

Cappelen Damm Agency *Spring 2025*



Who by Friday

Who by Friday? is a novel about wanting and not wanting, love between friends, a stupid mistake, a mother's troubled heart, painful loss and intense longing.

Nelly takes a day off one Friday in April. Her friends Gry, Unni, Mari and Ellinor are coming for dinner. Nelly wants to spend the day choosing flowers, wine and food, going to yoga and calling the man she sometimes sleeps with. But she is uneasy. It's a changeover day, Linda is supposed to be going to her father's, and apparently Grandma has had a bad fall. In addition, Nelly has forgotten something she should have remembered. How firm is the ground beneath her feet at this point in her life? Is she losing Linda? Will she die alone?

The spring evening is surprisingly warm. Her friends arrive, clink glasses of bubbly and smoke on the terrace. The evening is heating up.

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Who by Friday
Emely Benedicte Kahrs

Emely Benedicte Kahrs *b. 1975*

Emely Bendicte Kahrs (b. 1975) was born in Bergen and lives in Oslo. She's an architect and author. Her debut, Gallop for the Black Horse, came in 2017, and since then she's published several novels and a poetry collection.



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Synopsis

In *Who by Friday* we follow Nelly one specific Friday, from morning to night. The text is a stream of thoughts, a shopping trip, a yoga lesson and preparation for an evening with her friends.

Nelly's daughter Linda has left to start her week at her father's, her grandmother had a grim fall and should be checked in on, and will she find time to sleep with her lover before the guests arrive?

Underneath the practicalities trembles an existential insecurity concerning who Nelly is in the world. Can she find peace with the fact that she might stay single? What kind of flowers should she chose? What is the right menu for the evening? Is she a good enough mother? Will she keep up her career as an architect – or can she even call it a career anymore?

Nelly has taken the day off after weeks of working on an architectural competition and spends time shopping for flowers, wine and food. Her ex, and the father of her daughter, announces that he has met someone new, and Nelly fears that Linda will move in with him permanently. While shopping, Nelly observes Linda smoking in the parking behind the grocer's and she realizes that there might be a lot she doesn't know about her daughter. She also keeps bothering herself by a vague feeling that she might have forgotten to attach an important document when sending in the entry to the architectural competition.

Finally, her friends arrive, food and wine is on the table, there is talking, drinking and maybe even an urge to go all in and hit the town.

Trough Nelly's eyes the novel explores an unrest; who are we to each other? The text is restless and searching. It revolves around the meaning of having other people in our lives and explores the dynamics of Nelly's life and relations.

In *Who by Friday* Nelly is haunted as much by the language of her own thoughts as by the events themselves. Inner and outer events melt together and create a Friday-mix of guilt of breaking up the family, shame for being a bad employee, fear of losing her daughter and not least for dying miserable and alone. But what the hell, it's Friday and her friends might come any minute now.

Who by Friday by Emely Benedicte Kahrs

English sample translation by Lise Lærdal Bryn

If I die on a Friday afternoon, it'll take days for someone to find me, worst case scenario, a full week. Robin might have a question for me, but no earlier than Monday, something about Linda, school, periods, he calls and gets no answer, ends up sending a text. When no response has come by evening, he calls again, again no answer, hmm, he thinks that I'm unruly and out on a Monday bender, taking advantage of being Linda-less, that I can never take it easy, that I'm on a ceaseless hunt for someone better than him, and incurably bad at responding to boot. An acidic annoyance builds in him over the course of the evening, he feeds on it, savors it. Tuesday he sends another text, what abdication of responsibility, and Wednesday yet another, and that evening he asks Linda to swing by, she has to pick up a cleanser she'd forgotten anyway, and that's when she finds me, the poor unfortunate soul, I'm stinking dead, she'd unknowingly been motherless for days, a widow's child who had never seen death before, but now she sure sees it, it oozes out of me, her beloved mother, stiff hard unapproachable, nothing moves, up nor down, clean out of this world, it is all too late, there's nothing more for it, Linda falls forward in despair, her hands are punctured; the sight, the smell, the sap of me seeping into her palms, her bloodstream.

If I die on a Monday afternoon, it might take four days. Because I'll have answered Robin's Monday question, he and Linda have a typical week together, nice if not a bit tiring, too. Thursday evening it's Unni whose text goes unanswered, and Friday she calls on her commute, not because she's worried but because she's impatient, she wants to meet for a drink after work, smoke and summarize the week and eventually longingly look around for what's out there, where, everywhere, simply anywhere but here, wheresoever, whatsoever. Because we're friends. Because we've known each other since we were fifteen and Unni started at my school. When a second text goes unanswered, she sends an email, asks if I've gone away, if I'm tied up in meetings, what's going on, do I want to meet at Juret or

Café Sara, what am I in the mood for, the choice is mine. In the early afternoon she resorts to calling Linda, fully cognizant of how drastic this is, given Linda is at Robin's and calling would only cause worry, but all Linda says is I think she's at home, and Unni gets this nebulous knot in her stomach, she starts running, jowls spewing fear she swallows down, she is pale and out of breath when she rings José-on-the-second-floor's doorbell, and together they break into my apartment, Unni and José, in unison pitching a sideways assault on my front door, one two three times until it gives way and their shoulders smart, and there I lie, stone-dead. Unni and José hold each other, fathoming nothing, thinking: how long has she lain here all alone.

I suppose my job would notice something, too. When follow-up emails start finding their way to Niels. Initially they had simply assumed I was caught up in meetings I'd forgotten to put in the calendar, but then the plants start to wither, something's not right, Niels will say to Une, but they'll probably leave me be all the same, because I prefer to not be disturbed, he knows that, and what's it to him, we're just colleagues, if I need a few days without someone breathing down my neck then it's not his place to get in the way of that, you're a free spirit, he said to me once, a free and independent spirit.

But I won't die. I'll get going, wake Linda, make breakfast and pack lunch, all with an immortal feeling in my gut, the one that comes with the morning light, Friday's the best, with comp time for me it's an omelette for Linda, I'll give her a hot chocolate, I'll give her everything I have. In the shower the water warms and massages me, the streams running down my body are almost itchy, I wind and twine a towel around my hair, good morning sweetheart, have you slept well? Springtime makes for lighter days, the birds returning in migratory chevrons, I relate to our little twosome life with steadfastness. The bread dough has risen overnight in the cold oven, I whisk eggs, then brush, I'll serve her warm bread with melted butter, I halve oranges, twist them until the juice trickles down and I pour out a glass, I open the windows, I air out her duvet and book movie tickets for next Friday, exactly a week and a school-day will have passed and she'll come back to me.

When I go to the flower shop early in the day, there's a greater chance of being alone. Other people with their chatter and movement bewilder me, and so I often end up just buying bouquets from the bucket by the register, a *du jour* of sorts, I hate how the shop assumes it knows what I'll want before I do.

I lift a dark blue, maybe deep purple flower to my nose, carefully hold it with my thumb and index finger, wary of the small hairs on the stem. Poppy anemone. The shop is quiet, all I can hear is the florist, a tall man with long fingers, moving pots in the back room, a running tap, the rustle of paper; I can deliberate unobserved, at a few minutes past ten.

Distinct yet soft, it's hard to determine where the scent is coming from, where it hits as it travels up my nose, I pull it all the way in, fill my lungs with it, fill my whole being, nothing pricks or tears at me, it is a wave of wellbeing which, when I close my eyes, turns into salt water lapping at coastal rock, the sound of the ocean, my eyelids from the inside when the whole world winks out. I put the anemone back in its glass vase, it glides through the water and makes a little thud, or maybe not a thud, a softer sound, but a sound, still, when it hits the bottom.

I walk around the table. The vases, glass and ceramic, are crammed together, there are long flowers with billowing white petals, short ones with soft papery leaves the pink of Linda's lipgloss; leaves like velvet, like silk, some pebbled like ears of corn; stamina, sepals, carpels. There are yellow balls topping brown twigs, verdant foliage, shiny leaves and matte, coarse, prickly; some of the stalks are hefty and strong, some are teetering, and, I sense, hollow. Where a poppy has buckled an unsmoothable wrinkle has been furrowed, the flowerhead hangs and fights for every leaf, gasping for breath. Linda probably keeps her lipgloss in her right pocket, fishes it out repeatedly at break-time, swipes her bottom lip, twisting the applicator as she puts it back in the tube, presses her upper lip against her teeth, she paints herself blank and invulnerable, wants to forget which parent she's going home to after school, she's going to Robin, wants to go to Robin, her duffel packed and ready in the hallway before five, as usual, a piece of me tearing off, as usual, I become smaller and smaller, try patching myself up with how lovely to see you and Nutella, and I am so small, so very small, what kind of embrace can I muster without cracking apart, I'll drown her in my safe arms, I am the seas and the skies put together in my love for her, it

was my milk that watered her; hide away with me, come be with me, only me, my love, my everything, I am the one who is drowning.

My phone dings:

Grandma fell in the bathroom. Hugs, Mom.

It was only a few weeks ago that they didn't know where to put her. Too dependent on help for a retirement home, too healthy for the hospital. I'm glad she has moved into what appears to be a nice enough nursing home, not far from here, near where she grew up. She weighs thirty-nine kilos, her life flaking apart from missing her husband. My granddad started getting all muddled, his memory crumbled, and eventually no longer called my grandma Elisa, but rather Clara and Margot and Tutta, and so she walked right up to him and she squeezed and squeezed and squeezed and squeezed, completely wordlessly, she told me, and I cried then, how pitifully I cried, my chest caved in, will I be as good as her, will I have someone to miss? Someone I fear will die before me? Someone to hold, even when he no longer recognizes me? Or will I be alone? And do I maybe find that desirable, liberating? I of course want Linda with me, God willing. Will I still know who I am? I can only hope, listen, I want to grow old, no, ancient, live longer than all the rest, as long as Grandma has, I should call Mom, burrow into her the way I never do anymore.

The flower selection will depend somewhat on the menu, and vice versa. I want it to be breezy, unpretentious. If I do decide to go for a sort of tapas it should be easy enough, as a teeming table means that a number of vases can mingle with the dish-ware, both tall and short. A single flower in one, several in the other, easily slotting into the seemingly random ever-varying table setting. Just as the girls pass around and shuffle the bowls, so too will the vases be moved to make room for whatever needs accommodating at any one moment.

If, on the other hand, I choose to make a mussel chowder, which in many ways is the more sophisticated option, the center of the table will be emptier. Which might very well be preferable, it is cleaner and calmer, the conversation may change, too, without all those interruptions, the can you please pass me the beans, the manchego, the olives, the can you grab me one of those rolls, thanks. But such a simple table setting, the pot of chowder and a single large bouquet, does bear two obvious risks. The one, that Ellinor will move the vase to the kitchen island, gorgeous flowers, I'll put them here shall I, so we can see each other better. The other, that Mari has discovered she is allergic to mussels, or even seafood in general. I don't know which would be worse. I could forestall Ellinor by instead putting out a handful of low vases with short-stemmed flowers. Then there would be no need to move them, moving vases that aren't blocking anything would be altogether too weird, although it can be hard to tell, with Ellinor, whether she actually cares about ensuring we can see one another or simply has a need to demonstrate that she doesn't care about superficial bullshit like table-setting, trivial details, her being oh-so-bohemian, but it's phony, in reality she simply doesn't *want* to be someone who cares about trivialities, how terribly bourgeois, she thinks we can't see how her vanity drapes over her, heavy and impermeable.

Mari cancelling is almost more the rule than the exception, no matter the menu; she's prone to cancelling long after she's meant to have arrived, sometimes for no better reason than that she can't decide what to wear. She never thinks she looks good enough, expounds on how this and that happened, regarding her hair, the hold-up, that dumb blouse. It almost makes me hope for a cancellation, I'd rather the chagrin of listening to Mari's excuses: I'm so sorry, I'm just not feeling well, my head is pounding, so unfortunately

I won't be able to make it tonight, though it's not for want of wanting to. Had I lived out on the island she definitely would have initially said yes, to appease me, but then cancelled, no way in hell she's about to sacrifice precious hours to the tram and ferry and bus, then the same for the return, which I guess is understandable, it's a good thing I live here, near my workplace, my home, my girlfriends, only it's not so free or fertile or full of sky as out there, but one day, maybe, when Linda has finished school, all the rooms more full of air.

When I take my comp day, I can go visit Grandma. Make the time to stay with her a while, see with my own eyes how she's faring and not just rely on my mother's report. It isn't a long drive, I'll bring her a flower and put it in a vase on her nightstand, then we'll smile, then we'll hug. Then again, yoga. It's not often I have an hour to spare in the middle of the day for flowing in forty-two degrees, the sweat running, dripping, detoxing, and everyone's joints are so flexible, all of us limber and supple and slim, yet muscular and young; we'll begin by breathing in fours, in two three four, hold two three four, out two three four, hold two three four; afterwards, invincible.

The lilies' scent is intense, almost sickening, rotten. How can something be to the eye so beautiful, yet the nose so repulsive. Because it is poisonous, dangerous?

Several of the flowers here would suit the small low vases I have at home, three of them, of glass. Not identical, but similar enough, and if I'm lucky and the evening sun reaches the table, the water in the translucent vases will make the light dance on the tablecloth. I check my weather app, between eight and nine a sunny cloud, it could make it inside, that dancing light, and so the spring, and so life itself, into our veins.

The deep purple anemones, its flat flower like a pirouetting skirt, would actually work quite well if cut short, though snipping the long stem feels drastic, robbing it of one of its foremost qualities, given that perhaps height is integral to the anemone's elegance. But the blue, or rather purple, flowers are so dazzling the girls can't be but utterly taken in by them, as long as I put them in low vases and ensure they're easily visible to everyone around the table, how there's a tiny black ball in the middle sprouting thin little arms, like microphones, and the girls won't miss a longer stem, they won't notice a lack of elegance, all they will see is beautiful, vibrant, playful.

A bigger vase of long-stemmed flowers in the middle of the table would make for a stiffer impression than many small ones, but I don't really want it to be stiff, I only want stiffness when whisking peaks or there's a penis involved, imagine signing away your access to regular stiffies, but that's divorce for you, the penis has ceased to be interesting, whether it's stiff or it's flaccid.

I pick up one of the yellow balls, dry as dust. A single one of these would look best in a narrow vase, maybe one of my old bottles, but is that a touch too sparse? I hold up two anemones with the yellow ball, observe how the yellow one sticks up further than the others, maybe I need more, is it a bit paltry, the three flowers gathered like this? No, there is something natural about it, as if I hand-picked them from the garden, even though such a thing would be impossible as early as the 12th of April. Besides, I can never manage to grow the type of garden one can simply go and pick flowers from, the girls will make of it what they will, that at Nelly's the flowers are all store-bought, that's just the way it is.

In Ellinor's garden, there's no trace of goutweed. In her garden, one striking blossoming follows the next in a carefully constructed play of colors. Not too blaring and colorful, and not too stern and minimalistic either, it looks like nature's very own dance. I really lucked out this year, Ellinor might say, I just scattered some seeds I found in the shed, what a treat it's all grown so abundant. She is radiant in her patterned dresses, her feet bare long before it's really warm enough.

I get the three flowers, Grandma would have liked the anemones, the dry stalk topped by the yellow ball is mostly there to complement the blue flowers. I'll only buy these this go round, I can walk by the other flower shop, the little one up by the park, later on, see if they've got anything in to fall in love with. And I'll have plenty of time to come back here in the afternoon to buy more anemones if it turns out that these three together do look too meager in the vase at home.

By the cash register are the begonias. Grandma always kept three begonias on the windowsill overlooking the garden, a pink double-flowered kind. Three, so that should one of them have died, she'd always have at least two remaining, an insurance against her own lax maintenance routines, or simply lacking knowledge of plant care, leading to emptiness, to loneliness, she kept them in white glazed pots with small stumpy feet.

Look how strong-willed they are, she said, they flower again and again, as if showing off to one another, keeping them is a singular joy, she said, blessed be the small wonders of nature, how they enliven our everyday life. I don't know if she still has all three, if there's room on the windowsill in the new home. Mechanical beds and linoleum floors, more or less maintenance-free, life is better for her there now that she's so poorly, Mom says. She was allowed to bring her own nightstand and that photo of Grandpa's boat and a crocheted blanket to put over the bed during the day when she ventures out into the common room to join the other inhabitants, who she doesn't know yet. Who are not her family. They're easy to talk to so long as they talk first, she had told Mom, they're just all so incredibly old, she had said and laughed at the woman who'd been a teacher her whole life, who now wanders around in a nightgown both day and night, doesn't like the food, and addresses everyone like they're her students.

That feeling of being able to wander about the city streets on a Friday morning. It's been a while since I last took my comp time. I prefer saving up my hours for the summer, lengthen my vacation as much as possible on both ends: start it earlier than I'm supposed to, be back later in August than is expected. But lately I've felt a bit fatigued, I think, or have I just started giving fewer fucks?

The competition entry was handed in on Tuesday, then two long days of follow-up work, all the file-sorting has tired me out, there's no way in hell I'm about to sit there and sort yellow folders on-screen for yet another day, I've done what I'm good at, sketched until the final line was drawn, refined the blueprints until every room met the square footage to an inch, compact yet airy, orderly yet playful. I deserve a break, in fact it annoys me that I have to mark down the day as a comp in my time sheet, shouldn't a day off after a big due date be the standard? Can't we expect a little extra time off as reward for our hard work? I haven't even informed one of my day off, I just put it in the shared calendar before leaving the office yesterday: Nelly comp day, pink letters filling the Friday column.

I don't know if it's better to have the time off and think about Linda leaving, or let the work disturb dissuade distract me from my reveries. The Friday exchange. Our short week together is over, and it'll be a long seven days until the next time I see her, she's leaving me, abandoning me, I confuse it with rejection, it's harder than the cold, the type of cold it is when there's nowhere warm you can go, this is something I've asked for myself, an arrangement I forced her into, I'm the one leaving abandoning her, I don't know.

What I do know:

Heart palpitations.

Staring into the dark ceiling.

Linda trudging home to Robin's place after school. She lies at the top of my stomach, stretching out every limb, wobbly knees, tensed ankles and wrists. With her teddies and my shawl in her bag, she is simultaneously fifteen and three. Call me at any time, at any time, I repeat and pull her taut and too slack teenaged body close, but not for too long, we can't turn this into a proper farewell, it's just a standard see you, because she'll be back in no time, and it's best to pretend that Fridays are nothing out of the ordinary, a day like all the rest when she doesn't leave.

That heaviness, a weight in my throat, but no tears, understand the instability she must deal with always coming and going, her resignation, help her carry it, don't show any pain, smile and say things are fine, or maybe it's best not to say anything at all, and certainly don't let yourself imagine the worst, that she falls down a steep slope, scrapes all her flesh off, there's no saving her, she is run over from behind and dies instantly, she gets drunk on moonshine and is dumped freezing and drenched in a ditch, her skin is green and there's foam around her mouth when a passerby chances to find her, and I don't know about it for many unmotherly hours, because she's staying with Robin, it's his week, when I arrive her grave is already full to bursting of flowers and teddies, and before I throw myself over her body, I shove Robin up against the wall with both hands, with everything I've got, he tilts his head and rounds his eyes, look at what you've done, had it not been for your incurable egoism it would never have come to this. Never.