not here. Mary is going to kill me." I had no idea how he expected to find them inside, given that the door was locked and he himself stated that they had no key, but I imagine it was desperation that was making him more dedicated to acting rather than thinking. I wasn't going to mention it, as much as I would want to tease him about it. I had been there, I knew the feeling and I wasn't planning on judging him either. I was only looking at him, helpless and incapable of doing anything which could help him, as he ran his hands through hair. A ring of desperation came from the sigh which escaped him, as he whispered into his palms: "I am horrible at this, aren't I? An idiot. A damn idiot."

He seemed so lost, so desperate at that point. His voice was at the verge of breaking, albeit the blame he was casting on himself, even though probable, was still unfounded. I just stood there immobile observing him, with no idea as to what to say or do. I was only observing the pain that shook his slender frame as his hands gripped on the hair, pulling on it. And I couldn't help it but feel guilty for being the reason for the delay and being the one that caused all of that.

I was about to head to him and try to say something that could make him feel at least a bit better, if that was possible. It was a er all the least I could do. But while I was approaching him slowly, I heard his name being called out of somewhere. Just one single 'Bård' echoed in the air. I looked around and noticed a boy running towards us from across the street. I swi ly glanced at both sides of the road, exhaling as I found no car in any proximity. Opposite of my calm reaction, Bård turned around towards the kid running in his direction and picking him up from the ground in a tight hug. As he hugged the boy a smile appeared on his face and all the worry seemed li ed from his shoulders. The very next moment he said: "Where is Jane?"

He didn't seem to notice the woman, holding a girl by the hand, approaching as well. I presumed that was Jane and realized that my presumption was correct once he picked her up in a hug as well. I was

still at the spot at which I froze when I heard his name being called out. It was so out of my comfort zone, particularly because I didn't exactly know what to do or how to behave. The chubby elderly woman, that appeared to be the neighbour from across the street, stood silently next to him. When Bård eased his grip around the girl putting her down on the ground again, the neighbour explained: "I saw them sitting on the porch and I thought you must be at work, so I called them at my place in case you get home late." Bård smiled at her, with that by then familiar smile which lit up his eyes with a warm sparkle, clearly thankful. "Thank you so much, Mrs. Ågot. I got held up at work. I really appreciate it." "No problem. It was my pleasure. Besides we are the ones that bother you when we need things repaired, remember?" He received that reply with a chuckle and once again thanked her. She waved her hand at him and said: "Get the kids at home and make them lunch. They didn't want anything from the things I had to o er. You have spoiled them, Bård." "I will see what I can do," he said, greeting her goodbye, a er which she headed towards her house and he turned my way. He tapped the boy on the shoulder and told them to get in the house, when heading into my direction. He smiled at me, intentionally inclining his head towards the car with the words: "Let me get your phone." I slowly moved towards the car following him, awkwardness setting in in me a er having witnessed the entire scene. It seemed to me that he lead a hell of a life. And it was one I couldn't understand at all. He searched through his bag and in a matter of couple of minutes of furiously throwing stu in and out of it, he finally grabbed ahold of my phone. He silently handed me the phone, right a er he picked up his things from the car and closed the door behind him, pressing the lock

button on the remote. I took my phone, a silent 'thanks' forming on my lips, as I immediately placed my gaze on the screen checking for missed calls. I was relieved to see that there weren't any at all.

Upon looking up I realized that he was already heading for the house, his jacket and purse in his hand as he was slowly making his way up the stairs. A smile ghosted over my lips, as I turned my back and I headed down the driveway thinking of how to get back, since I didn't pay much attention to where he was driving and had no idea where I was. Oslo was a er all a new environment for me and I hadn't had the opportunity to even go out. Calling a cab would be pointless since I had no idea at which address I was. Going back and asking was the best option, and yet I felt unwilling to do that very thing. All of a

sudden I became aware that I was lost. Again.

my ears: "Where do you think you are going?"

Before I could bring myself to consider my next move, I the steps behind my back started appeasing. Within seconds, his voice reached

I turned around, and in a mode of question stated: "Home?"

"Do you know where you have to go?" he asked, hitting the bull right in between his eyes. "I was going to ask your neighbour. She seemed nice," I whispered. When I lowered my head, fully routed and lowered my gaze, he so ly chuckled. The win was his and he was fully aware of that, so a er a short pause he said: "No way I am letting you go back home now, a er I dragged you here in a rush – kidnapping your phone in the process. And no way am I letting you leave without lunch a er the scare I gave you. Come on, please." As if his so, pleading voice wasn't enough of a convincer, he threw me a beatific look and a tantalizing smile played at his lips. That face was more that irresistible. I wanted to accept his o er - without knowing the reason. I simply did want to accept it, but I didn't like the thought of having dinner in the house of my professor with his kids in the same room. It was... weird?It was weird at best. "Come on," he once again pleaded, his eyes still fixed on mine, that same smile painted on his face. I only wished that he was less handsome and charismatic as he stood before me, waiting for my reply to his invite. Despite the rational decision upon which my mind was trying to make me reflect, despite the order that my mind was sending to my entire body - I nodded my agreement, a quiet 'Yeah' escaping before I could register it was even formed. He gave me another smile and then swi ly turned his back to me and headed for the house. I followed him, reluctance still obvious in every move I made. What in the name of God was I doing? As I ascended the few stairs before the door, I was beginning to feel tension in my back, my hands. In fact, my entire body was beginning to tense up. It wasn't right, what I was doing. It felt bizarre, weird and irrevocably wrong. When I stepped into the house, the very appearance of it took my breath away. So much so, that I entirely forgot the various uncomfortable feelings that were overwhelming me only moments ago. Everything inside was so perfectly arranged, every little detail was located on its place. The space was planned to the last detail, and yet it appeared as if it lacked a feminine touch and a family atmosphere. Indeed it was settled to an extreme exactness, but there

were no family pictures as to transform it into what it was supposed

I placed my bag on the armchair in the living room uncomfortably not knowing whether to sit down or remain standing. But one thing was certain, I still couldn't get used to the fact of the luxury of the place. It was strange to have such a house, from a professor's payment, and such a young one at that. I was still staring around trying to digest it all, when I heard Bård's voice addressing me: "Sorry, I had to leave my stu upstairs. Just make yourself comfortable. I am going to call Mary to calm her down and when the kids get down I will set the

I took a seat on the very edge of the armchair, when he took his phone out of the pocket and sat down on the sofa. It surprised me, since I thought he was planning on leaving the room. But he seemed

"Hey, Mary. Sorry it took me this long to call you back." Genuine honesty was detectable in his voice, but what had me puzzled was the lack of inconvenience. I, for one, was inconvenient and shouldn't

"Hei, is everything alright?" I could clearly hear a gentle, worried

"Yeah, I got held up at work and lost track of the time, so... I am just

Technically, he didn't lie at all, which was nicely played. It didn't seem that he wanted to deal with an explanation of how he managed to forget two kids before his doorstep at the moment, and le out the main part of the story. I had to admit it was a nice move, and of that I was hundred percent certain. But it was also uncanny, which had me

"So, everything is fine?" I heard the voice once again asking the same

"Yeah, they are getting ready for lunch now. They are upstairs, but I

wondering whether he lied to his wife all the time.

thing, with less alertness the second time around.

relaxed and without minding my presence dialed Mary.

to be – a home.

table. Okay?"

I just nodded at his words.

he just go somewhere more private?

tired, couldn't call you sooner."

female voice on the other end of the line.

can call them if you want to talk to them." "No, it is fine. I can talk with them tonight." "Can I get Vegard on the phone, please?" I couldn't detect a reply to the question, thinking that the line might have went flat. I, however, discarded that thought when a er few moments of silence, my professor was still persistently holding the phone up to his ear. I imagined she must have whispered an agreement, since a er a short pause another voice appeared on the end of the line. I had expected it to be a kid's voice, but this was a full grown up man. "Yeah, Bård." "Hey." "Is everything okay? You sound tired and frustrated. Are you already regretting your o er?" A cheeky, teasing chuckle filled the line a er the question and I noticed Bård's face lit up at the words. For a moment there, I could even detect a tiny smile. "Everything is fine and I am both those things right now. But I am not regretting it. I am the reason for both those feelings." His free hand le the comfortable position from his thigh, ending up covering his eyes, as a deep gasp le his lips. "Okay?" The intonation of that one simple word was more than questioning. It was indicating knowledge and comprehension. It felt as if that word has replaced an entire sentence, and yet it was just that one word. "We will talk when you get back. Anyway how did it go?" "You were right. She loved it and I owe you a party night when I get back." The excitement of the reply was indication enough that the conversation took a more pleasant direction. "Party night? I thought you said I should cut down on alcohol. What changed your mind?" "Hah. I still think the same way. A party night doesn't have to involve

"How is it a party night then?" He shrugged his shoulders, inclining his head slightly, as a light giggle escaped him. When not receiving a reply, with a little urgency he added: "Ah, never mind. I just wanted to ask how it went. I am gonna run now. Hungry people in the house

One quick 'okay' was the last thing I heard, before the line was broken and Bård looked at me. Before I could register it and move my gaze from examining his face, it was too late. He must have noticed

my inconvenience, which got renewed upon being caught

intentionally staring at him and it was easily detectable that I was sitting on the very edge of my seat, so he said: "How is that getting

I simply shrugged my shoulders. He shook his head in disapproval and got up from his seat, placing the phone on the table. He looked towards the stairs and called out: "Matthew, Janie lunch time. Get

A er that he headed in the opposite direction. It was no more than a minute and I heard the hurried footsteps down the staircase. I got up heading towards the dining room, which was combined in one with the living room, but I soon froze on the spot not knowing what to do.

A few more times in running back and forth and the table was all set. I was still standing at the exact same spot, not willing to invite myself to the table and without an idea of how to help out, when they all gathered around. While taking a seat, he looked at me and said:

I scratched my neck while heading towards the table, wondering how I got there and what was I doing there. It was awkward and I hated it. So the reason for doing it was even more clouded. It was my fault, I was sure. It was always those tiny decisions which I made which lead

environment, I was only thinking of why I didn't leave when I had the chance to do so. It was certainly not that hard to excuse myself properly or even make some lame apology and just ask for directions.

The first few minutes went in complete silence. The kids were digging in their plates, apparently hungry as hell. My professor was in no way di erent. On the other hand, I just sat there, forcing myself to take a few bites, despite the lack of appetite. I felt my face burning under the skin, which meant that I was most likely flushed. I dared not to look up, being absolutely grateful that my hair was let down and was

to awkwardness. As, I was taking a seat, unaware fully of my

so neatly covering my face, hiding every reaction.

I nearly jumped when the silence was broken by Jane, who addressing him so ly said: "Uncle Bård, is there more of that apple

The kids ran past me and headed the same way as Bård.

drinks, you know?"

and we will talk tonight."

comfortable?"

down to help."

"Come on, take a seat."

juice?"

sweet, adorable.

weird."

"Weird? What is less weird?"

Before I could fully register her words, he was on his feet replying her: "For you princess? Always." He gave her a wink and a nonchalant smile and headed towards what, by now I was certain, was the kitchen. I could only reflect on how sweet his response was while he was gone. Moments later he was back, carrying a glass and the required beverage, pouring it in the glass and placing it in front of her with the words 'Here you go.', before taking his seat again. "Uncle?" I whispered, my tone guizzical. Now that was a turn of events I didn't see coming. He looked up at me with a smile on his face and proudly said: "Yes, I am Uncle." "I thought they were your kids," I silently formed the words, hoping that he could understand it, since I had no wish for the children to hear it. He did understand it, and trying to contain his chuckle, he mumbled: "No, they are not my kids." "So, Mary is?" "Their mum. My brother's wife," he elaborated. "Right, okay." I confirmed, nodding my head and facing the plate as a getaway from his gaze. And somehow the swi rerun of the entire day in my head seemed to make more sense a er those five little words. It made me reflect upon everything that happened. His face when he saw the caller's ID, him being all freaked out and the phone conversation. He was watching over his brother's kids. That was

"What?" I was startled by his question, gazing up to look at him, secretly praying that I didn't let some nonsensical and embarrassing thought slip out. It was too late for my prayer to be heard, I had already done it and he was telling me exactly what I said. "You said

"I did?" I mumbled, becoming aware that I must have. I was glad, however, that it were just those words that escaped me. As inconvenient as they were, they would have been nothing in comparison to me saying that it was absolutely cute what he was doing. No escape was to be found from under his persistent gaze, so I didn't hide away my gaze. "This is embarrassing. Me being here is less

He furrowed his eyebrows. "Wait, you thought I was married with two

'Less weird', so I am just wondering what is less weird."

kids?" "Yep, I did." He started laughing, at which my defensing mechanism got activated. "Well, how was I supposed to know? I heard you talk to a Mary ten times today and the kids..." "Okay, okay you weren't supposed to know," he said, waving with his hands in the air trying to calm me down. "But I am not married. I am just babysitting." "Babysitting? Well, they are not exactly babies, and you are doing more of a marathon rather than sitting, but I do get the general idea." I shot him a small smile, at which he responded with a similar one. The rest of the meal went in silence only I no longer felt that incommodious. A er we all finished, the table was cleaned up faster than it was set and when I asked if I could somehow help, I was told to leave it to them. When they finished the task in hand, he sent the kids in their rooms to finish their homework threatening to check in on them to see if they were studying. Jane seemed to take it much more seriously than her brother, but nevertheless they both headed to the second floor. When we were le alone, I standing in the middle of his living room, I started to feel awkward once again. Therefore, without thinking twice, I said: "I should get going." "So soon?" he mumbled, his azure eyes fixing on me. 'Is he expecting me to stay? Is that what his eyes are radiating?'

thought, shaking my head to indicate to myself that it was absolutely

I nodded. "Yeah. Not that I am not grateful for the help, the lunch and

Until that moment, I didn't even bother to consider the way I was going to get back. I was a er all more pleasantly occupied. Or more awkwardly. Probably both. Luckily he had an idea of how to make it

not what he meant. 'He is just being polite.'

everything, but I really need to get home. Sorry."

A er he made the call, I picked up my things. We both exited the house, deciding to wait for the cab out in the fresh air. I placed the messed up strands of my hair behind my ear, while we were climbing down the stairs.

As I stepped of the last stair, I heard his voice behind me: "I am sorry that I can't take you home myself. But, uhm..." His thumb was pointing behind him towards the house, and I got what he was trying to say, without hearing the rest. I wasn't even sure if he was going to continue his explanation.

"It is fine. I don't mind. I understand. Your driving is probably going to give me a heart attack anyway."

"Oh, thank you very much!" he exclaimed, pretending to be hurt – his hand pressed tightly over the le side of his ribcage – somewhere above the heart. He seemed to do that a lot. Still, I could see a light smile sneaking up on his lips.

"I didn't say anything that wasn't true and you know that."

"Yeah, I suppose I do," he admitted, going silent for a while. Then, out of nowhere he suggested: "We should exchange phone numbers in

happen.

"Let me call you a cab."

"Yeah, thanks."

"Oh, thank you very much!" he exclaimed, pretending to be hurt – his hand pressed tightly over the le side of his ribcage – somewhere above the heart. He seemed to do that a lot. Still, I could see a light "I didn't say anything that wasn't true and you know that." "Yeah, I suppose I do," he admitted, going silent for a while. Then, out of nowhere he suggested: "We should exchange phone numbers in case one of us can't make it to the Norwegian lesson on Thursday." I took out my phone and we did that very thing, once again falling into a silent presence. I faced the house, letting my eyes roam on every detail, inspecting every little particularity. It was soon a er my gaze landed upon the house, when I heard him ask 'You like it?'. "Huh?" I mumbled. "The house. Do you like it?" "Yeah, it is amazing. But it is also grand." I shot him a puzzled look, and went on: "I have been meaning to ask this all day long. Don't get me wrong, I don't mean any disrespect, but I was just wondering. Are you rich or something?" "Well, I am not Bill Gates rich, but I do well." he jokingly said. "No one is Bill Gates rich." I teased back, going serious the next

moment. "How can you get this house from a professor's payment? Just the architect must have cost a fortune. This is an amazing

"When it comes to money, I have other resources. As to the architect, it is my design," he shyly admitted. I didn't see a single reason for him to be so, given that I, without knowing it, complemented him on his

"You designed this? Awesome." I enthusiastically said, since the spark

design."

work.

of architecture awareness stirred inside my mind. "Thanks." I didn't have another moment to observe it more closely and I did want to do just that a er being so leisurely informed that it was his work, since the next moment the cab parked before the house. He walked me to the cab. It was just a few steps, but the very fact that he did it was flattering. To add to my dumbfound state, he also opened the door for me with the words: "Sorry for the inconvenience, but it turned out quite nicely I believe." "It is fine, professor." My gaze landing on my shoes, for God know which time during the day. Before I could say anything else, he cut me short. "Oh, that isn't going to work. Bård, please. I am a professor at the university. Outside of it, I am just Bård. Okay?" "Yeah." I unconvincingly whispered, looking back at him. "So, does the 'yeah' mean that I can call you Catherine instead of Miss Fox?" He confidently asked, a smirk shining on his face. "No, you can't," I purposely replied more abruptly than usual. It was not only he who knew how to tease people. As I said that, his expression momentarily changed from cocky confidence into embarrassed seriousness. "I think I prefer Kate." His lips playfully turned into a smile as he nodded. "Kate sounds good." "I had a nice time. Thank you again for everything, Bård." "Anytime. See you in class," he mumbled. "Night." I mused and entered the cab. He closed the door behind me, addressing me one last smile before he made his way towards the

house. I gave the address to the driver and leaned back into the seat to run through the confusingly surprising events from the day.

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I wasn't even aware how badly I was grinning.