*The Vilde Drawer*

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1

“I swear, you’re going to die of laughter!” says Thea, and holds the phone screen up to me.

We’re sitting in our tree at school, on the same branch, and Thea swipes through what’s got to be about a hundred photos from half-term before she finds the one she just *has* to show me.

“You see?” she says.

I feel the branch sway a bit under us when I lean forwards to look at her phone.

“Look at Nora! Ice cream smeared all over her face, on her jumper, in her hair, it’s like, everywhere!”

Thea’s little sister, Nora, is two years old. She has a giant head, like Thea, and brown eyes and nearly black hair like everyone in their family. Nora always smells like either poop or vanilla, but no matter what, I want to bring her home with me.

“Skveakin’ great picture!” I say.

We have made up our own word, which can be used about almost anything, but if someone had asked us what *skveakin’* means, it would be impossible to explain. But the two of us know. I can hold up a banana that has gone totally brown and soft and say *skveakin’ great banana,* and then Thea will laugh so hard she can’t stand straight. And then I’ll start laughing at Thea laughing.

“Check out this gigantic squash!” Thea says, and points at the screen, pressing her thighs together so the phone doesn’t fall down.

Her entire autumn half-term just pours out of her:

* The cabin at Skeikampen.
* Rafting in Sjoa.
* Harvesting in orchards.
* The skate park.
* The cinema.

“So what did you do in half-term, Eline?”

I quickly slide myself a bit forwards on the branch.

“Help! I’m about to fall off!” I say.

Thankfully, she begins to laugh at that and doesn’t ask again. Because what would I really tell her about the break; that Mum and Dad were home while I was at Granny’s cabin for three days? Three days of sitting on the pink thermal pad and listening to Gran complain about all the hikers, and then be forced to eat lamb shank? Thea would never understand why Mum couldn’t come along, even though she doesn’t work, and I wouldn’t be able to explain how she still can’t go on walks or even be far from the house.

From our branch I can see Eirik, who stands where he always does in front of the teacher’s parking lot and does tricks with the Coca Cola yo-yo he’s inherited from his mum. At the moment, he’s showing a trick to the janitor, Mario. Apparently, he also played with yo-yos when he was a kid, because *that’s* how long it’s been since yo-yos were cool. I’ve tried to explain to people what a yo-yo is, but no one gets it. I’ll be like: *It’s these two circles made of plastic or wood that are fastened together, and in the middle there’s this string all wound up which you release, and then the yo-yo goes up and down,* and they’re just like: *What?!*

“There’s Anna,” Thea says quietly, and points.

She automatically begins whispering, even though Anna is all the way on the other side of the playground with the girls in Year 7; the ones who have started developing boobs and who are taller than many of the boys.

“Her and her older sister have the same tracksuits,” says Thea, rolling her eyes.

“The light blue one she’s wearing right now?” I ask.

“Yeah, with the silver stripes down the side. Anna said it was so expensive she had use all of her pocket money,” Thea answers.

“Why’d she wanna do that?”

“It’s so dumb,” says Thea.

She turns to me again.

“Two of the girls in her sister’s class have *done it* behind the corner shop,” says Thea.

“No!” I say, and would probably have covered my mouth in shock if I didn’t have to hold the branch.

“Yup! Someone in her class saw the guy’s bum, and the girl was lying under him.”

“Ew!”

Thea grins with excitement and can’t sit still.

“Skveakin’ great …” she starts saying, and then I can’t hold onto the branch any longer! I don’t have a chance!

The laughter just crashes through my body, and all my muscles turn to pudding.

I let go and fall the two metres down, land on my knees with a thud. My legs are burning, and I hear Thea shout my name. A pinecone has dug into my calf, but what I’m mostly thinking is how weird it is to be down on the ground looking up when I was just up in the tree looking down.

Eirik comes running over, his yo-yo swinging behind him. He loOks scared.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

“Yeah, ‘course,” I say.

“Should I go get Signe?”

“No, it’s fine. I didn’t hurt myself too bad.” Thea has joined me on the ground now.

“Oh my god! Are you hurt?!” she asks.

“That’s what I asked, too!” says Eirik.

I get to my feet and shake my legs so that all the needles and dirt fall off.

“Skveakin’ great dive,” says Thea.

“What?” says Eirik.

“It’s nothing,” I say.

2

We push our desks to the sides of the classroom and sit down in a circle on the floor.

“Sit on the quilt!” says Signe. “Or I’ll have to send you home with a urinary tract infection.”

“A *urinary tract infection,”* Thea whispers to me and grins.

“How wonderful to see you all again!” Signe continues. “It almost seems like you’ve grown in just a week. Let’s hear about your holiday then; have you had a good time? What have you done?”

She turns to Anna, who sits next to her and is the first person in the circle.

“I’ve been to Copenhagen and in the Climbing Park,” says Anna.

“How fun,” says Signe.

“Lofoten,” says Håkon.

“Lucky duck,” says Signe.

“Portugal,” says Live.

“Oh, wow!” says Signe.

“Skeikampen and Sel,” says Thea.

“The mountains are magical in autumn,” says Signe.

“We were in New York,” Alfred shares.

“You don’t say,” says Signe.

“Our cabin and the zoo,” says Eirik.

“Wonderful,” says Signe, and looks at the next person, which is me.

“At my gran’s cabin in Stavern,” I say.

“Beautiful Stavern,” says Signe.

“*Just* there?” says Anna.

Signe blinks at Anna.

“That’s not *just* anything, Anna. When I was young, I spent all my holidays with my grandparents on the West Coast, and it was simply magical.”

“And I’ve also been to Disneyland in Paris,” I say, while looking down and pretending I have a mosquito bite on my neck.

I scratch for a long time, dig my nails into my skin.

“Seriously?!” Anna exclaims.

Thea says nothing, she doesn’t even look at me, just stares ahead as if she doesn’t know me.

“How exciting, Eline. Would you like to tell us about it?”

I try to come up with something I can say, but the only thing on repeat in my brain is: *Mickey Mouse. Minnie Mouse. Mickey Mouse. Minnie Mouse.*

“Let’s see some photos, then!” says Anna.

Signe shakes her head.

“No, we won’t bring out our phones now, but Eline can probably show you later on.”

While I nod, I imagine everything I’ll need to do after school today:

* Cut and paste pictures of me next to Peter Pan and Goofy.
* Memorise the names of all the rides.
* Download one of those French learning apps.
* Order a t-shirt with *I love Disneyland* printed on it.

While the others keep talking about their holidays, I notice that Eirik is glaring at me.

Eirik lives in the house next to mine. We often walk to and from school together. He has light blonde hair, completely straight apart from a wave in his fringe. It’s like a fountain sprouting out over his forehead. This one time, last winter, his spiral almost looked like a butthole. I was about to tell him so, but he’s not the type who would’ve laughed if I did.

Eirik is the type who laughs at:

* Jokes that my gran thinks are funny.
* Cars that drive off the road.
* His dog, Penny.

Signe inhales and exhales loudly through her nose, rolls her shoulders, and wiggles her bum for a better sitting position.

“So,” she says, and looks at everyone in the circle.

Håkon shoves Alfred’s leg, and Alfred shoves back, laughing. Signe reaches her arm to their legs and just holds her hand there while she looks at them, shaking her head.

“It was very exciting hearing about your half-term. Now I thought we’d continue with the topic *body and feelings*, which we started right after the summer holidays.”

Håkon and Alfred stare at Signe.

“The thing to remember is, we all have different bodies, so we have different thoughts and feelings, too.”

Most of us look around, but almost no one looks at each other. Signe stretches out her legs.

“Do you remember the book we started using in Year 3?”

*Everyone* remembers *that* book. *That* book was actually the reason Thea and I became best friends. It was full of pictures of naked bodies; from cute babies to wrinkly old people, and it got all of class 3A to shut up. Thea and I caught each other’s eye while Signe read aloud, and we realised we were both about to explode with laughter. We were only just about able to keep it in, and then during break, we talked about how much it had hurt; bite marks on the inside of our cheeks, sore abs, nail imprints on our palms. Ever since, we’ve kept on talking and playing together. We became best friends.

And now Signe is holding up *that* book and pointing at two teenage bodies.

“Even though you are all approximately at this stage, no one is exactly the same. Everyone develops at a different pace.”

“Can you tell how tall we’ll be when we grow up?” Håkon asks.

“No, I’m afraid not, but you often reach a similar height to your parents. Both your mum and dad are quite tall, so it’s probable you’ll be tall, too, Håkon.”

“My granddad is also super tall, like Dad,” says Håkon proudly.

“But my mum is pretty tall, even though Grappa is short and fat,” Alfred adds.

“Well, you’ll just have to wait and see,” says Signe, and clearly wants to turn the page, but Håkon’s not done.

“Everyone says I look just like my dad,” he says.

“Yes, I’d agree with that, you have very similar faces,” says Signe.

“Yeah, both of us have green eyes,” Håkon continues.

Eirik has brown eyes, even though his mother’s eyes are blue. So I suppose it must be his father, who he doesn’t know, who has brown ones. His mother didn’t have time to find herself a man, so she just went to Denmark and got some sperm.

I turn to look at him, because I really don’t think he looks like her at all. Eirik stares out into the classroom, his arms wrapped around his stomach. I hope it doesn’t hurt.

Signe picks up the book again.

“Do you know what happens to boys when they reach puberty?”

No one raises their hand, so Signe just lists the answers:

“Voice change. Growing feet. Pimples.”

I hold my breath and try to think about pencil sharpeners. The grey ones. With one small hole and one big. I bite my cheek again, so hard a tiny piece of flesh is torn off.

“And then you have the girls,” says Signe, and continues her list: “Hair on your crotch. Mammary glands. Menstruation.”

“Hermine has gotten her period!”

Everyone stares at Anna, who looks really proud. Signe smiles and turns to her.

“She has, has she. How wonderful. Remind me how old your sister is, Anna?”

“Fourteen,” Anna answers.

“Ah, right.”

“She’s had it for ages,” Anna adds. “And when she’s on her period, she can’t have PE or swimming.”

“Yes, indeed. But remember, with periods and the like, lots of people consider that quite private. It might be something you only tell your family and closest friends,” says Signe, her expression becoming stern.

Anna plays with her long plait, which one of the Year 7 girls did for her during break. She purses her lips.

“I’ve got to use the loo,” she says.

Signe narrows her eyes.

“I’ve *got to*,” says Anna.

“Very well, Anna.”

Anna gets up. Everyone looks at her, at her white trousers, at her bum, as if *she’s* the one who’s got her period. No one wants to think about period blood, but it’s like she’s making us.

Signe claps her hands.

“Alright, we’ve had quite a lot going on today, so I suggest we sit back at our desks with some pens and paper and draw it all out.”

While Signe hands out sheets of paper, I wonder what it is we’re supposed to draw. Spots? Big feet?

“Draw whatever you feel like,” says Signe.

When we’re drawing, we get to share desks and talk quietly to each other, so Thea pulls her chair over to me, as usual.

“I’m going to draw something from half-term, are you, too?”

I nod, even though I’d planned on drawing what I always draw nowadays, which is puppies with big eyes. I look at her white sheet, already filling out with mountains and sheep.

“Are you gonna draw something from Disneyland?” she asks.

I try to draw Donald Duck, but it doesn’t look anything like him.

“Why didn’t you tell me you went there?” Thea asks quietly.

Her voice sounds almost sad.

“I forgot,” I say.

Agh! I should’ve said something clever; like for example that we had planned on going, but tickets were sold out. And that telling the class that wouldn’t really work, since it’d be too much to explain. But it’s too late to say so now that I’ve already said I just forgot.

“Didn’t you have fun?”

“Sure.”

What does Donald wear? A suit? I put down my pencil and look at Thea, who is glaring at me.

“What is it?” I ask.

“Nothing,” she says, her voice surly.

“That’s an amazing drawing,” I say to Thea to make her like me again, but she just tidies away her colouring pencils without answering.

“Is that jumper new?” I add. “It’s really pretty.”

She shakes her head:

“It’s a hand-me-down.”

“It really suits you.”

She doesn’t answer. She always gets all quiet when she thinks I’m lying about something.

I didn’t mean to lie, of course, but my mouth just said it before I was able to stop it. And now I definitely can’t tell her that I’m not allowed to join the handball team! It’s only because Dad is too tired to drive me and do all the team activities and stuff at the moment. But Thea’s parents love those things, so Thea won’t understand why I won’t get to join up. She’ll probably think it’s because I don’t want to join with her.

3

When school is done, Eirik comes over to walk home with me, as usual. We don’t say anything to each other, not even *hello*, or: *alright, let’s go then*, we just shrug on our backpacks and start walking.

Eirik spins his yo-yo while he walks, he practices the “walking the dog” trick all the way to the corner shop. He can’t quite manage it, says it works best on a carpet, especially the stripy one they have in the hall at home.

Here are some of the things I know have happened by the corner shop, in addition to the whole sex thing:

* The shop lady, Gro, shat behind the shop once and picked up after herself with a doggy bag.
* Eirik and I buried a toad that had been run over next to the benches.
* Mum bought two ice creams for me in a row the summer after Vilde was born, and blamed *baby fog*.
* Gro had to stop two men from fighting in the queue. She threw a piping hot burger right at one of their faces.

“Wanna split a Fanta?” says Eirik. “Mum’s given me some cash!”

He puts down his backpack and digs out a black wallet, like the one my dad’s got.

I don’t answer.

“Why were you so weird in Signe’s lesson today?” I ask instead.

“I don’t remember,” says Eirik.

“Did your stomach hurt?”

“No.”

“Were you mad at me?”

Eirik looks up at me like I’ve said something completely mental, like for example: *Wanna set the shop on fire?*

“It just got a bit weird for me when Håkon started talking about his father.”

“Oh, right.”

“About how he knows how tall he is and all that.”

I sit on the bench next to the shop, but Eirik stays crouched down, still looking up at me.

“Whoever your dad is, he’s probably tall,” I say.

“Why do you say that?” Eirik asks.

“Well, you’re pretty tall. And he probably has blonde hair and a wave in his fringe, like you.”

Eirik looks up at his forehead, touches his hair.

“Did you hear Alfred, or what? He called his granddad *Grappa*.”

I laugh when I say it. Thea probably would’ve laughed her guts out, but Eirik isn’t the type who laughs at *Grappa.*

“Isn’t it just short for Grandpa?” he asks instead.

“Probably. I guess it’s a bit gangster; Grappa.”

Eirik looks at me.

“Lil’ Grappa,” I continue, and laugh loudly.

Eirik stands up.

“Do you like the normal Fanta best, or the other one?”

“I don’t really like Fanta.”

“You prefer Coke?”

I nod.

“Then I’ll buy a Coke,” says Eirik, and starts walking over to the counter.

“Is it all right if I get the one without sugar?” he shouts to me.

“Sure,” I shout back.

Soon enough, Eirik is back with a Coke.

“Didn’t you get any cups?” I ask.

“No.”

We look over at Gro. She’s stepped out to light a cigarette.

“Gro shouldn’t smoke,” says Eirik.

“No, she could die from cancer,” I say.

“And get yellow teeth,” Eirik continues.

He’s brought out his phone, googles smoking.

“And cardiovascular diseases, it says here. Lung cancer, smoker’s cough, strokes. And then it says that smoking during pregnancy increases the risk of miscarriage and stillbirths, too.”

I try opening the Coke bottle, but my hands are so sweaty I can’t get the cap off. I just screw and screw without getting a proper grip.

“Shit!” I say.

Eirik looks up from his phone.

“Should I have a go?” he asks.

“No!” I say, and feel my back getting warm.

Eirik looks down at his phone again.

“At least our mums don’t smoke,” he says.

“Yeah, my mum’s never smoked! I remember she ate loads of veggies and fish when she was pregnant with Vilde,” I say.

I stand up, give the Coke bottle to Eirik. It fizzes over when he twists the cap off. Then he gives the bottle to me, so I can have the first sip. I drink for a long time before handing it back.

“Do you want to come over to mine?” he asks.

“I can’t today.”

“Why not? We don’t have any homework.”

“I have to tidy my room,” I say, but really, I have to sort out all that stuff so it looks like I’ve been to Disneyland.

“I can help you,” says Eirik.

I look over at the shop. Gro has gone back inside.

“Okay, but my mum’s at home,” I say.

“We can be quiet,” says Eirik, because I’ve told him that Mum is often tired.

When we reach the end of Fjell Road, we see his mother in their window. Eirik waves at her, then points first at himself, then me and my house. She opens the window.

“I’m going over to Eline’s for a bit,” Eirik says.

“You‘ll have to come in and do your homework first,” his mother answers.

“We didn’t get any homework today.”

“Well, come in for an hour first anyway, so I can hear all about your day, and then you can go over to Eline’s after.”

“Okay,” says Eirik, and starts walking to his house.

I look over at mine. The curtains are completely still.

4

“Two slices of toast with butter and mini salamis, please.”

Mum nods slowly while staring out into thin air. We’re both sitting on the sofa. Or rather, I’m lying down, with my feet up against the wall behind the sofa. I don’t have the energy to start sorting out the Disneyland stuff just yet, so I’m watching *Prank Nation* on YouTube. Mum sits on the edge of the sofa. Her back is curved like a banana.

“With the butter spread out to the edges,” I add.

“Okay,” Mum answers.

“Like, not just pooled in the middle.”

Mum sighs super loudly, which she really doesn’t need to do. Then she gets up without looking at me and drags her feet into the kitchen.

Pranks I watch today:

* A man who pretends he has a real baby in a pram. He lets the pram roll down a hill.
* A woman who orders a taxi and tells the driver she just needs to get her dog. She comes back with a llama or an alpaca or something like that.
* A man who picks up a nappy from the rubbish bin that he’s put chocolate spread on, and everyone is shocked when he opens the nappy and begins to eat from it.
* Two little people wearing monster masks who hide behind shelves in the supermarket and scare shoppers.

I can’t hear any sounds coming from the kitchen; no crinkling of a bread bag, or knife on the cutting board, or creaking from the fridge. Not even any foot-drags. Nothing. I can make my own food, obviously, I’m eleven years old, I’m just checking if my mum can be bothered.

I sit up and go out to join her in the kitchen.

She stands with her back to the door, I can see her bed head. She’s been inside all summer and autumn.

“Slice the bread then, Mum!” I say loudly. “Slice it!”

The bread knife slips from her hand and hits the floor. Tears drip down onto the oatmeal bread.

I walk over, pick up the knife, pull the board with the wet bread on it to me, and cut two slices for myself, while Mum just stands there, useless. *Fox food*, that’s what Dad calls people who are totally helpless. Everyone says I look like Dad. *Shot straight out of your dad’s nose, Eline,* my granny says. It’s a terrible thing to say; like I’m full of snot.

I have nearly white hair and light blue eyes. I’ve tried saving for long hair my whole life, but it’s always gone poorly. When I was six, Mum tricked me into thinking that everyone got one of those *big-girl-cuts* right before they started school, and the hairdresser chopped my hair off to just under my ears. Which was much, much shorter than I had imagined, so the hairdresser put a little purple clip in my fringe to get me to smile again. Everything was fine until we got home, when Dad said: *Look at that, your hair is just like your gran’s!*

In Year 4, Mum and I had a fight about my hair, because she said I couldn’t have long hair when I refused to brush it. This was when she was pregnant and just wandered around the house getting worked up about everything. The scolding was non-stop, so in the end I just said: *fine!* and cut off a tuft of hair to get her to shut up. Which she did. And then I was back to Granny-hair.

Thea has the prettiest hair in our class. She and her little sister have the same black, shiny hair. Nora talks constantly, but I understand barely anything she says. She likes to dress up, and pretend to be a cat. When she’s angry, she throws herself on the floor, right on her back, as if she’s bending into a back bridge but forgets to catch herself. And then she screams. Her face crunches up, and those long eyelashes become wet and sticky. Then she shouts “no” to everything, even when her dad offers her a banana, which is her favourite food. When she’s done screaming, she just wants to be with Thea. She turns into this loose and tired gym bag, which sits on Thea’s lap with staring eyes and tries to breathe calmly, as if she’s nearly drowned. While she sits like that and stares into thin air, her dad will sometimes put a piece of banana in her warm hand, which she’ll smear all over Thea, along with the snot and drool from her crying. And still, I miss Vilde.

Lately, I’ve started thinking about where Vilde’s set place around the kitchen table would be. Probably between me and Mum. We haven’t emptied the Vilde Drawer yet. I open it sometimes if I’m home alone.

In the drawer:

* Vilde’s dummies.
* Plastic spoons.
* Bibs.
* Baby bottles.

Mum wipes her cheeks with some paper towel.

“Maybe a holiday would do you some good,” I say, and go over to her to make sure she’s listening. “Wouldn’t it be nice to go to Paris?”

Mum smiles sadly. I block her way out.

“I’m happy to start researching, you won’t have to think about anything,” I say. “I can find a hotel and book plane tickets, you just have to talk to Dad and say the word.”

“We won’t be going to Paris just now, sweetheart,” she says with a blocked nose; her whole head must be stuffed with snot!

“I didn’t mean now, but over Christmas or something? It’s not as if you work, and Dad’s said he’s got lots of time off saved up.”

But then someone rings the doorbell.

“I’m going to lie down for a bit,” Mum says, and walks around me.

5

I go and open the door. It’s Eirik. He starts whispering the moment he steps into the house, and then he walks towards my bedroom in slow motion, as if we’re on the moon.

When we enter my room, he sits down on my bed, right on the white and yellow striped duvet.

I like having a tidy room, so I usually ask for things that can fit in my chest of drawers, for example:

* Drawing paper and markers.
* Games.
* Small teddies.
* Stickers.
* T-shirts.

“Wanna watch pranks?” I say, sitting down next to Eirik.

“Yeah, go on then.”

I search for *pranks scaring people* and click on the first result.

“Bushman prank,” I say, and laugh really loudly, even though I’ve seen it before.

Eirik doesn’t laugh, doesn’t even smile.

“I hope we’re not disturbing your mother,” he says.

“Huh?” I say.

“Maybe we should laugh silently.”

“It’s fine,” I say, and put on the next prank.

“She’s probably really tired after that trip to Disneyland?”

I don’t respond.

Instead, I search for funny cat videos:

* Cats that try to jump from one shelf to another and miss.
* Cats who fall into the bathtub.
* Cats who attack their own reflection.
* Cats who run into walls.

“Who picked up your mail while you were in Disneyland?” Eirik asks.

“That was Mads, actually, or whatever his name is.”

“COD-Mads? Call of Duty-Mads?” Eirik asks in a shocked voice.

“Yes,” I answer.

“You talked to him?!”

“No, my dad made the arrangements.”

“Did he get paid for it?”

“Yes,” I say, but then quickly correct myself: “Or no, he got Diet Coke.”

“Diet Coke?”

“Why are you asking so many questions? Is this an inquisition, or what?”

“It’s just so weird that you suddenly went to Disneyland,” says Eirik. “That’s all.”

“I don’t think it’s weird,” I say.

“I do,” says Eirik.

“Well, I don’t,” I say sharply.

Suddenly someone knocks. We jump.

Mum opens the door.

“Hello, Eirik, have you come over?” she says. “How lovely.”

I see that Mum’s cried again.

“We didn’t get any homework today,” Eirik explains.

“Oh, okay, very well, that’s nice then.”

Eirik sends me a hard look, as if we’re in the middle of a stand off, before turning around and looking at Mum.

“Did you have fun in Disneyland?” he asks.

“What was that, Eirik?”

I turn up the sound on YouTube. Meow. Crash. Laughter.

“Eline said you were in Disneyland during half-term,” Eirik continues.

Mum just looks at me. I can feel her stare, and I seriously wish I could just melt into the mattress and turn into a bedsheet.

“In Disneyland?”

*Shit!*

“Eline, can you turn down the volume!” says Mum.

“No,” I mumble.

“Have you told Eirik that we were in Disneyland?” Mum’s almost shouting.

“That’s not what I said!” I say loudly.

“Yes, you did!” says Eirik.

“Well you misunderstood me,” I try.

“It’s what you told the entire class!”

Mum turns and looks right at me.

“What’s going on, Eline?” she says with her swollen crying-face.

“Then you heard wrong, Eirik!” I say.

The tablet is hot in my lap. The cat videos keep playing.

“Signe heard it, too,” Eirik says.

“Eline, turn down the volume!” Mum repeats. “We don’t need to yell at each other.”

“I have to use the loo,” I say.

I put the tablet on the bed, squeeze past Mum, go to the bathroom, and lock the door.

I can’t just sit there with them looking at me thinking I’m a big fibber, that there’s something wrong with me. I can’t help it, I’m just a master at speaking before I think.

Mum knocks on the door.

“I’m on the toilet!” I shout.

“I just wanted to say that I’m going to go lie down again, you see I’ve got such a headache.”

“Okay.”

We used to have Vilde’s changing table next to the sink. In the side pocket was:

* Soap.
* Oil.
* Talcum powder.
* Bum lotion.

My phone buzzes in my pocket. It’s Eirik calling. I don’t answer it.

“Oh my god, can’t he just send a text,” I whisper, annoyed.

He calls again, he’s always such a nag.

“What!” I answer. “I’m on the loo, y’know.”

“Are you done soon?”

“Do you have to go home?” I ask. “You can just leave!”

“Not yet.”

“Well, I’m not done yet, and I won’t be done for a while, I can tell,” I say.

“I can wait.”

He’s so clueless!

I push the flush, even though I haven’t actually used the toilet, and then go back to my room.

Eirik is sitting on the same spot on my bed, right by the pillow.

“Hey,” he says, smiling.

“Hey,” I say, and sit back down.

“I’m googling Disneyland.”

My stomach clenches.

“I want to learn all about it, in case me and my mum go there sometime. We can read about it together.”

“Okay?” I say.

Now he’s holding the tablet.

“Check it out,” he says. “They even have a Halloween festival! And Tower of Terror!”

I lean in towards the screen.

“So cool! And check out Splash Mountain! Do you think you get super soaked there, or what?” Eirik says.

“Oh yeah, dead certain!” I say.

“There’s that fairy from Peter Pan, Tinker Bell.”

“Vilde probably would’ve liked her.”

“Maybe you can buy a tiny Tinker Bell figurine if you ever go there again? Or if my mum and I go, we can buy one for you.”

My face gets hot. Because Eirik obviously knows I lied.

“Imagine if our families went there together!” he exclaims.

“That would be so cool!” I say, because it totally would be.

“Should we look up what we can eat there? Mum likes to eat organic,” says Eirik.

“Sure.”

“Captain Jacks, that’s got to be a pirate restaurant.”

“Tap on it and see. No, tap on Snack Bar!”

“Cookie Kitchen!” we chorus.

Eirik’s stomach rumbles. I rest my head on it, like I used to do with Mum when she was pregnant.

“It’s like a thunderstorm in there,” I say and Eirik starts to laugh, making my head bounce.

I sit back up.

“What are you having for dinner today?” he says.

“I dunno. Dad won’t be home until late.”

“I’ve ordered pancakes with bacon and blueberries,” says Eirik.

“Wow!”

“Do you want to eat with us?” he asks.

“Yes,” I answer, because it’s been ages since I last ate pancakes, and I can’t even remember the last time we had it at home.

6

Eirik’s mother has just started frying up the pancakes when we come in the front door. A wagging Penny comes up to us, but she always wants to greet Eirik first. I also want a dog; someone who’d be most excited to see *me*.

“Is that my sixth graders? Come sit down, the food’ll be ready soon,” Eirik’s mum says cheerfully, and strokes Eirik’s hair.

We sit in the kitchen and watch Runa cooking her pants off.

Pancake making:

* Stare at the frying pan.
* Get hot.
* Be starving.
* Stare at the frying pan.

Eirik sets the table. He puts orange napkins on the heavy plates, unscrews the lid of the homemade blueberry jam, gets out the milk, asks if he can put out the sugar bowl.

“Oh, fine,” says his mother, who has to take off her thick jumper and wipe the condensation off her glasses.

“Here you go,” she says, and puts the pancakes on the table.

The sweetness of the jam and the saltiness of the bacon; it tastes so insanely good I want to close my eyes.

“Mum,” says Eirik, “I have a suggestion for our holiday next summer.”

“You’ve started thinking about your summer holidays already?” his mum says while lighting the candles on the table.

“Yeah,” Eirik answers, his mouth full of pancake.

“What were you thinking then?”

“I thought we could go to Disneyland in Paris.”

“Oh? Yes, I suppose you’d like that.”

“Yeah, Eline and I researched it some online, there’s loads there for adults, too.”

“Oh, there is?” his mum asks. She smiles while she fills up our glasses with milk. “What’s that then?”

“Green areas, good coffee, croissants, Dolly.”

She looks at Eirik and laughs.

“You’ve thought of everything, haven’t you, Eirik.”

Eirik takes another pancake, puts *both* jam *and* sugar on it.

“If Eline and her fam go too, we could all hang out there.”

“Oh, have you planned on going to Disneyland next summer, Eline?”

I lose my grip on the pancake roll, so a big drop of blueberry jam falls on the tablecloth. First I look down at the new spot, then up at Eirik’s mum.

“Don’t worry about it, Eline,” she says.