

From *A Better Man*

(*Ølhunden Berit*)

by Thomas Seeberg Torjussen

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“Look at them,” Tom’s grandfather would say.

Nothing more. Just: *Look at them*. Sometimes he would shake his head slightly, but more often than not he simply sat there, stock still. It might be Muslims on the evening news, or young people in weird clothes hanging around the local kiosk. Boys who looked like girls, or vice versa. And Tom, ever the dutiful grandson, would look at them. And he would look at his grandfather, because he didn’t entirely understand what he was looking at, but nor, it seemed, did his grandfather, and that was sort of the point.

The most important thing was that they looked at them, because they were *different*. That much was certain.

He’s dead now, Tom’s grandfather. Developed a throaty rattle and started smelling of piss, then kicked the bucket, as he would say. He no longer said *Look at them* towards the end. But he continued to watch television and drink red wine, and occasionally he would shout at the TV: “And so what?!”

Tom is a grown man now. A mature man, some might say. Forty-five years-old. It isn’t too late for him, not yet.

We’re going to take a look at Tom. We’ll watch what he does and listen to what he says, just as everything is going to hell. That should be more than enough.

Maybe we’ll even spend a bit of time inside his head – but not too much. Because a man isn’t his thoughts, but the sum of his actions.

To start with, Tom’s actions are detestable. Then they gradually get better, that much can be revealed. We’ll see a larvae break out of its pupa like the ugliest butterfly you’ve ever seen. We’ll watch it fly too close to the sun and plummet to the ground, and we’ll see it get up again, have its wings ripped off, and, for a brief moment, look like a dick, before it grows arms and legs and finally becomes a kind of man. Whatever that is.

Let's take a look at him in his usual habitat – the computer screen. The screen is his room. The Internet is the village that has raised him and the pot in which he simmers.

His face has a blue cast, and his frontal lobe tingles. Tiny eyes, small nose, and a gorgeous, stoic beard.

But enough about his face. A man isn't his face, either. Let's take a look at what he's doing, because most of what Tom does is digital.

A screen recording from the evening Tom has just spent on his Mac would give a good picture of him. Here's someone who operates mouse and keyboard with a quick and expert hand. Tom was going through puberty when the Internet was born, and as everyone knows, necessity is the mother of having to learn HTML.

Now he's a procrastinating and lightning-fast web user whose attention is spread far and wide. He flits between high and low, between dumb memes and longer societal analyses from both the left and right of the culture war. He sharpens his sentences with care, spices them up with academic jargon and the locker room humour of the edgelord.

Social media stalking, online newspapers and discussion threads. Windows are opened, closed, minimised at breakneck speed. This is a man who knows his shortcuts.

A story about a celebrity leads to a compromising image of said celebrity. A foreign word from an article in English leads to Wikipedia. Photos of 'friends' on Facebook lead to the profiles of the wives of said 'friends'. He checks out houses they're selling; we take a closer look at the asking prices. This is the general online snooping that most of us undertake, only it happens at lightning speed and with extreme proficiency, as if the keyboard is an extension of Tom's body. Sometimes he posts on obscure forums or under pseudonyms on people's walls. Pointless little provocations, cold irony, contempt, or just plain old humour. Not without their wit and linguistic flair, and equally good whether written in English or Norwegian.

He reads a story about the comedian Live Stensvaag, who's speaking out about the time she was almost raped. An avalanche of sarcasm around *almost* being raped follows in the comments. Tom, under the pseudonym Rationaldo, writes: *Almost is no boast*, before with a hop, skip and a jump he moves on.

He clicks on another commentor's profile and reads the last thing he posted, an article about a right-leaning think tank.

Now using the pseudonym Mascurevolt, he posts a link to an article called 'Critical theory as applied mass psychology, and the deconstruction of gender in European culture'. Whether he's read the whole thing is debatable, but he reposts it anyway.

Pop-up notifications appear to left and right. At the same time, he regularly checks how many people have liked his *Almost is no boast* comment. It's quite a lot. He won that comments section.

All this comes to an abrupt halt when Tom receives a message via WhatsApp. From someone whose name, we see, is Maria. Tom enlarges this one thing: the message from Maria. In her profile picture, she is radiant. Young, beautiful and strong. Her English, however, is so-so.

*As always your letter makes me warm and happy. You are so smart! I cannot wait to fly to Norway and finally meet you! Why is it three days feel so long!? (Emojis) Should I bring warm clothes? Will you pick me up in airport? Lately I read everything I can about Norway and it sounds like the most fantastic place in the world!*

Tom freezes.

Norway... *the most fantastic place in the world.*

The cursor blinks slowly in the reply box.

Tom realises that he's about to fall for a trick he's read about but never been able to try: if you want to know the truth about a woman, praise her to the skies in front of her girlfriends. Then it's only a matter of time before one of them cracks and squeals, "Oh, I'm not sure about *that!*" Then comes a correction, a splotch in the perfect image you've painted, and in that splotch lies the truth about the woman and all the future trouble that awaits you. If the intention behind Maria's last statement was to learn the truth about Norway, well then here it comes.

Most fantastic place in the world? ... I'm not so sure about that...

His fingers itch. The cursor blinks. Tom replies.

*Dear Maria. Of course I will pick you up, I am not the kind of man who treats ladies like men. I am glad you are excited about Norway, but I must warn you, it is not the Utopia that you may have googled. If you have read mainstream media stories about Norway, you have been exposed to propaganda from a well-camouflaged tyranny of political correctness. The agenda of radical feminism here is tied up to such a level of prestige that the price is being hidden at any cost. This toxic femininity has left the Scandinavian man in ruins. Depressed, his kids are taken from him, he crowds the prisons and the suicide statistics and is forced to see his sons being diagnosed with ADHD and lobotomized with ritalin for no other reason than being born boys (fortunately I am not among them). Norway loves weakness and hates real men. Loves the unemployed, the lazy, the burned-out wimps, the immigrants and the retards. Norway loves any minority and loathes white males. This is not enabled by social*

*democracy as such. That's where the pompous cunt Anders Behring Breivik was wrong. Who enabled this mess? State-feminism did. Karin Stoltenberg. Gro Harlem Brundtland and all their daughters, 'men' included. Without whom Norway would have law, order and rationalism in its center.*

He rants at a furious pace. Hammers one nail after another into the coffin of vagina state Norway. Cunt Country. Vaginastan.

Behind the clacking of the keyboard the rumble of the city can be heard, but the sound is muffled, as if inside a slipper.

Outside is a small, urban park. People of all orientations and skin colours walk across it; a fountain creates a kind of roundabout at its centre. Fathers with pushchairs, girls on longboards, alcoholics, drug dealers, seagulls eating discarded kebabs and Swedes selling mobile phone subscriptions.

You can buy vinyl and second-hand clothes here. You can sit on uncomfortable chairs and eat ramen, and in the midst of this hipster soup there's a fashion boutique for mature women, so untouched by the surrounding gentrification that it's almost become cool. Hallstensen, the store is called, the name written in ornate script on its Art Deco-style sign. Look past the mannequins in the window, and you'll see Tom's stoic beard trembling with fervour as he hammers home the truth about Norway to Maria.

He's smart, short, a little chubby. Wearing tweed. His MacBook stands on a glass counter, leather gloves neatly arranged in mahogany drawers beneath it. The city's cultural heritage officer had got a raging boner when she stopped by, Tom remembers. She'd wanted to talk about preservation, but he'd rather cash in by selling to the highest bidder when his mother finally dies. Which, of course, she never will. She moves from health centre to health centre while waiting for a permanent place at an old people's home.

*The vaginal state of Norway shames our winners and tell our most incompetent citizens that they are perfect just for trying. They teach our young boys that their sexuality is, at best: A primitive joke, at worst: A criminal offense to all wom...*

Ding-a-ling, says the door, and the sounds of life from outside fill the store. Tom slams his laptop shut.

"Well hello there, how lovely to see you both," he says with a high-pitched and practised joviality.

Two women in their seventies stride in. They have practical hairstyles, sporty down jackets above trousers that stop just below their knees, and Hoka running shoes.

"Yes," Turid says. "There can't be many others who still come here..."

“No, things are a bit quiet, it’s true,” Tom says.

The women consider the five hundred square feet of store and move towards the rack of newly arrived items.

“You have to walk through half of Africa to get here now,” Unni says with the voice of a seagull conveyed by her puckered little smoker’s mouth. She’s referring to the one guy out of all the drug dealers on the bench outside who is black.

Turid and Unni are the closest thing Tom’s mother has to friends. Gluttons and scavengers. Ever since he was small he’s heard them talk about his mother behind her back. Laugh at her.

Turid looks at the new blouses. Italian female fashions, made in Italy, but she doesn’t seem impressed. Tom stands there, studying her. Hard make-up, a short no-nonsense hairdo, and a yellow-and-pink scarf that makes her look like an old trout.

“So how’s your mother doing?”

“She’s still in Lovisenberg.”

“Uff, such a shame. Is this new?”

“Came in yesterday.”

Turid sneaks out her phone and takes a photo of the price tag so she can buy the blouse later online, or maybe just check how expensive Torill, Tom’s mother, presumes to be. Tom remains servile on the sidelines. The message to Maria, which he was on a roll with, finally continues inside him.

*Truth is, Maria, I loathe Scandinavian women, but not nearly as much as they loathe themselves. Constantly battling their true nature, they now devote their lives to make everyone as lonely, bitter and miserable as they are.*

“Look at him,” Turid says. She’s over beside the store’s entrance, pointing at someone out in the park. Unni moves to stand beside her.

They always do this. Stand inside the store, criticising the people in the park outside.

“He’s selling drugs to that young man!”

*Like the dried out cunts who visit my mother’s store. They are always nagging about immigration, but they are the ones who stopped giving birth! Who’s going to wipe their asses when dementia hits them? And you know what’s funny, Maria? Our immigration policy is a direct result of their subconscious longing for African cock!*

“You really ought to call the police, Tom.”

“I’ll do that.”

“Yes – do it now!”

“I call them pretty often about everything that goes on around here.”

“Well then call them again, Tom!”

“Okay.”

How he hates them, but soon the weather will turn and they’ll fuck off to Italy. Burning through their kids’ inheritance and the environment as if there’s no tomorrow. Feminists who love Italy are retarded. Any woman who goes on about the good life in Tuscany is no better than the man who goes on about the good life in Pattaya City.

“Oh no, it isn’t for the *men*, it’s for the *food*,” they’d say. But haven’t they heard of Thai food? It’s fucking delicious! Fuck your pasta. Go deepthroat your Luigi and shut the fuck up, you midwit cumdumpster. He wears pointy shoes that cost a thousand euros but still lives with his mother. He’s *obsessed* with his mother. Which is presumably what gets them wet. Maybe that’s why Southern European men are such femboys? The more macho they try to be, the more effeminate they seem. Is there anything on this earth more gay than a matador, Tom thinks, as he calls the police to report that hash is being dealt in the park.

Turid and Unni don’t buy anything, and finally they leave.

“Give our best to your mother, won’t you.”

“I’ll do that,” Tom says. “Toodle-oo,” he even adds.

Tom looks at the message to Maria. It’s ended up quite long. He catches sight of some rather unbecoming phrases. *Pompous cunt* and *African cock*, for example.

He deletes most of it and adds: *I can’t wait to see you. Send me your flight number.*

Every other day, Tom stops by to visit his mother. She doesn't have anyone else. Unless you count Turid and Unni, of course. Which you really can't.

Her COPD has got worse over the past year, and she hasn't worked in the store since she started needing breathing support. A hose up her nose, tucked behind each ear and connected to a machine that says *pssht* and *click*. A kind of mechanical lung. She's ashamed of the hose and says she has pulmonary fibrosis, but it's COPD. COPD from smoking. It's impossible to talk to her about it – Tom has given up. He's given up trying to talk about the past, too. If he tries it, she either grows agitated and has to turn up her oxygen saturation, or she turns maudlin.

This is the little Tom knows: his mother came to Norway from Sweden to work as an au pair when she was seventeen. She got pregnant by some rich asshole who is Tom's father, who she refuses to talk about, and about whom Tom therefore knows nothing, other than that his mother still hates him and that Tom, on a bad day, is apparently very like him.

It's textbook braindead single mum behaviour. She eagerly mounts some random cock, then squeezes out a kid in bitter loneliness, and accuses said kid of looking like the man she fucked.

"There you are, finally," Tom's mother says as he comes through the door with two coffees and some artisan baked goods in an exclusive-looking bag.

"It's doing this again."

Tom's mother shows him her laptop's screen. It's full of ads and virus warnings. Spin-to-win and one-armed bandits. A paper clip from the nineties jumps around the screen, winking psychotically.

Tom smiles indulgently and takes a seat in the chair next to his mother. He takes the laptop while she takes the bag of buns, peeks inside it, and sets it aside.

Tom clicks away.

"Let's just get rid of that, that and that," he mumbles, and finally: "There! Now try not to click on everything that flashes, Mum, that's when all these programs end up being installed."

"I do nothing of the sort," his mother says, settling the laptop on her knees. "So where's Facebook now?"

"There," Tom says.

"Can't I have it there?"

“You don’t need it there, you already have it there.”

“I want it there!”

“Okay, fine.”

He creates a shortcut to Facebook on the desktop. His mother eagerly clicks through to the website and sits there squinting, sniffing a little and coughing.

“Well,” she says to herself and the screen. “All fur coat and no knickers.”

And while his mother sinks deep into Facebook, Tom eats a bun and watches a beautiful young nurse pass by in the corridor. Finally, he takes a deep breath and steels himself, making his voice as jovial as possible.

“So Maria will be here on Friday...”

“Who?”

His mother looks at him.

“Maria. I told you about her, she’s from Lithuania.”

His mother’s expression remains blank. Tom pulls up a photo on his phone, of Maria smiling at the camera. She’s younger than Tom, but dresses maturely.

“Her!” Tom says, thrusting the picture of Maria in front of his mother’s face.

His mother studies the photo sceptically.

“Hm, she’s very pretty, Tom,” she says.

“Yes – and she isn’t one of those mail order brides or whatever.”

“No, but you met her on one of those dating sites, didn’t you?”

“No! We were on the same team in a game, and then we got talking. She’s really cool, we talk about everything: politics, society, history. She’s studied drama and read Ibsen and stuff. Now she wants to find a job in Norway and I’ve told her she can stay with me.”

Tom’s mother takes this in for a moment, then turns her attention back to Facebook.

“That’s nice, Tom.”

Tom looks away. Picks a loose thread from his tweed jacket. Stares at the universally designed door to the toilet and cannot stand to be in his mother’s presence for a second longer, but he can’t leave.

“Have Turid and Unni been by the store?” she asks.

“Yup.”

“And the takings are...?”

“Very little.”

“How little?”

Tom doesn't want to go there. It isn't going to help his case when he asks what he needs to ask.

"How little?" his mother says again, loud and clear.

"Seven-and-a-half-thousand."

"Seven-and-a-half-thousand?"

His mother gapes at him.

"Is that all Turid and Unni, then?"

"No, they didn't buy anything."

"Why not?"

Tom doesn't answer.

"Seven-and-a-half-thousand, it's never been that low, Tom!"

"Your customers are dying off, Mum. They think the park is scary... and many of them just use the store as a fitting room, before they go buy the stuff online."

"Who does that!?" his mother barks.

"I think most people think it's a bit too expensive."

"It would help if you were a bit more service-minded."

There it is, Tom thinks, but he's not going to argue with her today.

"Okay," is all he says.

"Seven-and-a-half-thousand!"

"About that," Tom says, sitting up straighter. "I need to do a bit of redecorating at home, buy some new furniture and whatever, before Maria comes."

"No!"

"Yes, Mum! I'm working in the store for your sake. I've had to put my own career on hold."

"What career?"

"I have loads of projects I'm working on."

"On the Internet, you mean?"

"Yes, so?"

"Well then surely you can do whatever it is you need to do during working hours, if no customers ever come into the store?"

Tom has no reply to this. It's complicated. He's managed to get some good projects off the ground, promising stuff, but then someone always beats him to it, or he gets lost in the coding, and lately he's kind of given up. He stares straight ahead and listens to the clicking of the oxygen machine.

His mother closes her laptop and looks at him.

“Now listen. When I die, you’ll get everything, but I don’t want the last thing I do to be to wrap you up in cotton wool, you understand? I really want to see you stand on your own two feet, gain some independence, even if it’s just the tiniest bit, before I die.”

Tom looks away. Can’t bear to look at his mother.

A young father with a baby strapped to his chest walks past outside. Tom’s mother follows the father with her gaze. Then she looks at Tom.

Later, Tom stands in his apartment, considering it. It's big enough for a bachelor. Functional, perfectly nice, but it lacks a certain feminine touch. He has a large painting by Simon Stålenhag hanging on the wall above the sofa. It depicts a man carrying something that looks like a desktop PC towards a seventies-style yellow house, a Volvo from the eighties parked outside. The man has stopped on his way up the snow-covered hill and is gazing out at the horizon, where two gigantic spaceships rest above the earth.

That was what Tom's fever dreams were like in the 1980s. Scandinavian social realism crossed with sci-fi. He loves the painting, but what will Maria make of it? She's cool, she has good taste in music and films and everything. The painting can stay, he decides – but the samurai sword will have to go.

He has some vintage LPs from various seventies prog rock bands neatly framed. A sofa, a large-screen TV, a games console, an amplifier, set-top box, Apple TV, and so on. An entire collection of remote controls. On the desk stands a gaming PC and a monitor. He has a MacBook, too.

It's too masculine, all of it.

Tom turns on his heel and goes straight to IKEA.

He doesn't feel fat at IKEA. In trendy Grünerløkka, on the other hand, he feels very fat. He feels fat most of the time. Wakes up fat and goes to bed fat. But not at IKEA, where there are stuffed people everywhere. Stuffed kids. Stuffed new fellow citizens. He saunters along in the direction of the arrows on the floor, on the lookout for feminine things.

He considers all the couples trying to agree on a kitchen or a sofa, or on wardrobes and tables and chairs. He once saw an accumulation of shopping trolleys in a corner on the ground floor; an IKEA employee had come over, and parked another trolley half-filled with bedroom items there. The other trolleys were similarly full, some with items for a child's bedroom, some with things for the kitchen.

Items had been studied, discussed and chosen, but then it all must have gone wrong somewhere, because the owners of the trolleys had dropped everything and abandoned them. Seven or eight trolleys like this gathered in a corner, bearing silent witness to impending divorce.

Maybe Maria and Tom will walk around here one day, filling their shopping trolley to the brim, and then, due to low blood sugar, people walking against the arrows, and the one

thing they actually need but which IKEA doesn't seem to have, he'll lose it, and shove the trolley away from him, hard.

"Fuck this shit!" Tom will say.

"Where are you going?" Maria says then.

"To the car!" Tom shouts – because they've bought a car – and Maria doesn't want to keep shopping alone.

She follows him. They get into the car. Tom, empty-eyed, stares straight ahead. He feels ashamed, because, as one of his teachers once said, he has an explosive temper. But Maria strokes his cheek. Smiles.

"Fuck IKEA," she says. "We'll go to a bar, and then we'll order everything online!"

"I love you," Tom says then.

He thinks all this as he's holding the scanner at the self-service checkout, shooting the barcodes of things he considers feminine. A wooden bowl, a vase, a picture of something abstract, which is in any case better than the black-and-white Sverre Malling poster he currently has on the wall.

A fat, dowdy Middle Eastern woman in a Securitas uniform stares at him. Tom wants to punch her. Do I look like a shoplifter? Stare at somebody else! he doesn't say.

He selects his payment method on the screen by tapping MasterCard. That's what it'll have to be, since his mother is so fucking... stingy. It's a shame his mother will still be alive when Maria arrives. He could have sold the store, been living a life of luxury. "I really want to see you stand on your own two feet before I die," his mother had said. "Gain even the tiniest bit of independence..." She had even put on a squeaky voice when she said tiniest.

*Tiniest.*

He should have smothered her with her pillow there and then. Then she would have seen him gain some independence.

On the bus, a group of women in niqabs have gathered towards the back, loaded up with as much as they can carry from IKEA. They screech and laugh. "Look at them," his grandfather would have said. But Tom doesn't look at them. It's more than enough just to hear them. He feels the same way about people who speak Arabic as he does about certain people from Trondheim – he hates the choked way they speak. Gurgling, from way down in their throats, is how they speak. He has the urge to shove a toilet brush into their mouths. Put a stopper in it for them.

He sits as far from them as he can, right behind the bus driver, a miserable woman in uniform trousers, with big hands and short hair. Freak. Reject.

*You should see the looks of our women, Maria, they secretly hate what they have become. But the men, Maria, are far worse.*

He had almost forgotten about the men, but now that he's got off the bus he catches sight of his neighbour, Audun, who is sashaying along with a baby strapped to his chest and two heavy supermarket carrier bags in his hands. Walking a fair distance behind him, Tom allows his fingers to race across his phone's screen.

*You know the clitoris has more than eight thousand nervous endings? Yet it is not nearly as sensitive as the average Norwegian male. Take my simp neighbor Audun, for instance. He's a castrate.*

Tom follows Audun up the stairs. His baby, Theodor, peers over his shoulder, staring down at Tom with the empty eyes of a cat.

Audun's partner, Hege, comes out of the door with her phone pressed to her ear. She's pretty – preposterously pretty – and signals that she's just finishing a conversation while simultaneously smiling at Audun, squeezing the phone between her ear and shoulder and taking Theodor in her hands. She's pushed for time, but manages to coo at the baby and relay a brief message to Audun before she heads off.

Tom stiffly walks past, offering a brief “Hi” in response to Audun's more forthcoming “Hey there!”

*His newborn is still breast feeding, but he is the one on paternal leave! Encouraged by the government and mainstream media he is serving the child milk powder whilst the mother pursuits her career and pumps her longing breasts with a mechanical pump. It's insane!*

Tom sets down the pot plant he bought at IKEA. The bags he's brought home are full of new coat hangers, new cleaning cloths and towels, new bedsheets, a wooden bowl and various other items. Things that are hopefully at least a little bit feminine. Things that Audun would probably own, if he lived alone. Tom once saw him wearing a men's skirt.

Now Hege has gone off to work, and there's an imminent danger that Audun will come and knock on the door, asking for help with his Mac.

He's always coming over, grovelling, licking Tom's boots, playing dumb, thinking he's cute.

*He cannot fix anything, cannot build anything, but his mother is proud of him. The government and mainstream media love him, so he is proud. He thinks he is the future. He and his like think I am a man from the past. They believe masculinity is fascism, they fear me,*

*and they pity me in public. Can you believe it, Maria, an androgynous little sissy twat with milk powder feels sorry for me!?*

Audun, the vagina state's true-born son, always enters Tom's flat with an air of self-contradictory entitlement. Apologetic and subservient as he strides into the living room in his stinking socks and puts the babbling baby on the floor. Then he looks around, gawking at things. He must be climbing the walls, stuck at home on his unnatural parental leave. He snoops, peeks at the screen of Tom's Mac, while Tom fixes his. Probably tells his friends all about Tom afterwards – with compassion, of course. "It isn't easy for men who've been rejected," he might say. He probably calls Tom an incel. Has in all likelihood read the countless op-eds in the mainstream media about how we should all be feeling sorry for men now. They're all written by middle-aged feminists, or by men who want to fuck them. It's schadenfreude and malice disguised as concern.

But Tom knows what Audun is. He's seen him through the chink of the door, shoulders slumped as he tries to pull himself together enough to perform his unnatural role.

*I have seen him, Maria. Lately he is having panic attacks in the hall, and I know why. His suppressed masculinity SCREAMS from within.*

Audun doesn't come over. Tom has time to redecorate. If his mother wasn't such a fucking hard-ass, he could have been assembling a new sofa right now, a proper sofa bed. He's thought about offering Maria his bed, while he sleeps on the sofa. Maybe, and hopefully, she'll eventually say that the bed is big enough for both of them. Then one thing will lead to another. He often thinks about this, how one thing will lead to another.

To get her to move in with him, he's lied about having to take some business trips, which, strictly speaking, he has no intention of taking. A little white lie. The most important thing is that she feels comfortable in his apartment, and that she doesn't start looking for somewhere else before one thing can lead to another. And it'll be good if she gets the impression he's got things going on, before he finally gets things going.

He thinks he'll pretend he's going away and sleep at the store every now and then. Give her a bit of space.

In the bathroom, Tom sets out a reed diffuser and some cute little toothbrush holders (a pair!). He throws out old towels, folds the new ones, and prepares the single wardrobe in the bedroom. That'll be for her. He wipes it down and hangs up a set of new coat hangers.

They're going to talk on FaceTime at six-ish, and Tom sits down at his Mac, giving himself plenty of time. The new pot plant is positioned behind him, so it will be caught by the web camera's eye. His beard protrudes proudly, as it should, and his cap hides his balding

crown. It's a tweed cap. He wasn't sure about it at first, but the flat cap he tried had made him look so old.

Maria is thirty-three. Tom is twelve years older, but it's only in Scandinavia that people think there's anything wrong with that. Only here in Femistan, and only in recent times. The fact that women like older men, and men like younger women, is a biological truth that the unnatural left, the clitoratti, want to erase. The miserable cunts.

His Mac gives out a ding-a-ling. Tom loves that she's always so punctual. He straightens his beard, checks his background one last time, and answers.

Maria fills the entire screen, but as usual she's forgotten to select the correct video settings, and this gives Tom an opportunity to watch her as she fumbles around. Oh, how beautiful she is. High forehead, high cheekbones, green eyes, reddish hair, a chin and nose that suggest a hint of something Slavic but without being too harsh. She's playful, strong and young. Tom loses himself in her for the few seconds he gets before she clicks on the right icons and finally sees him. She breaks into a smile that takes Tom's breath away.

"Tom! Good to see you!"

"Good to see you too!"

"How are you?" Maria says.

"Not too bad."

"How's your fucked up neighbour?"

"Still fucked up," Tom says, and laughs.

To think that she shares his malicious pleasure and contempt for the metrosexual femboy next door. She always asks about him, thinks it's comical that he goes around with his baby strapped to his chest.

"How are you?" Tom asks

"I'm okay," Maria says.

But something is obviously wrong.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Yes. No. It's my father, he's in the hospital again."

"Oh no," Tom says. "Is it another stroke?"

"Yes, they think so. I have to meet the doctors on Wednesday..."

She looks at him, eyes brimming with despair, and Tom is unable to hide his disappointment.

"I'm sorry, Tom. My sister is coming on Thursday, and then I can come to Oslo."

"Okay. So sometime next week?"

“Yes, but there’s a problem.”

Now she looks embarrassed, dejected. He’s never seen her like this before.

“I bought the cheapest tickets with the money you sent me, and the airline won’t let me get a refund or reschedule. I don’t want to ask for more money from you. I’ve tried borrowing, but the hospital bills ... I’m so sorry, Tom.”

Tom feels for her, and he also feels for his wallet. He may have given the impression that his personal finances are somewhat better than they actually are, and now that his mother has tightened the purse strings, this is a crisis of the worst kind. He’ll just have to find a way through it.

“It’s okay,” he says, worldly wise. “It’s just money. What airline is it?”

“But they won’t let me reschedule.”

“I know, but sometimes they have to.”

“I’m so sorry, Tom, I don’t control this.”

“Of course you don’t – what’s the airline?”

“Lufthansa,” Maria finally says in her lovely accent.

“Don’t worry. I’ll talk to them. I’ll get you new tickets.”

Maria smiles at him. For a long time. It’s so delicious, but at the same time so financially arduous. Having to sort things out, to be a provider.

“You’re too kind,” she says, and Tom blushes.

She waves with both hands and smiles affectionately at him.

So beautiful.

And it’s so quiet in the apartment once she’s hung up.

He has twelve thousand left on his MasterCard. Minus twelve thousand kroner. But didn’t he read somewhere that an airline can’t refuse to change your tickets? The pigs. Don’t they know that people have rights, which they’re happily shitting all over?

Everything to do with air travel is a scam. All of it.

Tom searches for Maria’s flight, but can’t find it. The website just wants him to buy things, so he calls customer service instead and immediately regrets it when he has to listen to Coldplay for over fifteen minutes before someone answers. *Coldplay made me gay* – wasn’t that a meme?

“Hello and welcome to Lufthansa, you’re speaking with Gro, how can I help you?”

“Yes, hello. My girlfriend has purchased a flight from Vilnius to Oslo with you tomorrow, but when I search for it nothing comes up.”

“We don’t fly to Vilnius.”

“What?”

“We have no flights between Vilnius and Oslo.”

“Then who... who’s flying from Vilnius to Oslo tomorrow?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know.”

Something thick and sickly is swelling in Tom. He hangs up. She did say Lufthansa, didn’t she? Maybe she purchased the ticket through Lufthansa, but the flight is operated by another company? That could be it. It must be something like that. It can’t be anything else. He sits down at the PC, opens Avinor’s search engine.

No airline is flying from Vilnius to Oslo tomorrow, but that doesn’t necessarily mean anything, it might just be that there’s a transfer somewhere. If she bought the cheapest ticket it might be Wizz – or Jizz – Air to Poland and then some other shitty operator from there, for example.

Of course he could just call her.

He calls her.

She declines the call after three rings.

This isn’t possible. He isn’t stupid. She would never try to scam him – not Maria. She isn’t...

*Hm, she’s very pretty*, his mother had said. *Too pretty*, was what she’d meant. Too pretty for short, fat Tom. No. She must have money troubles. Drugs, maybe?

No, of course – she’s spent the money on her father! Because she’s *Maria*. She’s cool, but also fallible. She’s smart, she’s funny – but maybe not very organised. Maybe she has low impulse control – that comes with being feminine. So she paid a hospital bill and then couldn’t afford the flight, and now she’s embarrassed. She is who she says she is. Maria Kazlauskaitė. Tom had checked after their first conversation. They had played on the same team in *League of Legends* many months ago, and loads of girls play under fake names, for good reason, but not Maria. He had checked her Facebook page. He did an image search. He has her number. He’s spoken to her about pretty much everything, for fuck’s sake.

Why did she decline his call? She’s probably feeling ashamed. Maybe she’s even in tears. Poor thing.

He searches for her again, first by doing an ordinary image search, and then, just to be on the safe side, he runs a search on a Russian server – they often turn up different stuff to the American ones.

But now surely he’s being silly. This is just anxiety. She’ll call him back. Ah, there she is – the images are pouring in, and her name is Maria. She’s so beautiful. There’s her

LinkedIn page, and there's her Instagram profile. Oh, that isn't her, haha, this is someone else. Ieva Paškevičiūtė, her name is, and her profile looks like that of every Norwegian girl on the left. Go Hamas and Happy Pride. But shit, she really does look like her.

But Ieva has curly hair and looks younger than Maria. She's in a relationship with some guy, looks like a hip young artist. She really looks like Maria, though. She really, really looks like Maria.

Exactly like Maria.

She has two names.

Tom stiffens.

All at once, anyone who has ever been in a plane crash is inside his chest. The sensation rages and rages. No, not like that, he thinks. Not a fucking honey trap. Not 'scammed online'! Not him. The Internet is *his* game! *Nobody* is that good. And definitely not her!

"You fucking retard," he says, and the tears well up – sissy femboy tears – but he'll be damned if he's going to cry.

He checks again. An ordinary face search brings up nothing, but the Russian server sends him to Ieva Paškevičiūtė.

Maybe Ieva is fake, and Maria is real?

Comparing the two there's no doubt. Maria is fake.

"Fuck... fucking fuck fuck," he says.

She must have been forced into this against her will. They've had wonderful long conversations – surely he would have noticed if she didn't really want him? Somebody is behind this. And whoever it is, they're not going to get away with it. He's going to make them pay. Didn't she just say it herself? *I'm sorry, Tom. I don't control this.* Is she in a troll farm somewhere in Lithuania, being knocked about by some Andrew Tate-like dickweasel who smokes meth and rapes her? Was this a cry for help?

*I'm sorry Tom, I don't control this.*

He quickly sits down and hammers away at the keyboard. The line between grief and anger has always been a thin one for him.

*To whoever runs this account, he writes, I am on to you. If you don't reimburse the money I have sent to the actress you call Maria I will deal with you, and trust me, you don't want that. You are fucking with the wrong guy. You have no idea who I am and what I am capable of.*

That helps a bit. Fucking pigs. He's never liked Eastern European men. Barbaric hicks. Flabby-faced cunts.

He startles when, after just ten seconds, he receives a reply.

*Hello, funny man. We are real men from Lithuania. You are little pussy. Thanks for money and fuck off. If you try anything, our friends in Oslo will find you.*

Now he cries. Cries and hates himself. What a sorry little wanker he is. A lovestruck, flaccid loser.

*You are little pussy.*

He looks at the feminine wooden bowl he bought at IKEA, and kicks it. Hurts his toe. Plumps down heavily on the sofa and allows the tears to fall, but is disgusted when he hears the sound of his own hiccupping sobs. Big fucking baby. The shame runs through him like thick black oil, dampening the sounds outside and creating a thumping bassline inside his head. His body grows heavy.

He sits there and cries for a long time, interrupted only by the insults and abuse he hurls at himself. Fucking idiot. Fucking loser. Fat, ugly retard!

He slowly brushes his teeth. He's finished. Finished as a man, finished as a person. He wants to go to sleep and forget. He's going to scroll himself to sleep, and then he's going to forget all about Maria.

*She's very pretty, Tom*, his mother had said, and he had actually been offended. So fucking humiliating.

He catches sight of himself in the mirror. Stupid and old, with such tiny features. No attractive aquiline nose or big ears. Women like to say that men become more attractive with age. Look at George Clooney, they say, but in his reflection Tom sees only a frightened, overgrown schoolboy. The stupid little nose. The tiny eyes.

*You are little pussy.*

He takes the toothbrush from his mouth, looks at himself for a split second, then spits into his reflection's face, as hard as he can. He tries to wipe the mixture of toothpaste and saliva away, but it only smears across the mirror, leaving behind a grotesque, greasy mess. He leaves it there.

Later, he sits in bed, scrolling himself into a coma. A Reddit thread full of memes rolls past at a speed his eyes can't possibly follow. Like trees rushing by outside a train window. He finally snaps out of it, slams the MacBook shut, turns off the light and tries to turn off his mind.

He imagines travelling to Lithuania and killing people indiscriminately. Massacring *real men from Lithuania*.

When he's irritable, he often goes shooting in his sleep. Sometimes he lies on a hillside beside a fjord in Western Norway – a landscape he must have seen in a Freia chocolate ad, or something like that. He lies on his back with two assault rifles pointing straight up. Then he shoots both of them into the air, and the rhythmic cracks and the recoil push him down into the flowery meadow and the mattress until he sleeps.

Now he has a target for the bullets. He stalks around an Eastern European factory that smells of cock and vomit. He shoots and wounds the men, sets the girls free. Leaves the men writhing in pain for a while, before he sets fire to the meth lab in the basement and strides away from the scene as the flames warm his back, as do the admiring gazes of a dozen liberated slave girls.

What a moronic dream. *Little pussy*. His dreams are ridiculous. He always has to show them, to be victorious, to shine in his arrogant honour. Always a fucking yacht and a cream-cake castle. Some subservient bimbo who sucks him off between the folds of his robe covered in gold dollar signs. What a cuck.

He's lost, and now he has to move on.

Get up early, go to the gym, lose weight, get his projects off the ground. This is rock bottom. He's been here now. Now things can't possibly get any worse. Enough confusion and self-delusion, enough porn and senseless scrolling, enough takeaway and the path of least resistance. This is the moment he'll look back on, when, one day, he's victorious. All winners have to hit rock bottom at some point, and here he is.

It feels as if his tears have given his brain an enema. His eyelids are hot, and he slowly drifts off to sleep.

Then the baby in the neighbouring apartment starts to howl.

He hears Audun go in to the kid. It's always Audun, even though the baby is probably screaming for its mother. Theodor is carried from the nursery.

The shame punches him in the gut. Maria is fake. He's been scammed online. His mother was right. She was too good, too pretty. He sees it now. Fat little cunt-faced man.

He pulls his MacBook up onto his belly. In the living room, the feminine items from IKEA are overturned and strewn around. He can't bear to go out there. He shoves the pillow Maria was supposed to lay her pretty head on under his neck and allows the blue light from the Mac to flood his retinas.

His scrolling ritual consists of opening all the websites that might have posted something new since he last visited them. The Norwegian online newspapers, all Meta's social platforms, Reddit, X, and so on. Then he scrolls through them, right-clicking on all the stories he wants to check out. These are then saved in the tab list on the right, and once he's gone through all the front pages, he usually has six or seven articles he wants to read. When he closes the last tab, thirty minutes to an hour or so later, he catches sight of his desk, where everything he still has to do lies unfinished and waiting for him. Then he snaps out of it, and if he's standing in the store, he takes a deep breath and fetches himself a cup of coffee, promises himself he'll turn over a new leaf, and takes up his place in front of his Mac again. Then he's ready, but before he can get started he just has to check all the same sites one last time.

He takes part in the public discourse, people have to give him that. But never under his own name, of course. The opinion corridor is too narrow – and Tom too multifaceted – for that.

Mascurevolt is a warrior for the man, fighting valiantly against the vagina state. He's ready, cold, educated. Rationaldo generally takes on the emotional tyranny of the left. He looks at the figures and sets people straight when the snowflakes are crying about how they're against nuclear power but for the environment. Laila Hansen is a vulgar old bitch who tells it as it is. But they have a tendency to merge into one another, these three profiles. When he gets going, he often forgets who he's logged in as. Now, as Laila, he writes that Green Party politician Steinar Kleven is a cunt and a moral poser, and that's basically her style, but the words could just as easily have come from Rationaldo.

Steinar K and the other Green Party choads want to boycott the United States because they're fascist, without even looking into the economic and security-related costs for Norway. Stupid moralising libtards.

A punk band consisting of upper-middle-class kids from a posh suburb of Oslo is complaining that a rock music festival is too white, and Laila Hansen replies that woke punk isn't punk, and that these dumb brats aren't even genuinely angry. Jumped-up PC junkies, she calls them. It feels good. She has spunk, Laila.

People out there are so stupid that he forgets how stupid he feels himself. A story about pride flags in primary schools is a post for Laila Hansen: *What are the gay lobbyists going to teach primary school kids about?* she writes. *RIMMING!!?* On a Swedish site, which was once a Scandinavian version of somethingrotten.com, but which is now more of a humour site for people who hate highly strung Swedish feminists, he comes across the

YouTube hit ‘You can breastfeed here’. It’s a ‘witty’ info video about how it’s fine to breastfeed anywhere. It’s embarrassing, in the way that Norwegian companies who create teambuilding songs and then post them on YouTube are embarrassing.

The melody the Swedes have chosen is ‘Gangnam Style’. *Youcanbreastfeedhere, and youcanbreastfeedhere, and youcanbreastfeedhere*. They move from a café to the library and to all the places where it’s okay to breastfeed. It’s unbelievable, how imbecilic they look.

*If they can breastfeed wherever they want, then I’m going to fucking well jerk off wherever I want*, writes Mascurevolt, or Rationaldo – it doesn’t matter. It’s good to get it out.

He clicks on a story about comedian and social commentator Live Stensvaag, the woman who was almost raped. She’s everywhere, with her smug smile and her disparaging comments about men. She’s built an entire career on it. She thinks she’s leading a new wave of feminism, but she’s just like the women Tom had as teachers. What was that framed quote the headmistress at his primary school had on the wall of her office? *Women have many faults, but men have only two: everything they say and everything they do*.

The mainstream media can’t get enough of Live Stensvaag. Now there’s a new story about her: *Women have to dare to give less of a fuck*. She thinks women spend too much time worrying about their bodies. She’s posted a photo on Instagram, which her five-year-old daughter has ostensibly taken. In the photo she’s only half dressed, and now Stensvaag is being praised for showing her fat rolls, only, she doesn’t actually have any. She’s been interviewed as a kind of hero, for not hiding or retouching her body. Imagine spending two years on a journalism degree only to end up scrolling through celebrity Instagram profiles to write stories based on them. The West is going to the dogs.

He clicks on her profile. There she is, laughing in her underwear as if she doesn’t want to have her picture taken. *Learned the hard way that five-year-old Ronja has figured out how to take photos with Mummy’s phone*, she’s written. It was probably her husband who took the picture, Tom thinks. He looks through the comments. Girls praise the photo and tell Live she’s beautiful. Some men say that their eyes are burning. One writes that he can see why she was only ‘almost’ raped.

*Nothing like a good #Metoo story to boost your ticket sales*, writes another. Tom, as Mascurevolt, writes: *You’re the least funny PC-hag Norway has birthed so far. I’m going to do the country a favour and come and finish off your ‘almost’ rape. Look for me in the audience. I’ll be the guy who isn’t laughing*.

A split second’s hesitation before he presses the Enter key, hard. Then he scrolls on, directionless and full of pent-up frustration.