Standing at 5' 11" the Norwegian mixed martial artist Isak Valtersen always thought his nickname of 'The Little Viking' was ironic. Although competing in the featherweight division of 66 kgs (145 lbs) does lend some credence to it. Like almost all aspiring MMA fighters, his dream is to feel the weight of a UFC Title Belt across his waist. But Isak has a long and difficult path in front of him. His talent is undeniable, but so are the holes in his game. And that's to say nothing of the unspoken insecurities no one but himself knows about. Before Isak can be a legitimate contender for the UFC's featherweight belt, he has to defeat a far more elusive and insidious opponent than the one's he'll be facing across the cage. One that he faces everytime he sees his own reflection.
Yooww! So, this is my first venture into fanfiction. I first had this idea because of two things.

1. I am a massive, and I mean massive MMA nerd. I started practicing traditional martial arts around 13 and began training in mma a few years later. There's something about the competition of physical combat with another human being that is unlike any other feeling you can achieve in life. Whether it be in jiu-jitsu, wrestling, boxing, muay thai, etc. Unfortunately I can't give you that feeling through this fic, but goddammit I'm gonna try.

2. Some months ago I read a fic entitled 'Checking from Behind', by DickAnderton which was a stunningly written story about Isak and Even being adversarial hockey teammates who eventually fall in love. I was amazed at how detailed yet also how easy to understand the writing was.

Having said that, I cannot stress this enough even though I did put it in the tags: ISAK WILL GET HURT IN THIS FIC. He will get punched, kicked, slammed, choked (possibly in a few different contexts :p) pretty much any manner of things that can happen to a mixed martial artist in competition. But Isak's real struggle will be to love and accept himself. Oh and that's the other thing . Isak can kick your ass, but he's massively insecure when it comes to himself. He pretty much uses mixed martial arts to avoid his problems of self identity.

Anyways this a/n is getting a bit wordy so I'll leave you guys to it. Let me know what you think and if I should continue this fic. I can't promise regular updates, but I do have some key events planned out already. Also I'll be posting relative info for some of the more technical aspects of the sport. Starting with this example of the submission Isak uses to win his fight.

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=tw509MgKzns

See the end of the work for more notes

- Inspired by Checking From Behind by DickAnderton
- Inspired by An Officer And A Gentleman by Jamz24
The blood was pounding in his ears, each pulse reminding him of how the doctor nearly stopped the bout earlier in round one. The crimson rivulets were coating his lips and staining his teeth, crashing over his gums like lazily lapping waves. This had to be the finish if he was going to win this fight. His takedowns were consistent throughout the contest, but they hadn't materialized in anything. A seemingly frantic pair of sea foam orbs darted to the clock. *Fuck.* He felt his opponent trying to angle out of his grip, the blood making it easier to do so. But then it happened. Instinct and muscle memory took over and all of a sudden, he felt the fight in his fellow competitor drain rapidly. He didn't even notice that it was over until the referee was shouting 'Stop' and he was rolling out from underneath his foe.

His brain was telling his body to take a victory run around the cage, but his calves were wincing in agony so he settled for a leisurely winners stroll. His opponent was sitting against the opposite end of the fence, looking simultaneously disappointed and bewildered. The blonde gave his vanquished enemy a tentative smile and kneeled beside him. "I know you lost, but you don't need to be sad. Fuck man, I thought you were gonna finish me at the end of the first." The words got a wistful twitch of a smile from his fellow fighter. "Hahah, shit, I did too." The young man laughed once he saw he'd put his opponent at ease. His amiable smile shifted into a more serious expression. "But hey, you're a fucking warrior mate. Alright? Win lose or draw you're a fucking warrior brother." The other man nodded his head subtly and the two exhausted competitors shared a brief embrace.

"Alright lads let's go!", the ref told the young men. The fighters stood in the center of the decagon as the final result of the fight was told to the arena by the booming voice of the announcer. "Ladies and gentlemen referee Jan Mirdek has called a stop to this contest at four minutes and twenty one seconds into the third round. For your winner via triangle choke.....Isak 'The Little Viking' Valtersen!" Isak felt a swell of pride in his chest looking over to his team as they rushed to embrace and elevate him. No matter how many times he won a fight, no matter how many times his hand got raised by the ref, that feeling of satisfaction, of gratitude, of pure, unadulterated joy never went away. But there was something else that never went away either. That bitter, cynical voice tucked away in a cramped dark cave in Isak's mind. A voice that chuckled cruelly while he tried desperately to ignore it. A voice that looked him dead in the eyes and sneered. "Think they'd still be cheering if they knew you were a faggot?"
Dr. Schistad's handy-dandy post fisticuffs protocol

Chapter Summary

Isak is still in recovery from his hail mary victory over the weekend. Add to his still aching body a couple of ball busting coaches, a snooty, at least in Isak's mind, jiu-jitsu instructor, and some unwanted thoughts about one of his fellow fighters and Isak is ready to rinse everything clean with some well deserved and much needed booze. There are things the alcohol won't make go away though. And problems Isak can't punch, kick or choke his way out of.

Chapter Notes

Welcome back everyone! So this is the first official chapter and not everyone has been introduced but a few of the key characters have. Most everybody will be introduced into the story by chapter 5. There's a few references to some mma related things that you guys may not recognize and I'll breakdown those down in the end notes. Enjoy and leave me kudos and comments! They help pay for my dumb insurance and allow me to buy the bougie kombucha I don't need, but love!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mandag

September 22nd, 2018

10:35

His eyes opened slowly, the twilight shadowing of his room fooling him for a split second. Isak yawned loudly before lazily throwing his legs over the side of the bed. His first order of business was to kill this ache in his calves. After taking a few puffs from his CBD pen Isak slowly cracked his neck and back and ventured out into the rest of his shared apartment. He could hear the low rumbling of his coach's voice before he entered the kitchen. "I just think it's bullshit. Newell has this fucking incredible story, he's a legit black belt, and he's fun to watch and Dana goes with fucking Greg Hardy? I mean, not only is the guy a piece of shit, but literally anyone on the heavyweight roster right now would mop the floor with him."

Isak glanced over from where he was standing rifling through the fridge to smile at his boxing coach. "So you've gotten your blurb for Bloody Elbow memorized I see." Elias gave a fond scoff and gently shoved Isak's shoulder. "And you're still waddling like an emperor penguin. You know if I had known you weren't going to use any of the calf kick checks Chris taught you I would've told him to focus more on your head movement." Isak balked, fake indignation crossing over his still slightly swollen face. "Bakkoush! You're my coach! Aren't you supposed to be happy for
me?". Elias played along, keeping a serious expression, "Oh I am. Just...ya know, I'd be happier if you didn't have seven stitches in the side of your nose right now." The boys chuckled amicably at one another just as the aforementioned muay thai and kickboxing instructor strolled into the kitchen. "Aha! The mighty victor has awoken from his slumber!". Christoffer briefly glanced down to look at the mottled, lumpy mess that were currently Isak's calves. "Hmm, I see the mighty victor seems to have ignored Dr. Schistad's handy-dandy post fisticuffs protocol."

Isak lifted his head up to stare at the playful smile of the older man. "Oh you mean the one you screenshoted from Emil Meek's Instagram?" Elias jumped in before Chris could respond. "Not even man, he dead ass took a picture of his own laptop!" "I have a new phone I haven't figured it out yet! Besides I'm too busy training future world champs." Chris' eyes traveled fondly over Isak's face as the golden haired boy lightly chuckled and suddenly became very interested in the egg and avocado breakfast he was having. "Well shitty calves or not, you need to be ready to go to gym by noon Isak." The fighter groaned with displeasure, but schlepped himself out of his seat and went to go get ready.

As Isak was pulling on one of his favorite Roots of Fight shirts he heard the flat sound of knuckles on the wood in his doorway. Once Bas Rutten was proudly stretched across his chest the young man gave Chris a raise of his eyebrows to indicate he was listening. "So, I know apart from training we haven't really hung out much lately. Me, William and some friends were gonna get some drinks later on if you're interested." The easy banter the boys had in the kitchen had transformed into a tentative yet friendly tone. Isak smiled gently at his coach while nodded his head slowly. "Sounds good to me." Looking pleased Chris told him the address and said he looked forward to it.

18:06

The familiar sounds of Bred Akse gym settled into Isak's ears. The oddly calming sound of skin smashing into leather and the echoes of powerful kicks and punches being landed on the line of heavy bags. The loud exhalations of breath as two fighters sparred in the ring. The effort soaked grunts as a few pairs of grapplers fought to improve their position. And then...... The bubbly laughter of children having a ball watching an olive skinned girl of no more than seven demonstrate an armbar on the long, lithe limb of a dirty-blonde haired man in his early thirties. His gi had small tournament patches adorning it as well as a few logos of other gyms.

"So, as Rjuka has just showed us, mount isn't the only way to secure a juji-gatame, but it is the safest and most effective." Isak let out a long frustrated sigh and turned to stare judgmentally at his coach. "Seriously? Kid-jitsu hour couldn't wait until like eight o'clock? Oh, actually you know what they'd probably all be in bed by then anyway." Elias chuckled, but stared somewhat ruefully at Isak. "Remind me again why you hate children learning a martial art in a safe structured environment?". "Because Elias, it's the same space where adults are training to beat the fuck out of each other for money in a cage." The statement must have been louder than expected as Isak met the unimpressed and disapproving glare of a pair of clear azure eyes. Isak nervously cleared his throat and said, "I guess really it's my own bullshit. Maybe just something about the incongruity of
Elias clapped him on the shoulder, "I can't remember far back enough into school to recall what that even means or if you're using it correctly, but I need you to focus on helping Olmeive get this combination down right, k bro?" Isak gave the older man a stalwart nod and strode over to where a boy not much younger than himself was dressed in a short sleeve compression rash guard and tight, thigh high athletic shorts. He merely observed him at first, watched how the young man pivoted perfectly on his lead leg, turned his hip over and smashed his shin into the bottom middle of the bag. Isak studied the repetition, momentarily mesmerized as the powerful calves and thighs of Olmeive's legs tightened and relaxed almost rhythmically. Suddenly Isak had flashes in his brain of the other things those legs could do. How securely they could cling around his waist, how they could shift and roll on top of him, how they could press flush to his ass and the backs of his own thighs and- "Isak!" Isak jerked out of his unwanted fantasy and stared at the younger martial artist with the look of a red handed thief.

"Um, yes. Sorry mate, I was fucking miles away." "Hmm, you did take some hard shots on Saturday." "Oh fuck off." Isak said a small smile on his face. "You wanna learn the Valtersen Vortex Combo of Death or what Olm?" Olmeive let out a near failed attempt at stifling his laughter as breath exited his nose and he responded. "Teach me, oh wise and mighty Valtersen." Isak went about getting the younger fighter in position and breaking down the combination for him. It was a classic kickboxing combo. One that allowed a fighter to switch from an orthodox stance to southpaw without giving up much defense and still pressuring their opponent. As Isak was strapping on the body protector and mitts his eyes once again unwittingly traveled to Olmeive. This time he was entranced by the bobbing movements of the young man's Adams apple as he guzzled a bottle of water. Isak watched with shallow breath as the rust colored stubble on the fighter's throat stretched. "Damn old man, we haven't even started and you're already breathing heavy!" Isak let out a shallow scoff and began calling out the commands of the combination.

Orthodox. Right hook. Left jab. Right front kick. Southpaw. Repeat. Orthodox. Right hook. Left jab. Right front kick. Southpaw. Repeat. The boys moved around the space beside one of the heavy bags hanging all the way to the right side. Although Isak knew Olmeive could throw a deceiving amount of power into his strikes, the kid also knew the equation: Technique + Speed = Power. The young men worked on a few other combinations for the remaining hour and fifteen minutes of Olmeive's allotted session with Isak. When they were done Isak caught the younger fighter slowly stripping off his compression top, drying his sweaty torso. Not trusting himself to have the willpower to look away, the fighter turned to the wall as he undid the velcro on the body protector and focus mitts.

*That's pathetic Isak. You really can't control yourself can you? Imagine if poor Olmeive knew what you've been thinking about him. He'd probably open those stitches right back up. Even if he was like you, you think he'd wanna be with you? A closeted mma fighter who can't face his own problems? Get real. As soon as an uncomfortable humidity started to effect Isak's eyes he heard Olmeive's low pitched, gently rolling voice. "That's was some great work today man. I know it was short notice, but thanks for filling in. I gotta tell Magnus to start celebrating my victories as hard as he celebrates yours."

Isak let out a genuine, full laugh at that, giving an open mouthed smile to his
training partner. "If he does that we'll have to start rescheduling our fights just to save Mags' liver."

Olmeive returned Isak's laugh as he opened the door of the gym for the other fighter. Having scrounged up the courage through making him laugh, Isak turned to the other man and blurted out, "Hey, I'm going out with Chris later tonight since I was in no condition to properly celebrate Saturday. Think you'd be up for it?" Isak knew he hadn't just asked the boy on a date. Knew Olmeive would never have perceived it that way. Knew there was absolutely nothing but warm, platonic vibes between them. But fuck if it didn't feel like he was asking the guy out. The russet headed lad popped his head up from where he was texting and gave Isak his full attention. "Absolutely dude," he said with a kind smile adorning his face, "I'd love to do some belated celebrating with you." Isak smiled back and responded. "Awesome, I'll text you the address." The fighters went their separate ways and try as he might, Isak couldn't keep the small, wishful smile off his face.

Chapter End Notes

Nick Newell/Greg Hardy situation: Ok, so Dana White, the president of the UFC has a series that is broadcast of the UFC's online application. The app is called fightpass and the series is called Dana White's Tuesday Contender Series.

Nick Newell is a multiple times world champion mixed martial artist who happens to have been born without the lower half of his left arm. He is a badass and has a really cool and inspiring story. Also just a genuinely good dude and does a lot of work with kids with congenital defects.

Greg Hardy is an ex NFL women beating piece of shit, who unlike Nick Newell, got a developmental contract with the UFC. Now granted, Nick did lose his fight in a split decision, but this still upsets and bewilders me.

BloodyElbow.com is an MMA media and news website. In this story Elias is sometimes a contributor.

Emil Meek (pronounced Mek) is a welterweight (77kgs, 170lbs) Norwegian MMA fighter in the UFC.

Roots of Fight is a company that makes shirts and clothing highlighting certain figures in different combat sports. This is the shirt Isak is wearing: https://www.rootsoffight.com/collections/bas-rutten/products/bas-rutten-japan-tee

Bas Rutten is a retired Dutch MMA fighter.

Bred Akse means 'Broad Axe' in Norsk.

Juji-Gatame is the name for an armbar in Japanese jujitsu.

The kickboxing combination Isak is drilling with his partner was one of the first ones I learned in MMA and also one of my faves because I'm a southpaw.
And this is how I pictured the fighter Isak is helping train. Also his name is pronounced Ul-meh-yev.

Chapter Summary

Isak has an interesting evening with coach Chris.

Chapter Notes

Welcome back! So I'm thinking I'm gonna try to get a chapter out a week, probably updating on Saturdays. The chapters are also going to start going longer and more characters are going to be introduced as well. Also since I don't count the intro as a chapter, this is technically chapter 2. Let me know what you guys think! I'm having a blast writing this fic!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

21:36

A low background hum of international 70's funk provided the undercurrent for the primary layer of conversation. The establishment felt old, despite only being opened a few years prior. There was a rustic energy soaked into the hardwood floors and reclaimed cedar bar. The clinking of glasses and rumble of conversations interspersed with occasional laughter drew Isak's attention away from his thoughts. Chris glanced at him with a question in his eyes.

"Were you going to say something or....?" Isak turned to look at his coach, saying, "Oh uh, yeah just kind of not the place I would've expected you to want to go." The older man gave an affirming grunt and gestured to a table a few feet from their spot at the bar. "You can blame William for the lack of nudity. I actually thought we were gonna be celebrating your victory, but I guess one should always be prepared for ulterior motives when dealing with a Magnusson." Isak gave his friend a wistful smile and patted him on his shoulder. He knew that Christoffer Schistad and William Magnusson went way back. He also knew that even though if you asked either they'd say they were still best friends, they'd grown apart in the last few years. Chris' dream of making world champion mixed martial artists, Muay Thai fighters and kickboxers ran parallel yet often times opposed to William's dream of making money off them.

Which isn't to say Magnusson had no regard for the fighters his promotion represented, but he was certainly after a particular goal. And was at times flippant about people who may be in the way of that goal. Isak took another sip of the double of Notorious whiskey Chris had bought him and responded, "You know, I always thought you and William would've made great business partners. I mean it sounds like the dream right? You train the fighters he promotes them." Chris turned to look at Isak while nodding slowly. "You'd be right to think that Isak, hell, it's what we thought initially.
But things aren't that simple and we eventually realized if we wanted to remain friends, we couldn't remain partners." Isak's mind flashed an image of kind eyes, bushy eyebrows and chocolate curls before him.

"Yeah, I've sort of been in the same situation." As the tone of their conversation started to darken, the brass bell on the bar door clanged and was silent for a significant period of time before smashing closed again. The men looked over to the their left to see a number of their friends and teammates. Chris' demeanor switched as the coach's friends surrounded him. "You guys made it!" Olmeive smiled brightly at the pair. "Of course man. We've got to celebrate Isak's win right?" A slight girl around Isak's age bellied up to the bar and turned to face him. "You looked great Saturday Isak. I knew you were gonna win. Actually that's why I can splurge a bit tonight." The girl accompanied her statement with a set of keen eyes and a squeeze to Isak's left arm. "Oh, Um, well thanks Emma. People don't usually tell me that they bet on me." Seemingly disregarding his statement Emma moved on, asking Isak what he was drinking. "It's actually Connor McGregor's whiskey.", Isak replied stiffly.

He secretly hoped the short haired girl would deem it out of her price range, but instead she ordered a double and settled herself on the stool beside Isak. Chris turned to his fighter giving him a shit eating grin and telling him he'd be going over with Olmeive and some others to the table where William, his girlfriend Noora, her friend Sana and their marketing director Eskild sat discussing an upcoming event. "You know I just think it's so hot what you guys do. Just so primal and raw." Isak was jolted out of launching eye knives at Chris by Emma's blatant and frankly desperate attempt at flirtation. "Yeah I mean it's a pretty crazy way to make a living I suppose." "Definitely. I get the draw though. It's so instinctual right? Like.....sex." The girl let out a flirtatious giggle before continuing. "It's like fighting and fucking are two sides of the same coin." As she said this she started trailing her fingers along Isak's left arm, moving them back up to squeeze at his bicep. Isak hid his wince behind a large, finishing gulp of his whiskey. Ok, now he knew for sure Emma was full of shit. Had she actually seen his fight she'd have known that his opponent delivered several powerful kicks to that arm as Isak reacted and blocked them. Once he had drained his glass Isak abruptly stood up and nearly ran to the restroom. As he was finishing up and flushing the urinal a noticeably more intoxicated Chris waltzed through the door. "Sooooo, how's Emma?" Isak glanced with open hostility at his coach. "Can't believe you left me alone with her." Chris made an obnoxious sound of relief once in front of his own urinal and looked over to where his student was washing his hands. "Awww, c'mon bro. She's not that bad.", the older man slightly slurred to Isak. "She bet on my fight without even watching it. Who does that?"

His coach let out a scoff that then turned into a laugh. "Somebody who's trying to get that Little Viking deeeee!" Isak groaned and looked back at Chris as the man sloppily washed his hands. "I should've cut you off after your third gin and ginger. Everybody knows you're a lightweight." While clumsily drying his hands Chris made a scandalized face and gasped.

"I'll have you know, Valtersen, that I competed across three different weight classes in my time." Isak acquiesced, saying he knew and was sorry he'd insulted Christoffer 'The Penetrator' Schistad.
"Oh shit, I forgot we got that announcer to actually say it!" His student broke into a smile at the memory. "Yeah and I was the one who had to convince him to not make the promotion suspend you." "Pfft, they weren't gonna suspend me. If anything I'd have to pay a fine." As the boys approached the table that Emma, William, Noora, Olmeive, Sana and Eskild were occupying he caught a few snippets of the conversation.

"And I feel it's a whole untapped market. Or actually....no, not untapped; underutilized. Imagine if we had a place where queer fighters could go. I'm not talking about an exclusively lgbt promotion or anything, but letting people in those communities know they're welcome? I think there's a lot of benefit in it." Noora nodded in agreement and responded to redhead. "Absolutely, I mean look at what Amanda Nunes is doing with her gym. Obviously it's the skill of the fighter that matters, but imagine being the gym that has the first openly gay, male UFC champion. That would be pretty awesome." The girl swiveled her head to her boyfriend as he sat his drink down. "Totally. And to be the regional promotion he was champ of before? That'd be huge. I mean like Noora said, the focus should be on the fact that the fighter was that skilled to achieve a UFC title in the first place. Having said that, it would still be an incredible landmark to be a part of."

As William finished his statement, Sana caught Isak's eyes and appraised the young man, flashing him a polite smile. Eskild nodded enthusiastically before saying, "Now we just have to find an incredibly skilled, openly gay MMA fighter." A round of laughs bounced across the table as the occupants turned their attention to the drunk coach and his slightly buzzed fighter. Chris picked his head up from where he'd laid it against Isak's shoulder and uttered a joking question, "Does drunkenly making out with some Russ boys in high school count?" The friends chuckled at the man's drunken charm before Olmeive, playing along, answering him. " Ooh, I don't think it does. But hey, I'm sure there's plenty of other firsts that a coach could have." Isak jumped into the banter saying, "You mean like not puking for the first time on your way back to your apartment from the bar?"

Another round of easy laughter bubbled around the table. Seeing the opportunity to not only remove Chris from the bar before anymore alcohol entered his bloodstream, but to also avoid anymore bizarre and uncomfortable interactions with Emma, Isak informed the table he'd be going home now to put his coach to bed. After a round of good night's and an undeniable avoidance of Emma's lustful gaze, Isak and his friend braved the biting winter air of Oslo and began to make their way back to the fighter's apartment.

22:06

Upon entering the door the stiff hinges whined as Chris tossed his keys on the small, end table to the left. The slowly sobering man walked with a labored gait until he was in front of the couch and promptly fell back on it, letting out a satisfied grunt and turning it into a yawn. Isak walked into the kitchen and retrieved two bottles of water from the fridge before striding back into the living room and toeing off his shoes.
"Yo coach!", Isak gave Chris a heads up before lightly tossing him the other bottle of water. The blonde boy watched with a fond smile stretched across his face as the instructor drank over half the bottle in one go. "Whoa, don't go too fast; Elias got super pissed when Eva puked on the couch." Chris snorted a laugh and then repositioned himself so his feet were resting in his student's lap. "Shit man, I forgot about that night. Didn't she hook up with her ex or something?" Isak took a small sip of his water while nodding his head, keeping his eyes on his lap, away from his coach's gaze. The older man let out an affirming hum before speaking again. "I remember being kind of disappointed they'd hooked up actually", the brunette let his eyes slowly travel up the expanse of Isak's body. "Although, she certainly wasn't the only one I had my eye on that night."

Isak tried to cover the hitch in his breath by clearing his throat. He peered over momentarily to find Chris' low lidded eyes locked onto his own, his lips parted a half inch or so. Isak spoke again, trying to relieve the tension and slowly rising panic he felt creeping through his being. "Oh, cool......so um, who else was there?". As Isak looked to the opposite end of the couch, Chris had pulled out a weed vape and started taking small pulls on it. "Someone who's so oblivious they should receive an award of some sort." Chris' fighter let out a slightly relieved laugh at that. "Sounds like me with Emma honestly. I mean, she can't possibly think I'm actually that oblivious right?" Chris shrugged, "Probably not, but honestly I think you should cut Emma some slack." Isak grabbed the vape as his friend offered it to him, giving him a look of puzzled amusement. Chris let a smooth smirk form on his lips before sitting up, moving closer to the younger man. "You see, the thing is Isak, Emma gets so overly excited with you that it kind of ruins any tact she might have. She doesn't know quite how to charm people just yet." He subtly moved closer to Isak before continuing. "It's certainly a refined skill. Observing someone at a party or a concert, wherever, having fun. Realizing the parts of yourself you need to fortify to get them to notice you.", as Isak slowly lifted his eyes up he felt a rush of simultaneous arousal and nervousness when he realized how close his and Chris' faces were. "But sometimes, that's not what they care about. Sometimes they don't want to see how grand you can make the walls of your own castle." Isak felt his breathing quicken as his eyes reflexively darted between his coach's own eyes and lips. The blonde could feel the warm, now slightly sweet and earthen breath brush over his lips as Chris continued to lean into him as he spoke. "Sometimes, Isak, they want you to give them the permission to take the walls of that castle apart. But I know that can be terrifying, especially if you have no clue how you'd build them back up again." Isak swallowed thickly, letting out his response in a breath of rasped air, "I think....I might be willing to give someone that permission. The right person, that is."

Noticing Chris had started to let his eyes close and lean closer, Isak did the same. *Holy shit, I'm about to kiss a guy! I'm about to kiss fucking Chris for Christ sake! He's my coach! Does Chris even like guys? He said he made out with some back in high school. Shit, Isak, he was probably just joking, stop being so desp-* before Isak's racing thoughts could finish speeding through his synapses he heard an all too familiar wet heave that indicated someone vomiting was inevitable. Snapping open his eyes just in time to aim his coach's bowed head away from the couch, Isak grimaced as Chris deposited the remnants of what he'd drank at the bar and Elias's mother's curry and black bean casserole onto their wood and apoxy resin coffee table. The young martial artist covered up an annoyed yet also relieved sigh as his now sweaty friend cleaned his face with a box of tissues on the edge of the table that'd been sparred. Immediately after this, Isak heard a burst of laughter.
"Holy shit," Chris croaked out, "It looks like the Mjolnir Gym logo." Briefly glancing at the piled bile and food, Isak couldn't hold back a head shaking chuckle because it really did look like the Icelandic gym's logo. "Ok buddy, let's get you to bed before you start seeing the SBG logo in the recyclables or something." Chris sauntered into the bathroom at the end of the hall to relieve himself as Isak cleaned up the mess and then waited while his coach slowly brushed his teeth. He then helped ease him down onto his bed before saying, "Hey, I'm gonna leave another water bottle and trash can beside you, OK man?" Christoffer nodded lazily and quietly cleared his throat.

"Hey...Isak," Isak turned his head as he reached Chris' bedroom door, making a small noise to indicate he should continue, "I'm really glad that you're my friend." The sleepy man's eyes opened slowly, but quickly settled on Isak's, "And I'm really proud that you're one of my fighters." Isak felt his throat tighten slightly and his jaw clench before he replied, "Thanks Chris, I'm proud that you're one of my coaches." With that, Isak softly closed his door and walked to the end of the hall where he entered his own bedroom. A few minutes later, Isak found himself replaying his and Chris' conversation on the couch. He'd said he'd be willing to be vulnerable with the right person, but would he really? You were saying whatever you thought would make him kiss you. Fuck. It was an uncomfortable thought, but one not even Isak would say there wasn't truth to. But none of it mattered right now anyway. You might want to stop going through scenarios in your head before you're even out of the closet. He let out a sigh and decided to kowtow to the tired sassyness of his now nearly sober brain. These things were better thought about when he was at one hundred percent anyway. The last thing he heard before falling asleep were Chris' words echoing in his head: I'm really proud that you're one of my fighters.'

Chapter End Notes

Poor puke-y Chris! And poor Isak! Although it might be better that he didn't have a full on makeout sesh with his striking coach. Talk about an awkward training session am I right? The whole Emma betting on Isak's fight without watching it scenario actually happened to a friend of mine, although it was a b-class level Muay Thai fight, not an mma bout.

Anyways, I am a dork and here are some explanations/images for this chapter. Also I don't have a beta or anything so if ya'll see any mistakes let me know.

Amanda Nunes is the UFC's current Female bantamweight (135lbs, 61.3kg) Champion. She's also the first openly gay champion in the UFC. She has a gym which she co-runs with her fiance, a strawweight (115 lbs, 52kg) fighter named Nina Ansaroff.

Mjolnir is an Icelandic MMA gym where Gunnar Nelson, one of my all time favorite fighters, trains.

SBG stands for Straight Blast Gym, Ireland and is where Connor McGregor and several other Irish and U.K. fighters train. SBG is an international company with over 35 gyms worldwide.

Mjolnir Logo: https://images.tapology.com/gyms/logos/4026/profile/4026-mjlnir.jpg?
SBG Logo: https://fujisports.eu/media/categories/SBG-Straingt-Blast-Gym-Sandy-Springs-Logo-406-320.png

Also this fucking killer video of Gunnar Nelson and Mjolnir Gym doing an awesome cover of Michael Jackson's Beat It: https://youtube.com/watch?v=j_dKgeVX7IE

If you guys wanna nerd out over cute boys fighting or anything else let me know!
Wu-Tang Is For The Children

Chapter Summary

A new advertising campaign at work makes Even curious about the kind of people who train at Bred Akse, Magnus has made a full recovery from his vicarious celebration of Isak's fight and Isak himself is concerned for the innocent ears of Even's students.

Chapter Notes

What up! Definitely finished this chapter sooner than expected, so you guys are getting it sooner than expected! We scratch the surface of some of Even's past and get a feel for what his life in the real world is like. This chapter is definitely focused on Even primarily, but I also wanted to try and exhibit the close, rolling banter that I've often found is in abundance when humans decide to sweat all over and punch and kick one another. Your kudos and comments help me pay for my completely unnecessary and slowly growing collection of Japanese vinyl funk albums. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Torsdag

September 27th, 2018

8:33

The chilling tingle of Oslo's early morning air made the exposed, blonde hairs on the man's legs straighten like soldiers at attention. The slow burn of lactic acid filled his calves and upper thighs, his breathing steadily getting more and more labored. He stopped at a crosswalk, smiling at an old woman walking her dog. The sounds of a city waking up and preparing for another day rang through his ears. The rolling whoosh of wind as it was broken apart over vehicles transporting adults to work and children to school. The hum of conversation synchronizing with the lazy clip-cloping of dress shoes and office casual footwear. Coffee shops opening and welcoming the still sleepy populus to invigorate themselves with a dose of caffeine. The sun cutting through the shadow of lingering night and warming all it touched.

To say Even Bech Naesheim was a morning person would be an understatement. For Even, in his blue knee high shorts and vintage Adidas sweatband, morning wasn't just a time of day, it was a triumph of light over dark, literally. A representation that you get to try again, that yesterday doesn't define you. As someone who at times lived in yesterday the importance of a new morning was not lost on Even. He slowed to a gentle walk as he caught his breath and looked down to his shorts as he fished out his phone to confirm the time. Deciding he had time before he had to head
home and prepare for work, the tall blonde entered a coffee shop he spotted a few feet in front of him and let his eyes trail over the menu to the side of the counter. After settling on and ordering an iced chai latte, Even leaned back against the small booth behind him and opened up the home screen on his phone.

He saw he had a few messages from his assistant as well as a few missed calls. As he started responding to one of the texts his assistant had sent, a cheery, feminine voice informed him his drink was ready. Thanking the barista and paying for the latte, Even walked out of the shop and continued answering his texts before he switched to his missed calls and felt his mood drop slightly. What now Sonja? Choosing not to return the call, Even enjoyed the rest of his walk home, taking his time and stopping for aimless small talk as he greeted a few neighbors. When the instructor returned home, he walked up the stairs to his apartment at a slightly slower than necessary pace. Letting out a preparatory sigh as he reached the door and unlocked it, Even walked into the small foyer to find his roommate Mikael making breakfast. His eyes searched thoroughly, but found no site of his other roommate.

"Hey Mikki, have you seen Sonja this morning?" Even's raven haired friend shrugged while dashing in a pinch of paprika to his omelet. "She said hey before she went to work, but she left a few minutes before you got back." The taller man felt a short lived wave of relief wash over him as he realized this just meant he'd have longer to anticipate what Sonja was going to say to him. Exhaling an abrupt sigh, Even informed his roommate he had to go get ready for work.

After he'd washed himself clean from the early morning of downtown Oslo, Even selected what he was going to wear that day. He settled on a pair of charcoal skinny jeans, a muted lime, baseball v-neck that brushed his thighs and a matte black wool vest. Giving himself a once-over in his full length mirror, the thirty something deemed himself ready to face the cutthroat world of health food marketing and advertising. The man shouted a quick goodbye to Mikael as he left the apartment and made his way to work, noticing the distinct lack of people on the street as compared to earlier that morning. When Even arrived at work he noticed his coworkers were gathered near the center left of the room, listening to their supervisor discuss breaking into a new market.

"We've always had a solid clientele in the sports world. Expanding that will be a massive benefit as we attempt to secure higher level contracts with different organizations and athletes." The supervisor stopped her speech to watch Even, prompting everyone to shift their focus onto the tardy individual. He cleared his throat before apologizing. "Um, sorry Mrs. Olufsen, sorry everybody, lost track of time I guess." A satisfied yet somehow unamused look contorted his boss's face. "Oh no, it's actually convenient that you showed up when you did. You see Even, we're starting a new marketing campaign directed at athletes in combat sports. Actually, you uh, trained a few fighters didn't you Mr. Naesheim?" Even felt a flood of anxiety and resentful memories crash into him, staining his cheeks a fleshy pink. "Yes, Mrs. Olufsen, I did work with a few fighters back in the day. But to be honest I was an entirely different person then, so to gleen anything from that time in my life...... well, I don't know if that would be an intelligent decision."

He could see the surprise on his boss's face, reflecting in raised eyebrows and a lightly pursed
mouth. "Well, we'll certainly keep that in mind when asking for your input." Even gave a stiff nod, his eyes shifting off the supervisor to meet those of his friend Adam. He gave Even a quizzical look, one that said 'we're going to talk about this later, no matter how awkward and uncomfortable it is'. A quiet sigh left Even's nostrils as he added Adam to his list of anticipatory discussions. After the meeting was over Adam made a bee line for his friend, stopping him before he could unsuccessfully try to blend in with the other employees heading back to their desks and workspaces.

"What's up dude?" To anyone else it sounded like a normal greeting, but almost two decades of friendship supplied Even with the information Adam wasn't saying. Are you okay? You were late to work, you're hardly ever late. Have you been eating? How's your sleep? He flashed what he hoped was an easy and comfortable smile at his friend. "Apart from Olufsen's attempt to take me down a peg not much. Can't say I'm not excited for this new campaign though." Adam decided to indulge his friend, seeing his eyes say more than his mouth would allow. Yes, I'm okay. I let my run go a bit longer than usual. Definitely been eating, sleeping is good, could be better. The friends turned co-workers chatted animatedly while they worked through the day, talking about what sort of approaches and techniques they thought would be best to endear themselves to their new clientele.

The workday was drawing to a close as Even's shoulders reflexively jumped after hearing Adam exclaim a loud "Ooh!" Seeming to not notice or simply not care about startling the taller man Adam continued talking. "Elias' gym? Bred Akse? They're an mma gym right? I bet we could get some great insights from the people there." Even rolled his eyes, but his mouth twitched upward. "Yeah, I can see if they might give us some input. But Adam, I haven't been in that world for a long time. I mean, I teach seven to twelve years olds jiu-jitsu for Christ's sake." His colleague rose his hands in mock defense. "Relax man, I didn't ask you to try and get a job as a coach or something."

The pale man's shoulders raised and dropped. "I know, I just don't know how much different their input could be than whoever our people decide to work with. I mean honestly, if I wanted to make friends with a bunch of sweaty alpha dudes, I have much more fun ways of going about it." This time Even's smirk was in full effect, causing his friend to expel a loud burst of laughter followed by a short shake of his head. Although, the more Even thought about it, the more he wondered if maybe there was a nuanced voice at the gym.

18:56

The early autumn sun of Oslo punched through the long, columnar windows of Bred Akse. Golden light piercing through sweat and making it flash before going back to being simple droplets of pure effort. Isak was on the mats, Mahdi, Isak's favored student to use to demonstrate techniques, was currently held in an achilles lock. His hand was raised above the young fighter's thigh, ready to tap when needed.

"Quick, brutal, crushing compression. That what makes this submission work guys. Ideally you
want your opponent stretched out because this makes you far more difficult to punch and gives you better control over their foot, but even if they’re closer”, at Isak's motioning Mahdi scooted just into striking range of Isak, "You can still secure the submission. And obviously if he starts dropping bombs," Isak's partner mimed throwing heavy shots at his head, "You can reposition," He moved his hips off to the left, furthering the distance between himself and Mahdi, "Or, get them thinking about something else." With that Isak modified the grip he had on his friends foot, setting up the beginnings of a heel hook. As he did Mahdi tried to defend by pulling his leg to him, but as he did Isak hooked his leg with his arm, swiftly tossing the sparrad limb across Mahdi’s body before transitioning into a cradle position. Giving his partner an appreciative shoulder pat, Isak heaved his well worked body off the mat and over to his bag, scooping up his water bottle and taking a few deep swigs.

As he lowered his bottle his eyes were met with the kind yet slightly secretive smile of his ebony skinned friend. "Good roll today bro. I've loved that cradle transition ever since Magnus showed it to us." Isak smiled and nodded, "Mags is a lot of things, but a shit teacher isn't one of them." As the young men walked over to the hexagonal cage to the right back center of the gym, Mahdi dropped his voice to a low pitch. Not a 'you wanna hear a secret' level, but certainly a 'so I heard that' level. "So, you know how we've had that kid-jitsu teacher in here for the last few months?" Isak gave Mahdi a curious nod. "Me an Olm have dubbed him the James Dean of Jiu-jitsu." His friend gave a humorous snort at Isak's surprisingly accurate moniker of their newest member. "Apparently he's not just Elias' childhood friend or whatever. A few years ago he was training guys like Pimblett and Gokhan Saki. Eventually he ended up at Stavanger, but there was some drama and he turned his back on mma entirely."

The blonde youth's eyes flicked from where they were watching Magnus and Olmeive drill takedowns over to Even's designated area of the gym, a group of eight year olds practicing guard passes. A wide smile graced the instructor's face as he watched a young student finally pass her partners guard. *Maybe kid-jitsu guy is more interesting than I thought.* When Isak glanced back to Mahdi the grappler seemed to be finishing up the new guys story. "After that, nobody really wanted him. He did some privates or got paid to guest at a seminar, but he never trained another mma fighter again. Rumor is that after he moved back to Oslo, he got a marketing job or something and then Elias sublet the gym for him so he could keep teaching. Shit man, I swear sometimes I feel like this whole industry is a well organized, badly written soap opera with a lot more violence."

It was Isak’s time to snort a laugh at his friend's assessment of their chosen profession. As the fighter's pine green globes moved back to the wrestling and takedown attempts of Magnus and Olmeive, a familiar melody entered his ears.

*Aw, I don't want to fuck you. You can’t even sing! You had to sing, or something, to get some pussy
Ooh, baby, I like it raw
Yeah, baby, I like it raw
Ooh, baby, I like it raw
Yeah, baby, I like it raw
Shimmy, shimmy, ya, shimmy, yam, shimmy, yay
Gimme the mic so I can take it away
Off on a natural charge, Bon Voyage*
Yeah, from the home of the dodgers, Brooklyn squad

Wu-Tang killer bees on a swarm
Rain on ya dollar's ass, disco dorm
For you to even touch my skill
You gotta have the one killer bee and-

The young man grumbled out a frustrated sigh; muttering to himself, Isak walked briskly to where Elias was currently doing a light round on a heavy bag, having foregone gloves and letting his hand wraps get some air. Isak crossed his arms and waited on his coach to notice him, looking every bit like a disappointed parent. The older man's brows sprung up as strode up to his fighter. "Hey bro. Good roll today?" The coach was trying to come off as oblivious, but the perfectly mixed hedonism of Ol' Dirty Bastard flowing through the gyms p.a. system was enough to give Isak pause. "Look, Elias, I like ODB as much as the next guy, but are you sure that you should playing that with fucking kids here!?", Isak finished his statement in a near whispered hiss.

A set of melted umber eyes caught a pair of translucent baby-blues as Isak observed, bewildered yet intrigued, as his boxing coach and kid-jitsu man both started guffawing. Ok. Obviously there was a joke Isak wasn't in on. As he turned to Elias for an answer the gym owner had already begun speaking, " Relax little viking, those kids don't speak a word of English. And certainly not street slang from mid nineties New York." As soon as Elias had finished up his actually pretty solid defense of his musical choice, Mahdi chimed in with a timely setup. "Yeah Isak, you really didn't know?" A genuine expression of confusion contorted Isak's face. At that moment, he looked back to the cage just in time to see Olmeive finally take down Magnus, but not before the wrestling coach bellowed triumphantly, " Wu-Tang is for the children!"

Chapter End Notes

Hope the banter was good. Isak is definitely the mom of the gym. Also I did have a wrestling/jiu-jitsu instructor who always played like deep, dark doom metal or super aggressive 90’s rap and hip-hop. And we had a dance troupe that practiced like literally 50 feet from us lol. Well, I gotta get to bed, see you sexy fuckers soon!

A/N - I changed the sentence where Mahdi says "a decade ago he was training guys like Pimblett and Gokhan Saki". You see, for all my mma knowledge I'm not very smart lol. I pretty much muddled up the timeline of events to my own fic, but I'm fixing it now. Even started training fighters in Stavanger around 4-5 years ago, just for reference. Sorry, just had to clear that one up!

Stuff for the fic-

The achilles lock Isak is demonstrating with Mahdi:

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=__Dzt_mR6pl&t=1s

Paddy Pimblett: An English fighter who competes at 145 and 155 for the Cage Warriors promotion. He's a total goofball and a very entertaining fighter.
Gokhan Saki: An ethnically Turkish fighter from Holland who competes at 205 and 265. He's a multiple time Dutch and European Muay Thai champion and started competing for the UFC in September of last year.

A great breakdown of some basic jiu-jitsu positions: https://www.slideshare.net/mobile/al2013/brazilian-jiu-jitsu-fundamental-positions

Also, so it'll be easier to reference and visualize, this is the list of weight classes in mma. In the past few years, a few betweener classes have been added under the Unified Rules of MMA, but for this fic, we'll be sticking with the following ones.

Strawweight: 115 lbs, 52.2kg
Flyweight: 125 lbs, 56.7kg
Bantamweight: 135 lbs, 61.2kg
Featherweight: 145 lbs, 65.8kg
Lightweight: 155 lbs, 70.3kg
Welterweight: 170 lbs, 77.1kg
Middleweight: 185 lbs, 83.9kg
Light Heavyweight: 205 lbs, 93kg
Heavyweight: 265 lbs, 120.2kg (This is the maximum weight allowance for fighters at heavyweight.)
A reflection you don't recognize anymore

Chapter Summary

Even gets a unique opportunity at work which may draw him closer to the fighter's in Bred Akse. Isak struggles with his thoughts concerning a certain coach and is contacted by someone he hasn't spoken to in a long time. Noora, William and Eskild discuss securing a sponsorship for some of their fighters and the politics of regional mma.

Chapter Notes

Totally stoked on this chapter. So I've pretty much abandoned giving you guys a singular day when I might update. Just know most of the time it'll probably be weekly. Also, heavy warning, Isak is very down on himself in this chapter. I really wanted to emphasize how insecure he really is. Also some of you may have noticed I added a tag, and it is certainly relevant to Isak and his back story. Enjoy the chapter! And look for the end notes if you have questions about anything. Your comments and kudos help keep my shitty heavy bag intact! Skol!

Onsdag

Oktober 3rd, 2018

10:48

Even knew that his boss had spoken. Saw her lips move, heard the flowing pauses and explanations. However, when the words tried to enter his brain, they dissolved into a muffled, vague semblance of their original form. "Um.....", was his only response to the information he'd just been given. His eyes had compressed into half moons, holding a pair of questioning blue orbs. His brows were drawn in as if being pulled towards one another by an invisible string and his slightly chapped lips were stretched into a flat line of suspicion.

"Can you repeat that?" Mrs. Olufsen released an irritated sigh through her long, aquiline nose, but nonetheless repeated herself. "After looking over the profiles of ten selected employees across our offices countrywide, our corporate HQ has decided they would like to offer you a position as creative director for our new marketing campaign."

Even's immediate reaction of uncontrolled laughter was as inappropriate as it was unintentional.
"Shit! I mean...crap, sorry. Um, wow this is pretty serious then huh?" His supervisor nodded with a condescending raise of her eyebrows. "You'd be part of a team of three other people, all communicating together to work on the campaign and, if need be, traveling to meet with each other. I'm also obligated to inform you that if you choose to sign onto the team, your salary will be increased by fifteen percent and you as well as the other members of the team will receive twelve percent of the over all gross earnings after the first quarter. This percentage would of course be split among the four of you."

The tall man's brain broke the numbers down in his head. The company wasn't a giant like Onnit or MusclePharm, but they'd carved out a nice chunk of the market, particularly in Scandinavia. The three percent may not have sounded like much, but Even knew it would be a substantial amount of money. The fact that the more successful the campaign was the sweeter that three percent would be was not lost on him either. It was a good motivating tactic. Absorbing all this, there was still a question simmering away in Even's brain. "Why'd they pick me?"

Olufsen raised her gently sloping shoulders in a shrug. "I can't be sure, but I imagine they looked at people with a background in combat sports, probably asked some local athletes and fighters about their opinions on the individual." The muscles in Even's jaw tightened and he felt the previously steady beat of his heart begin to increase. Relax Even, she said local. Finding himself slowly nodding, the jiu-jitsu instructor shifted his gaze from his employer's desk to her face, allowing himself the smallest hint of smug triumph when he saw the subtle, disappointed frown on her face. "You know what? I think being creative director of this project could be a great opportunity for me to ease myself back into the community of mixed martial arts." Even had no intentions of doing this, but he was a master at making bullshit smell like fresh baked cinnamon buns and his supervisor didn't need to know that.

Mrs. Olufsen gave her younger employee a tight smile and stood up to shake his hand. "I'll let corporate know by this afternoon. Also you'll receive a projection of sales by Monday, so be expecting that. Then on Friday you'll be having a video conference with the other three members of the team." Her expression shifted into something more genuine; not happy, certainly not proud, but definitely with a sense of approval. "Even Bech Naesheim, welcome aboard PurKonchus Nutritionals first campaign for combat athletes." The sense of approval dissipated rapidly as her face set into a serious expression, "Don't fuck this up Naesheim. It might be the only chance at upward mobility you get in this company."

11:04

A sigh escaped from his mouth at the same time the vinyl upholstered chair gave a series of sharp squeaks. Languidly turning his chair to face his coworker, Even leveled Adam with a look of feigned apprehension. “Bro…”. Adam quirked his head to the left to address the other man. “What’s up buddy?”
“Apparently, corporate HQ decided that they want me to be the creative director for our new campaign. Along with three other people.” “Dude! That awesome!”, his friend exclaimed with a congratulatory pat and rub of his shoulder. “Yeah, maybe. I mean, I went to school for this, but I never thought I’d be in a position where it’d actually be relevant.” Adam hitched up his eyebrows at Even’s statement. “So what, your degree is just a wall hanger?” His tall friend’s eyes rolled to the side, shaking off Adam’s question.

“And who our age do you know who actually has a job directly related to what they went to school for? Hell, Elias went to UiO for social media advertising and market trend analysis, now he runs an mma gym. Yousef has a PhD in comparative anthropology and he owns a dance studio. Mikael has a teaching degree in classical Moroccan literature and works—” “Dude! I get it, jeez you try to congratulate a guy.”

Even apologized to his friend, stating it was just a lot of pressure all at once. “It’s weird. Like the universe decided to remind me I’m useful or something.” His friend gave him a speculative look of worry. “Of course you’re useful Ev. You’re going to fucking kill this campaign man!” Even gave Adam a smile of acquiescence, saying he hoped Adam was right. “Plus, you have Elias’ whole gym as a resource! You don’t even have to deal with whoever they get. And they said they want local input anyway right?” Even gave a nod and silently thanked Elias. He knew the chances of PurKonchus’s combat athlete consultants being members of his old Stavanger team were slim, but even that didn’t settle his worries. He thought back to what he’d said to Mrs. Olufsen about getting back into mma. Maybe it wasn’t as disastrous an idea as he’d originally thought.

16:33

“Mags, c’mon that’s total bullshit!” “I’m not lying! She made a meow, like a cat!” Mahdi and Isak’s snorts and eye rolls were simultaneous, making all three of the friends laugh amicably. “What did you say the start time was Isak?”, Mahdi asked his friend. Isak replied that their movie would be starting at 16:45, which gave them ample time to chat while they walked to the theater. “I heard our boy Isak here had a run in with Emma at Bjorn’s a few days ago.”, Magnus informed Mahdi as he playfully knocked his shoulder into the blonde boys.

“Ugh, more like a run away. I swear, that girl couldn’t take a hint if you paid her to.” Magnus scoffed at this, chastising Isak, saying that he had to hookup with girls so Mahdi could live vicariously through Isak’s sexcapades. Putting a theatrical hand to his chest, Mahdi pinned Magnus with his chocolate, charcoal eyes. “I do just fine for myself thank you very much. Also I’m not as snobby when it comes to girls as Isak.” The fighter shot his friend a puzzled look. “Just cause I score out of my league doesn’t mean I’m snobby.” Doesn’t really mean anything though does it Isak? Like you’d score out of your league even if you weren’t a closeted pussy. Isak tilted his head to the left and right, appearing to stretch his neck, but really imagining those painful thoughts emptying out of his head. It was among his favorite visualization techniques he’d learned from his sports-psych coach.
Magnus let out a loud, “Ooohh!” “He got you Mahd Man.” Mahdi shook his head at the nickname while a wide smile broke over his face. Making a decision to further distance himself from his intrusive, cruel thoughts, Isak brought up another topic. “So Mags, I hear Olmeive’s a couple fights away from a title shot?” The young man’s silk straw hair vibrated and bounced as he nodded enthusiastically. “Hell yeah man! William and Eskild told me they’re actually keeping him as a back up if the Geiranger vs Kolumalu fight has any dropouts, so he’s definitely been training hard.”

The boys dark skinned friend nodded in approval. “He definitely deserves it; guy’s been climbing that division like a mountain goat.” “He has, and if he wins the belt he’ll be the youngest lightweight champ in the promotions history.” The three men continued to talk about their friend and the opportunities that might be presented to him should he win the belt.

As they approached the theater and walked inside, Isak’s phone vibrated in his pocket, indicating he’d received a text. After paying for his ticket, he retrieved his phone, scrolling to his messages to see a text from Elias.

**Eli-B da Box Man:** Yo lil’ viking, I have cool and potentially money making news for you! Have fun with Mags and Mahdi and don’t tell me anything about the movie!

Isak cracked a small smile as he wrote his reply.

**Isak:** Sounds intriguing! Let’s go over the details when I get home.

After entering the theater their movie was being played in, Isak silenced his phone and settled in.

17:46

The film was OK, certainly not spoiler worthy so Elias could rest easy. Isak wished he’d been more interested in the movie, then he wouldn’t be left alone with his thoughts set to a soundtrack of popcorn grazing audience members and quiet, interspersed conversations. *You need to clear the air with Chris. Just because he didn’t say anything doesn’t mean he doesn’t remember it.* Isak shifted his hips, bringing his knees together and compressing himself into his seat. Maybe if he folded in on himself enough, he could choke the life from his unwanted thoughts.

No such luck.
How do you know he even wanted to kiss you? He was probably just drunk and horny. You think he’d actually want you? C’mon Isak. You were pretty much on the path to taking advantage of him. What would’ve happened if he hadn’t gotten sick? You would’ve kept going wouldn’t you? A chance for you to finally rid yourself of your disgusting urges. You’re no fucking better than he was Isak. Just going about your predation in a different way.

No. No, that’s not true. Isak knew it wasn’t true. He would never, could never do something like that. Ok, yes he has had some fantasies about a few guys from the gym. But he’d never act on them. He wouldn’t be able to anyway, wouldn’t have the courage. Maybe he was a pervert, but wasn’t a predator.

Of course. If you’re always the victim you can’t be the predator. Keep telling yourself you’re in control. Keep lying to your own face. One day, some new, vibrant boy is going to stride into Bred Akse and you’re not going to be able to control yourself. You’ll slither your way into his life just like he did. Gain his trust, make him feel special. But you’ll be so genuine won’t you? In fact, when you let him know what you really want from him, he’ll feel so indebted to you, he’ll let you do whatever you want. And after that, you’ll never see your own reflection again Isak. It’ll just be those mocking, manipulative, speckled mud eyes staring back at you.

Isak stood up abruptly, informing his friends he needed to use the restroom. When he entered the space he was relieved to see know one was there. Turning two faucets on full blast and smashing the button to start the hand drying machine, the upset youth let out a series of muffled screams into his elbow as his lashes threatened to give way to the weight of the tears held behind them. I’m so fucked up.

18:23

Once the film finished, Isak was at the head of the trio of friends, eager to feel the cool brush of October air against his cheeks. He hoped the tear trails from earlier had dissipated by now. The boys moved into the night air, Mahdi and Magnus chatting animatedly about the movie. While the friends huddled in close proximity to guard against the chilly night air, Isak felt his pocket begin vibrating. Assuming it was Elias again, Isak eagerly removed it from his jeans, happy to have something to distract himself with.

The name appearing on Isak’s lock screen didn’t confirm his hope. Instead the boy saw a name he hadn’t seen in nearly four years. A name that made him think of his childhood. Made him think of sleepovers, sharing toys, and play dates. A name that made him think of first crushes and secrets. Of guilty jealously and smoking weed for the first time. A name that made his stomach drop and his heart clench.
William was currently sitting with Noora and Eskild. The couple had invited their friend and business partner Eskild over to discuss some things about William’s mma promotion. “I hear you guys are keeping Olmeive on tap as an alternate for the main event in a couple weeks?”, Noora questioned the men before she began gathering a bite of salad on her fork. William nodded while Eskild took a sip of his drink, making a noise indicating he just remembered something.

“So, you guys know the sexy jiu-jitsu instructor at Elias’ gym?” William couldn’t help but chuckle at the statement, Noora herself letting out a smiling scoff. “You know he does have a name Eskild.” The ginger in question smiled mischievously replying, “I’ll call him whatever he wants me to. However, that’s not the point. Apparently he’s recently been made head of a marketing campaign that his company is starting focusing on nutrition and training for combat athletes.” Their friend leaned back proudly after divulging his information.

Noora and her husband’s ears and eyes perked up at this. William turned to Eskild, “And what company is it that he works for?”

A playfully smug grin overtook the redhead’s face. “PurKonchus.”

The couple let out dual laughs of surprise, Noora pinning her friend with a wide eyed gaze. “Are you serious!? Eskild, we’ve been courting a sponsorship deal with them for the past year!” The manager closed his eyes, basking in his achievement. William was equally as excited if not more so, which was saying a lot for the normally reserved man. “This is incredible man!,” the promotion owner said while patting and appreciatively shaking his friends shoulder, “How’d you even hear about this?”

“The creative director for the campaign emailed me directly, said he can’t entirely confirm it, but he thinks that Elias would definitely be interested in getting sponsorship for a few Bred Akse fighters.” “Did he have anyone in mind?”, Noora asked Eskild. “He gave me a few names; Olmeive Deichtner, Feliciana Corderon, Oskar Gulinier, Isak Valtersen-“

William’s eyebrows moved up his forehead at the mention of Isak’s name, sharing a look with his wife. “Valtersen, really?” Eskild gave an affirmative hum while sipping his beer. “I think they call him the little viking or something. Which is weird considering the boy’s almost one point eighty two meters. You know, I wonder if he has to….” The friend and business partner ended his stream of consciousness once he realized both Noora and William giving him a vaguely skeptical look.
“What? Is Valtersen like an ex-con or something? I mean he just turned twenty one this year, bit young for that isn’t he?” Noora gave Eskild an appeasing smile while shaking her head. “No, of course not, nothing like that. It’s just, well, Isak’s not quite yet the same level of fighter that Olm or Oskar or Feliciana are.” Eskild gave an understanding nod before turning to William.

“They’re all NFC fighters though correct?” “They are, but, well, I don’t mean to insult Isak or anything but….”, William cut himself off, clearly feeling uncomfortable criticizing one of the youngest fighters of his roster. Noora let out a sigh and finished what William was trying to say. “Eskild, I know you might not be aware of this since you’re the general talent manager, but out of all eighty-three fighters currently signed to Norske Fighting Championships, Isak is the only one who’s never fought for another organization. And he’s still very young in his career, so the push to sponsor him isn’t too great.”

The manager gave the couple a confused look, cocking his head just off center. “So companies don’t want to sponsor Isak because he’s loyal?” The husband and wife both gave a shrug of their shoulders, William offering a further explanation, “Sponsors want deals with multiple organizations. Having fighters who routinely fight for different promotions helps secure that.” Eskild still had a somewhat disappointed scrunch to his face.

“It’s certainly not ideal,” Noora conceded, “But, in lower level, regional mma, that’s how things go.” William nodded his concurrently. “Which isn’t to say we don’t support Isak, but our promotional reach only goes so far. And being one of the few organizations that has a dual competition clause in our contracts, Isak doesn’t have very many other promotions to go to. Still, we’ll absolutely do everything in our power to promote and elevate our fighters to where they want to be.”

The talent manager gave a curling tuck of a smile to that, not having realized that Isak would be unlikely to obtain a sponsorship. Heaving a sigh, Eskild raised his glass. “Well, I can’t say that’s the answer I wanted, but a partial win is better than no win at all. Skol!” The couple repeated the cheer and the three friends clinked their glasses together, moving on to discuss other business.

Chapter End Notes

So this chapter is basically the beginnings of the main plot and how most of the characters are going to intersect into it. I know I haven't introduced everybody, but remember this is technically chapter 4. Also this is probably around the length the chapters will be from now on.

Stuff for the fic:

Onnit is a health and wellness company. The offer a lot of nutritional supplements,
health food, training gear and are a sponsor for several high level fighters.

MusclePharm: Apart from being one of the first real mixed martial arts gyms, they're also a supplement and training optimization company and also sponsor a number of fighters.

The dual competition thing is basically a contractual clause that is a mutually agreed upon deal by two or more promotions to allow a fighter to compete in multiple organizations while not having to be signed exclusively. Because most of the promotions that do this are in lower level and regional mma, a lot of fighters sign exclusively to one organization when they start to enter into higher level competition.

It's definitely some boring politics bullshit, but for the sake of the story it will be important. I hope you guys are enjoying this as much as I am writing it!
What Hurts More, Is I Would Still Die For You

Chapter Summary

The past interferes with Jonas and Eva's attempt at an idyllic, planned life. Even breaks some good and slightly upsetting news to Mikael and Sonja. Isak is cautious of the sponsorship Elias is attempting to secure for him and is forced to deal with unresolved feelings involving his and Jonas' falling out years ago.

Chapter Notes

Mmm. Smell that boys and girls? That's some fresh, homemade angst. So, I'm back with a new chapter! This is kind of an angst heavy one, as previously mentioned. Also, I'm planning on our boys meeting properly next chapter. :D And Isak will likely be having another fight within the next 3 or 4 chapters. I'll put any other stuff in the end notes. Onward, and enjoy!

Fredag

Oktober 5th, 2018

14:12

The young man’s once shining, messy brunette curls had been traded in for a respectable, matte, medium short length cut. Almost a cast off of his previous naiveties. The core was still the same, but the tectonics and plates had shifted to create an otherwise unrecognizable landscape.

At least, if you knew him before that is.

Jonas looked at the pile of engagement party invitations with a half narrowed eye malice he usually reserved for only the most outward examples of crony capitalism. Having the party here in Stavanger would’ve been the easiest thing to do, but a lopsided number of friends and family residing in Oslo made the decision pretty clear. The man’s eyes focused in on one spot on the ‘personalization’ lines of the invitation. At this point the message to each friend and family member was reading like a work memo.

Hello. Getting married. Probably after university. No, Eva isn’t pregnant. Yes we are currently
living together. Love you, Jonas.

The last line was a light, but good natured barb to his aunt’s once overly staunch brand of Catholicism. As he was sealing the invitation, the door of the apartment, which was also an entrance to the kitchen, opened slowly and a flurry of ginger blonde hair preceded the body that was now closing the door.

“Fuck. If it’s gonna feel so nice out, can the wind chill not be like, below freezing!?” Jonas’ fiancé, Eva, complained. He looked up at her from his seat at the table with a faux smug grin. “Told you to wear a scarf and lined jacke-”, the words stopped as Eva sealed her lips over Jonas’ briefly, gathering a small stack of the invitations that he’d already completed.

Jonas smiled at her as she thumbed through the envelopes, ensuring he didn’t miss anyone. “Your presentation went well, I assume?” The young woman gave a soft noise in her throat for confirmation. “Naturally I’ll be receiving at least half credit I’m sure.” Jonas joked flirtatiously. Eva appeared ready to strike back with an equally sassy and witty remark before her face drew to a confused point.

Jonas, looking as bewildered as possible, stared at his fiancé. “What’s wrong?” A defeated sigh fell through Eva’s lightly chapped lips as she sat down. “Can’t help noticing that there’s no Isak Valtersen invitation…” Trying to mask a mix of disappointment and embarrassment, Jonas drew his lips into a line and shrugged. “Can’t give him an invitation if he doesn’t pick up his phone to give me an address.” Eva’s face showed a frustration with his words, but her eyes held a look of wistful empathy. It still hurts because you still care.

“Ok.” Jonas now held a look of actual bewilderment. “Ok?” Eva nodded, while giving a small shrug of her own shoulders. “If you want to choose to not inform the most important person in your life who’s not me or your family about your wedding, that’s your choice. But it’s not going to be mine.” The University student stood from the table, walking into the newly engaged couple’s common room.

Jonas let the weight of the churning thoughts in his head make his skull fall backwards, folding over the back of his chair. A long exhalation pushed itself from his lungs.

As he entered the room with appeasing Eva in mind, Jonas mouth seemed to have a different idea. “It was mutual you know. It’s not like I ran off crying or he did. It was the best decision for both of us. He understood that then. He understands it now.” Eva couldn’t help pushing out a warm, sarcastic puff of air from her nose. “Understanding something and being okay with it isn’t the same thing Jonas.”, this time she let out a real sigh. “I probably won’t ever know why you chose to leave Oslo. Or why Isak chose to stay. But what I do know without a doubt is he is still your best friend Jonas. He still deserves to be able to talk to you. I’m not saying to harass the poor boy, but maybe
he’s just looking for a little more effort on your part.”

Jonas felt his hackles rise at the statement. “Really, he doesn’t contact me at all for almost four years, but I need to show more effort? You know Eva, if there’s one thing I know about Isak? He hates being seen as a victim. Like I said, it was a mutual decision on both our parts.” The usual lava-lamp softness of Jonas’ eyes had hardened into a steely hazel. The young woman shook her head. “The only mutual thing between you two is how ridiculously fucking stubborn and scared of your own emotions you both are.”

Having stuck a particularly hard landing, and nerve, with her words, Eva got up from the couch and quickly shut herself into her and Jonas room. The brunette swallowed heavily, picked his phone up from the glass inlay coffee table. He navigated to Isak’s name, the call log appearing beside it. There were no new calls. Jonas released a frustrated grunt before muttering under his breath, “Can’t you just fucking talk to me?” Knowing that no matter how cathartic it may be, cursing at Isak’s contact info on his phone was not going to resolve anything, Jonas opened a new conversation and began typing.

You: Hey Isak. It’s been almost four years.

We should’ve kept in touch.

We should’ve been there for each other.

I should’ve been there for you.

But we can’t continue to let my negligence define our friendship.

Me and Eva are getting married in a little over a year.

I understand if you can’t come to the engagement party.

I would like it very much if you could come to the wedding though.

This is Jonas btw.

I wasn’t sure if you still had my number.

17:22

A pair of wide, burnt umber eyes were focused on Even expectantly. A second pair of stormy, cautious, dark brown eyes were fixed upon him as well. The friends sat apprehensively, waiting for the reason of their ‘house meeting’ to be explained by Even. The man finally let out a conflicted sigh, gaining the attention of his roommates. He looked between them before finally blurting out.
“I got promoted at work. I’m the National Creative Director for PurKonchus’s new campaign for combat athletes. I’m getting a fifteen percent raise and three percent commission on our gross quarterly sales.”, Even spoke robotically. Both Mikael and Sonja sprung up from their positions the edge of the love seat, gathering Even into a celebratory hug.

“Even that’s incredible man!”

“I’m so proud of you!”

“Maybe we can start planning that vacation now!”

“It’s so nice they finally realized how effective you could be.”

Even couldn’t keep the small smile off his face as he let go of his friends. Their larger, mirrored smiles only made him feel more guilty though. The newly promoted employee awkwardly cleared his throat before speaking. “Thank you guys. Really, I’m so happy to share this news with you.”

The pair of roommates gave their friend genuine if slightly weary smiles. The tension in the small living room hinted at a yet to be dropped shoe. This dual suspicion was confirmed as the tall blonde continued to talk to his best friend and ex girlfriend.

“This fucking sucks but, um….One of you probably needs to move out within the next month or so.” The roommates suspicions were confirmed, both previously weary smiles now full blown confused and upset frowns.“Why? Like, do they need you to move?”, Mikael asked.

“Yeah I mean, depending on where you might need to go, maybe it’d be better if one or even both of us went with you?”, Sonja hazarded, a fair question considering her current knowledge of the situation.

The newly crowned creative director gave a gently shake of his head. “Am I correct in assuming that, ideally, neither of you enjoy switching off weekly between the pullout couch and the second bedroom?” Mikael fixed Even with an intrigued gaze.

“It can be bad on my back sometimes, but then again I would’ve never started doing yoga if it wasn’t for that.” The olive skinned man let his eyes flit over to Sonja, giving her a warm smile. The older woman returned it, fondly remembering how helpful getting Mikael to attend her yoga classes had been for his shoddy box spring induced back pain. She nodded her head along with her friend’s statement before replying. “It can be a bit uncomfortable at times, but I guess I’ve gotten used to it for the most part.”
Even let a lungful of breath flap his lips together, making him sound like a bored child. “And uh….how would you feel, either of you I mean, “the man bizarrely interjected,” if you were to sleep on an actual bed each night. Like, a new bed I mean?” He nervously cleared his throat before adding his last question.

“A new bed in a…..in a new apartment?” It was now Even who was looking at his friend’s with a weary smile. The pair standing opposite him widened their eyes, glancing to each other and then to Even. Sonja and Mikael were both thinking the same thing, but neither one were sure of how to address it. Several more awkward seconds of silence passed before Sonja finally decided to speak.

“Even, are you suggesting that you would want to get one of us, whoever moves out that is, a new apartment?” Her ex-boyfriend’s brows leapt up to his forehead. He remembered how seamlessly Sonja used to be able to interpret and predict what he was really trying to say. Those days were long gone now, but it was clear some degree of ability still resided in Even’s friend.

“Not exactly. I would definitely want to look over possible options though. And I’d certainly be willing to pitch in on the rent for the first few months. But honestly, the reason I’m asking is….well”, Even sat back down in the ornate, mahogany chair he’d been sat in earlier, “There’s a likely chance that this new position is going to cause some stress. I know I haven’t had an episode in almost two years. And the last one was fairly easily managed.” Even put as much appreciation and love into his gaze as he could before continuing.

“With my salary increase and quarterly commission, we don’t really need three people to pay for the apartment anymore. And I know each one of you would love to have a place or at least a room of your own. Not to mention that it’s not either of your jobs to look after me.” Mikael flashed the man an empathetic smile. “We don’t do it cause it’s our job man. We do it because we love you.” Sonja nodded in agreement. “And I think it’s an intelligent decision that you’re choosing to stay here. I know your bipolar has gotten easier to deal with since you were younger, but having someone who can be there for you isn’t a weakness Even.”

The man looked at his ex with a slightly quizzical eye. “I know that. I’m just saying that it’s something that whoever ends up staying may have to deal with.” Both friends nodded. That was another thing that had gotten easier since Even was younger: distinguishing his feelings. Rarely did he have to question himself on the sincerity of a thought or emotion. No, his more recent aggravation was unwanted thoughts and emotions. Especially the ones he was too afraid to act on. His brain kicked itself, reminding him of the last thing he wanted to tell Mikael and Sonja.

“Which brings me to the last thing I wanted to let you know. I’m not going to be choosing which one of you moves out. You both mean a lot to me, and there’s literally no way I could remain
unbiased making either decision.”

Mikael interrupted before his friend could continue.

“Don’t tell me you’re gonna make us grapple to see who stays in the apartment?” The statement was said in jest, but the intent behind it was clear. You’re really making us do this on our own? Even released a humored snort and shook his head. “No Mikki, there will not be a grappling match for ultimate roommate supremacy. Besides, we both know Sonja would tap you in like fifteen seconds.” The woman gave Mikael a sympathetic lift of her shoulders, palm facing the ceiling, as Even met her other hand in a fist bump.

The black haired man rolled his eyes affectionately. “It was new years eve and I was smashed bro!”, he said, jokingly defending himself. All three friends had a good chuckle before an heir of light awkwardness washed over the room. Even’s mind traveling back to a time when watching his two friends try and submit each other caused a considerably different reaction. “Well”, Even started, “That’s pretty much everything I wanted to tell you guys. I don’t need to know the details or how you guys come to a decision, but I will need to an answer within the next two weeks. Gotta say though, it’s been pretty sweet having you both around.”

Mikael and Sonja both cooed with an ‘aww’ before Even fondly rolled his eyes and shook his head. “Alright you dorks, get in here.” The three friends repeated the group hug from earlier, this one tinged with just a drop of melancholy.

**20:05**

“Well?”, Elias gave Isak a wide, proud smile. Isak tried his best to put on an appreciative, thankfully smile. “Yeah! Elias, this is um….it’s great.”, Isak explained, trying to sound enthusiastic. Unfortunately for Isak, Elias knew when his fighter was trying to be genuine and when he was trying to be……nice. “Is something wrong? We’ve been trying to get you sponsored for a while now.”

“Oh, I know, and I’m super thankful, really! But didn’t this company get busted selling PED’s like three years ago?” Surprisingly, Elias fixed Isak with a smile, nodding his head before explaining. “They were, but Mutta and his firm actually bought them out. They’re doing a complete rebranding. And that’s where you come in dude! They want young, promising fighters and athletes Isak.” The boy still looked a bit unsure, causing Elias to try a different tactic.
“Ok, think about it this way. This is your chance to get in on the ground floor. If it doesn’t take off, it’s not like you have anything invested in it. And if it does, think about how much you have to gain man! It’s a zero risk situation for you either way.” The boxing coach watched as his fighter spun the chair half from the center to the left, to the right, back again, over and over. “I guess, I’m more concerned about the association with it you know? Like, maybe other sponsors won’t be as eager to contact me if it’s like ‘oh, this kid is part of that company that got popped by WADA.” Elias pressed his lips into to each other, leaning back in his office chair while nodding understandingly.

“I can definitely understand that. But Isak, if there’s one thing people love in this sport it’s a comeback story. The whole redemption narrative is part of the reason Mutta’s been so receptive to the whole thing. Sooo….what do you say?” Isak knew he was going to say yes, but couldn’t resist making his coach sweat. “Damn Elias, I’m really not sure,” a mix of disappointment an frustration cast over the older man’s face, his jaw moving just slightly before Isak finished sentence, “What I’m going to have for lunch today.” A childlike, goofy smile broke over the blondes face while his coach groaned and shook his head. He rounded the desk in front of him, roughly pulling his fighter into an embrace. “I’m getting old little viking, you’ve only got a few more years to scare me like that.” The friends laughed as they exited the gym owner’s office. Isak felt his right thigh vibrating and dinging; he could’ve sworn he put it on silent before sitting down to talk to Elias.

The young man quickly fished the device from hid pocket, his jaw and throat becoming strained at the message he saw.

Jonas V: Hey Isak. It’s been almost four years.

We should’ve kept in touch.

We should’ve been there for each other.

I should’ve been there for you.

But we can’t continue to let my negligence define our friendship.

Me and Eva are getting married in a little over a year.

I understand if you can’t come to the engagement party.

I would like it very much if you could come to the wedding though.

This is Jonas btw.

I wasn’t sure if you still had my number.
Isak felt the painful reminder of his and Jonas falling out, warm tears threatening to break over his lashes as he swiftly locked himself in the bathroom adjacent to Elias’ office. Letting out a stuttered breath, the young fighter leaned against the wall considering what, if anything, he should text back. *Nah, it’s cool Jonas, you didn’t abandon me out of guilt or anything.* The thought may have been unfair, but that didn’t make it any less true in Isak’s mind. He knew this would happen if, no, when he and his best friend started talking again. Finally settling on what he hoped was a safe, non-committal response, Isak began to text back.

**You:** Hi Jonas.

Yeah, it’s been a bit.

I’d like to come to your engagement party.

Let me know when you’ll be in town, we can have a kebab and chat.

And I kept your number, btw.

Satisfied with himself, Isak sent the text to his friend. He couldn’t help like feeling that there was some unwritten subtext to what he’d said though. *Hi Jonas. I’m sorry we’re both fucking cowards. I’d like to come to your engagement party. I don’t know why I thought your life would stop when I stopped being a central part of it. Let me know when you’ll be in town, we can have a kebab and chat. Warn me before you come here so I have a chance to act like I’m Ok. Maybe some sense nostalgia will help us both. Also I kept your number, btw. How could you fucking think I’d ever turn my back on you? You’re still my best friend.* Isak cleared his throat, checking his face for any obvious distress signs before exiting the bathroom. He definitely didn’t feel like kebab for lunch today.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think you beautiful mofos. Isak and Jonas are scared, precious boys who suck at feelings. But I foresee some dual reconciliation in the future, we’ll have to see. Oh, and there’s a FUCKING HURRICANE chilling outside, just like " Oh what, you like fresh food? Nah, homie, how bout I fuck your power up." Ugh. Anyways, I’m fine just to assuage any concerns. Hope to have another chapter out within the next week. Have an awesome weekend guys, and be careful if you’re in an area heavily effected by the hurricane.

Stuff for the fic:

WADA: World Anti Doping Agency. A professional, private organization hired by different sports organizations, such as the UFC, MLB, NFL etc. They have a United States arm, USADA, who are the main testing contractors for all the organizations mentioned above. A number of Football clubs across the UK and Europe have been known to contract with WADA as well.
Even realizes his new position may not be what he originally thought. Everyone in the gym is excited for a teammate's big, but short notice opportunity. Isak briefly allows himself to be vulnerable.

Chapter Notes

So. Hi. You guys remember how I said Even and Isak would officially meet this chapter? Yeah.....that's not gonna happen. xD There's some Chrisak stuff I needed to get through first. Having said that our boys will 100% meet next chapter. I would've actually had this chapter posted earlier, but I was waiting on a response from Ao3's support team about formatting issues. But I decided it was unfair to make you guys wait because of something that was frustrating me. So, enjoy the chapter, I'll see you at the bottom for the end notes and Stuff for the fic!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tirsdag

Oktober 9th, 2018

16:33

Even’s eyes kept cycling between slowly drooping closed and popping open again rapidly. The third time it happened, Adam let out a frustrated groan and shook his friend’s shoulder, hoping to jar the sleepiness from him. “Dude, are you sleeping okay?” The tall blonde cocked his head to look at his cubicle mate. “Oh no, my sleep’s been fine. I just didn’t realize when I signed onto this position that I was going to have to slog through all these bullshit ‘creative director guidelines’.” Even complained, complete with finger quotes.

Adam peered over at the laptop sitting in front of his friend, letting out a whistle when he saw the small 3/9 pages indicator at the bottom right of the screen. “Isn’t the whole point of the position to be…..creative?”, his dark haired coworker questioned. Even gave a shrug, stating that the title of the position may really be only just that. “I get not wanting to worry about legal issues, but Christ, they may as well have just told me what they wanted me to come up with.”

It was Even’s first official day as creative director for the company’s new campaign, but he already felt he was being hindered.
“Listen to this shit man.” Even exclaimed, reading out a small list of guidelines that were currently displayed on his laptop. “Caution should be taken when establishing a new marketing campaign. Instead of trying new, possibly unsuccessful, marketing techniques or strategies, stick to what has worked in the past. Your focus should be on attracting the customer base. Avoid becoming too niche or particular in regards to your selling points.”

The jiu-jitsu instructor threw up his hands with an exasperated sigh. “Have any of these people even met a fighter before? All they are is niche and particular!” His friend couldn’t help the agreeing laugh that he emitted. “Hey man, it’s literally your first day. Maybe they’re just trying to cover their bases. I mean, there’s gotta be a reason for those guidelines right?” Even’s left eyebrow floated up to his forehead as he responded to Adam.

“Yeah, there is a reason. They don’t understand their customer base and are too lazy to actually educate themselves. So what do they do? Get someone they know has had a long career, over a decade’s worth, of working with fighters. Then, as soon as that person is in the position, they expect them to just accept the status quo.” The man shook his head, his lips drawing into a crooked pout at the side of his mouth. “It’s like, I have all this knowledge. I understand how a fighter’s mind works, what they want in a product. What they look for, what they’ll respond to…..and they just want me to forget all that so they don’t have to rework their marketing strategies. Bullshit dude.”

After his impassioned rant, Adam looked at him with a tentative set of eyes. “Totally man, I can see how that would be upsetting. But, uh……you know-“ Even cut his friend before he could continue. “Yes Adam, I know I accepted the position. Just shouldn’t have had any expectations I guess.” As the shorter man gave a knowing hum Even’s eyes picked up on his silently ringing phone.

**Calling: Elias**

Even clasped his hands together, stretching his shoulders in front of and above his head before snatching up the phone and accepting the call. “Elias, how’s it going?” On the other end, Even could hear the sounds of the gym seeping through from the background. “Pretty good man. Listen I know you don’t have class tonight, but the co-instructor for my mma grappling class had to cancel and Isak really prefers having a black belt to drill with. Think you could fill in? I’d be paying you of course.”

Elias threw the last statement in out of habit more than anything. Even’s mind scrambled. This wasn’t how he planned on talking to Isak, but despite the splash of nervousness in his stomach he couldn’t wait to finally introduce himself to the boy. Although Elias didn’t need to know that. “Isak, he’s the blonde forty-fiver right? Doesn’t like inappropriate music on the p.a. system when
I’m teaching the kids?” This coaxed a chuckle out of Elias. “Yeah man, that’d be the one. The class is at 18:45 but you should get there at 18:30.” The black belt nodded his head while responding to his friend. “18:30, I’ll be there.”

Elias thanked Even for filling in on short notice, saying he was surprised he and Isak hadn’t officially met yet. *Yeah Even why is that?* Even attempted to drive those thoughts to the back of his head and continue reading the creatively limiting guidelines in front of him. *Maybe you can get creative with Isak. What the fuck!? Relax we haven’t even met the guy yet!* The creative director powered through his dueling thoughts, willing the end of the workday to come to an end as soon as possible.

**17:43**

Isak’s squinted eyes were being flanked by the thumb and first two fingers of his right hand. He caught Elias’ eyes with his own pair of narrowed, sarcastic green marbles. “Elias….kid-jitsu guy? Really?” The boxing coach dropped his back onto the thai bag behind him, groaning frustratedly. “Oh my god Isak, who do you want? Rickson Gracie? Actually you know what, I think I have him on speed dial.” Isak let a playful scoff exit his lips before telling his coach how badly the speed dial reference dated him.

Elias seemingly agreed with the young fighter before responding. “You’re right Isak. I am older than you. And because I’m older than you, I’m also like, way smarter than you. But beyond that, I’m your coach. And if you don’t think you can trust my choice of training partner well..”, The man trailed off, letting his gaze fall down to the floor. Isak became concerned he’d offended his coach after a few moments, immediately trying to remedy the situation.

“Shit man. I didn’t mean I didn’t trust you or something. I just think that, well, I guess because he’s never fought before maybe…..” It was Isak’s turn to trail off now, noticing how Elias’ face had changed. Finally the older man faced his fighter fully, a barely concealed grin on his face. As soon as Isak saw this he gently pushed the man’s shoulder, loudly exclaiming “You dick!”, while smiling himself, Elias let a bubbling laugh erupt from himself. “Oh little viking, you’re so easy!” Isak beamed at his coach before becoming a bit more serious.

“Really though Elias, I know the guy’s a great jiu-jitsu practitioner, but is he good at translating it to mma?” The man gave a tilt of his head while pushing bottom lip into the top one. “He was the head grappling coach at Stavanger for a reason Isak. I know you have some reservations, but Even’s legit man. And whatever you may have heard about him, just know that he’s a great guy ok?” Isak gave his coach a look of acceptance nodding his head slowly.

The young martial artist checked the time on his phone, estimating he had enough time for a little workout before Even showed up. As Isak was switching between bag work and fifteen second
sprints on the Versaclimber he felt a presence at his back.

Clearing his throat Isak addressed the person while he worked up a sweat. “Kind of in the middle of something here.”

“Oh I know,” the familiar warmth of Magnus’ voice floated into the young man’s ears, ”But this is more important.”

Feeling a bit slighted, Isak stepped off the exercise machine looking his friend in the eyes. “Tell me Mags, what could possibly be more important than me getting swol.?”

Magnus gave the boy a bright smile. “You remember I told you Olmeive was on tap as an alternate for the Geiranger versus Kolumalu fight?” Isak nodded his head, perking up at bit at hearing his teammate’s name. Magnus continued explaining how their friend was called in to save the fight on short notice.

“So apparently, Geiranger choked out some bouncer outside a club because he called his cousin a slur or something. And as badass as that is, he’s out of the fight. They called Olm the next day man. He’ll be fighting at a catch weight since it’s only two weeks out, but fuck bro, I’m so excited!” Isak returned his friend’s enthusiasm, expressing his happiness for their teammate.

“That’s fucking awesome Magnus! You think he might even get some offers from other promotions?”

The other boy shrugged while still maintaining his smile. “Totally possible man. Oh Isak, I can’t believe it.”, the wrestling coach pretended to cry tears of pride, wrapping an arm around his friend, “It seems like only yesterday I was teaching him to sprawl and get underhooks.” Isak chuckled at his friend’s imitation of a mama bird letting her offspring out into the wild.

“Imagine the sponsorship deals he might get if he wins too.”

Having completed his act out, Magnus nodded in accord with Isak. “Absolutely dude. And I mean I know it’s early to tell and everything and obviously I’m biased, but I feel like we’ve got something really special with Olmeive ya know?” The authenticity in the coach’s eyes made Isak proud, but there was also an uncomfortable streak of jealously as well.
Yeah Isak, bigger promotions and sponsors are really interested in 2-1 fighters with unresolved daddy issues.

As the fighter was going to change topics with Magnus, his eyes caught a wavy, medium shorn mop of dark chocolate hair talking with one of his female kickboxing students. Upon further inspection Isak realized the kickboxer wasn’t just a student, but Feliciana Corderon, one of Bred Akse’s most promising up and coming fighters. The jealousy he felt now stemmed from something else. Talk to him Isak. You’re so damn worried you overstepped a line with Chris. Get a definitive answer! Besides, he was probably just fucking with you. You know how much the guy likes messing with people.

Bearing those thoughts in mind, Isak excused himself from his conversation with Magnus and slowly walked over to where Chris and his student were coincidentally discussing Olmeive’s short notice title shot. The younger boy cleared his throat, appearing to achieve the attention of Feliciana first.

“Oh Isak, we were just talking about Olm’s title shot. Chris thinks it’s immoral to put money on your teammates. Can you believe that?”

The Brazilian born woman fixed Isak with a playful look of feigned incredulity. Before the younger boy could answer Chris responded to his student with an heir of flirtation.

“No, Ana, I said it’s bad karma to put money on your own teammate.” The copper skinned kickboxer appeared to have a response already whipped up.

“Oh so when you gambled on the fighters from your old gym down in Thailand….?” She left the question hanging in the air, expanding before Chris could deflate it with a dismissive, but amiable flap of his lips.

“It doesn’t count when literally everyone else is betting Feliciana. Besides, all my guys won.”, Chris responded giving a his female student a shrug of faux humbleness. She smiled widely at herself and Isak’s coach before informing them she needed to warm up and moving away towards the heavy bags.

Chris gave his fighter and open, inquisitive expression.

“So, what’s up Isak. How can Dr. Schistad help you today?”
The younger man couldn’t help cracking a smile at Chris’s reference to himself. That smile dissipated quickly once he remembered the reason he wanted to talk in the first place.

“Yeah um, I’d like to talk you.”

Chris gave the blonde an imploring look, waiting for him to continue.

Isak noticed he needed to be more specific and quickly tried to accomplish this.

“Uh, could we talk like, with less people?”

Again, the striking coach’s face transformed into the look of a man trying to sift through to the real meaning of what was being said. Isak tried again.

“I’d like to talk to you alone.”

After receiving the decidedly more direct response, Chris let Isak sweat just a bit before replying.

“Our classes don't officially start for another twenty minutes. Wanna get stoned in my car?”

Although somewhat surprised by it, it was not an offer Isak had any intention of refusing.

18:36

Isak’s eyelids had lazily slid down, his irises now resembling a green sunset on an alien beach. He glanced across to where his friend and coach was slowly allowing the smoke from mouth to curl up to his nose. His nostrils then pulling the billowing cloud in, creating what Isak thought might be the best French inhale he’d ever seen. *Fuck. Why is that so hot? Maybe it’s just hot cause it’s Chris. Wow. You are a thirsty little hoe Isak.*

Chris’s timing couldn’t have been better to kill his fighter’s overly analytical stream of thoughts.
“So”, the man started, “I’m guessing we’re sitting in my car getting high because of my failed seduction last week?” If Isak’s eyes had opened any wider he would’ve begun to resemble an anime character. He turned to look at his coach, a mélange of emotions skirting over his face. The young fighter spoke with a heavy tone of shame in his voice.

“Chris….fuck”, he looked down at his lap, too upset to meet his friends eyes, “I’m so sorry. You were drunk and-and I shouldn’t have tried anything. I-I mean I know I didn’t but if you hadn’t gotten sick-“

Chris turned to look at Isak fully, concern and confusion explicit on his face.

“Whoa whoa whoa, Isak hey, hey”, he placed what he hoped was a comforting hand on the boys shoulder and began to gently rub and squeeze, “You didn’t do anything wrong dude. Literally nothing. Hell, if anything I came onto you!” As Chris realized this another possibility crossed his mind. He looked at the younger boy with a pair of eyes that seemed ready to apologize.

“Shit, Isak, I didn’t make you uncomfortable did I?” The man heaved a large sigh before continuing.

“I was just fucking drunk and we were alone and in my defense you looked really good that night-“

“Chris.”

“-Which I know isn’t really an excuse, but I guess sober me is kind of a little scared of talking to people I like-“

“Chris!” The exclamation drew him out of his explanation as Isak realized what the man had just said. “Wait, you like me?”

A perplexed expression showed on the older man’s face.

“Of course I like you Isak. Look, I know I can be ambiguous and flirty and…” Christoffer struggled to find the word, “Confusing. But just because most the time I’m flirting or whatever it’s not genuine doesn’t mean it never is. Particularly when it comes to you.”
Isak had absolutely no idea how to respond. There was no precedent in his life to call upon. No previous experience to draw from. Even with girls it was all fabricated, so trying to implement those tactics here seemed disingenuous to both himself and Chris. So Isak came up with the only answer he could muster.

“Why?”, he turned his head to his coach, now giving the man his full attention.

A flirtatious, but never the less real smile graced Chris’s face. “Well for one, you are one hundred percent, ten out of ten, drop dead fucking gorgeous Isak Valtersen.” This statement brought pools of pink to Isak’s cheeks and a poorly hidden smile to his lips. No one had ever talked about him like that. He peered back up, silently asking Chris to give his other reason.

“And also because……you’re you man.”, the man responded with a chuckle and shrug. “I’ve met a lot of people who didn’t have the easiest time in life, but there’s something about you Isak. You’ve been through so much, overcome so much.” Isak was now actively trying to will away the moisture collecting in his eyes. Stupid weed, making me emotional.

“But, you’re still here. And you’re not just here. You’re thriving! A lot of the shit you went through, a lot of people wouldn’t have overcome it Isak. Some people would’ve even used as an excuse to stay comfortable. To stay stagnant. You didn’t do that though. And I guess for whatever reason……I’m really attracted to that.”

Isak had been stunned into silence. The amount of information Chris had just given him, nevermind the emotional implications behind it, was more than the fighter could absorb all at once. He was like an overly saturated sponge, unable to hold onto the water it was being surrounded in. After an impossibly long silence, which in reality was only a little over a minute, Isak finally replied.

“You didn’t make me uncomfortable that night Chris. I was just scared.” As he spoke, Isak felt the first tear fall from his right eye, followed by a second from his left. He also realized just how close his face had drifted to his striking coach’s. The man flashed him a sympathetic expression before speaking.

“Why?”

Pulling in a shuddering breath Isak cleared his throat of the full sensation it had quickly acquired. He’s being real with you Isak. You owe him that same courtesy. You owe it to yourself. He looked
Chris in his eyes, polished emerald garnets meeting glossy, swirled obsidian.

“I think I was just scared of allowing myself to have….to…to have something that maybe I wanted.”

Isak could feel Chris’s breath against his lips. His brain immediate flashing back to the previous week in the apartment. Only this time there was no alcohol. Only the slowly disappearing cannabis smoke and the bright orange sunset of early Autumn Oslo. Chris’s gaze pierced through him. Shined light on the spaces Isak tried to keep hidden. Gave the thoughts and ideas the younger boy was constantly pushing away a place to be themselves.

“I would give you, anything you want Isak.,” Chris moved impossibly closer to Isak, the blonde closing his eyes as he noticed the man across from him doing the same. Their lips met in a gentle, comforting embrace for the briefest of moments before an obnoxiously loud tapping broke the two apart.

Chris angrily rolled down the driver’s side window of his Volkswagen, shooting daggers into the seemingly judgmental cerulean eyes peering back at him. The man spoke with a hint of derision in his smooth, deep voice.

“Is getting stoned with your student who’s supposed to be teaching right now a pre-class ritual for you or something Schistad?”

Chris replied with an amount of venom in his words that would put a black mamba to shame.

“I don’t know Naesheim, is interrupting a completely private conversation and being a total fucking asshole part of yours?”

Thinking they were merely going to trade insults with a thin veil of dislike for one another, Even was rather stunned at the vitriol in the man’s voice. He surmised he must’ve interrupted a very important conversation and only put his hands up in defense as he walked away. Chris immediately turned back to Isak, a look of fear written across his face. Unfortunately, the older man knew exactly why Isak was scared, deciding to put his fears to rest.

“Hey, Isak, it’s okay alright? He didn’t see anything, he just thinks we were getting high.” Isak nodded while drying his eyes with his knuckles and the palms of his hand. The two men sat in the car, processing everything that had just happened. When Chris felt he was going to collapse in on
himself from the tension in the air, he decided to speak.

“So, I guess we need get back to the gym and uh-“

“Did you mean it? What you said?”

Chris was somewhat surprised by Isak’s blurring out, but answered him all the same. He locked eyes with the young man, putting as much truth, emotion, and authenticity into his eyes as possible.

“Every word Isak. I meant every word of it.”

The golden haired youth gave a slow affirming nod before leaning over and planting a soft kiss of Chris’s cheek. It was now the older man’s cheeks that were turning pink against his lightly tanned skin. Isak looked back at his coach, giving him a small, private smile. A smile few people ever saw from him in recent years. He clapped his left hand on the Chris’s shoulder.

“You’re a good person Chris.” *You don’t deserve the pain I’d cause you.*

With that, Isak exited the car, reestablishing the persona he would need to be an effective instructor. And leaving behind a simultaneously confused and highly elated Christoffer Schistad.

Chapter End Notes

Hope everyone enjoyed this chapter! I've got nearly all of chapter 7, chapter 8 on here, written and it's the first chapter where I get into some of the more technical aspects of the sport. I tried to make it as painless as possible lol. But there will be some visual aids in the form of short video(s) as well. That's honestly my main fear with this story, I don't want the mma aspect to overshadow the plot and character development. But, I am always open to constructive criticism if the fic seems to be going that way. I'm looking forward to posting the next chapter by around Wednesday, more likely Thursday, and I'm stoked you guys are enjoying it! Those comments and kudos make Isak suave and confident around hot dudes!

Stuff for the fic

Rickson Gracie - He is a legendary Brazilian Jiu-jitsu practitioner and retired mixed martial artist. His father is Helio Gracie, one of a small number of students who were taught by a Japanese naturalized, Brazilian citizen named Mitsuyo Maeda, aka Otavio
Maeda. Maeda taught his particular style of Jujutsu to the men that would go on to establish Brazilian Jiu-jitsu as a new martial art.

Sprawl/Underhooks - Techniques implemented in regards to wrestling to prevent being thrown or taken down.

Brazilian Portuguese - R's are commonly pronounced with an H sound. So phonetically the names Rickson and Corderon would be pronounced Hickson and Cohdehon.

Gambling/Betting in Thailand - Although it is illegal, in Thai culture, views on gambling are pretty relaxed, particularly when it comes to fighting. Unfortunately, some aspects of gambling can be connected to bigger, more dangerous crimes, but on a whole bets are between a small number of people with a decently sized reward.

Betting on teammates/friends - It's a superstition among many older Muay Thai coaches that betting on a friend is bad karma. This is somewhat ironic since Buddhism forbids gambling in all forms.

Cannabis use among fighters - Due to the anti-inflammatory effects of CBD in Marijuana, a number of fighters and jiu-jitsu practitioners use it for recovery. Some people who practice jiu-jitsu also believe it can have a positive effect on kinesthetic awareness, therefore making you more likely to notice an attack or defense. Officially, as far as USADA is concerned, it's illegal to have in your system while in duration of competition. Recently however, they have relaxed some of their rules concerning use post competition and during training camp for a fighter's recovery.
Kata Gatame

Chapter Summary

Isak is less than thrilled with Elias's choice of substitute co-instructor.

Chapter Notes

Good evening everybody, it's update time! I had a lot of fun writing this chapter. I do get into some of the more technical parts of mma here, at least when it comes to grappling. But, I've included a couple short videos to make visualization easier, if anyone is interested. Also I've been thinking about putting the stuff for the fic section in the actual chapter to make things a bit easier for you guys. Let me know how you'd feel about that. Hope everyone is enjoying the fic! Comments and kudos convince my boss to not make me work late next Saturday so I don't miss UFC 229! And, if you're so inclined, check out the end notes for stuff for the fic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

18:41

Even heard the influx of downtown Oslo through the open door, glancing up from his phone to see Isak coming back into the gym, looking noticeably more relaxed. Contrary to what Chris may have thought, Even didn’t care about Isak getting stoned. He knew lots of fighters and jiu-jitsu practitioners enjoyed using cannabis before rolling. No, he was more upset that it seemed that Isak would rather get high with his kickboxing coach than be on time for a class he instructed weekly.

Isak strode up to where Even was now stretching his shoulders and neck. The older man was on all fours, his right arm pulled across his body and underneath it, head tilted to look at the ceiling. Even shifted his eyes from studying the fiberglass composite paneling that made up Bred Akse’s roof interior to meet those of Isak. As he deepened his stretch the sleeve of his Hayabusa compression shirt rode up revealing a set of Japanese characters. Isak was intrigued.

Nodding his head to the characters, the pink yellow and blue making them pop on Even’s pale skin, Isak inquired, “Is that a Japanese jiu-jitsu thing?” Even sat back up slowly before getting to his feet and answering.

“It is. The kanji for Jujutsu actually. Sorry if I interrupted your conversation with Schistad by the way.” He gave Isak a blinding smile, offering his hand for a formal introduction. Isak accepted.
“Even Bech Naesheim. It’s good to finally meet properly.”

Isak gave a quick set of elevator eyes over the taller male. *Goddammit. He’s hot.*

“Isak Valtersen. I’m a featherweight signed to NFC.”

Even produced a smaller although no less genuine smile.

“I know, I’ve actually been following your career for a bit now.”

The younger martial artist made a dismissive noise.

“I wouldn’t call three professional fights and a 2-1 record a career, but I appreciate the support.”

Even couldn’t help himself. He’d promised himself he wouldn’t develop a crush on anyone in the gym. Wouldn’t repeat previous mistakes. His mouth decided to break that promise.

With an easy smile he responded, “Oh no, I was rooting for the other guys.” The statement was made with a casual tone, but it made Isak huff out a small chuckle. *Yes. Even’s emotions- 1, Even’s brain- 0.*

The older man was too caught up in congratulating himself internally to realize Isak had asked another question.

“Shit. Sorry, what’d you ask?”

“I asked why your tattoo was those colors. Is it like a flag or something?”

Even reminded himself to not become over excited and freak the boy out. He just loved when an opportunity to educate someone presented itself so naturally.

“The pansexual flag yeah. Got it when I was about your age. This awesome little shop in downtown Osaka.”

Isak squinted his eyes, pitching his head just to the side, appearing as if he was trying to solve a difficult algebra problem in his head.
“Pansexual. Isn’t that just like, I don’t know, bisexuality plus trans people?”

Even’s smile immediately fell off his face. Please don’t be a fucking douchebag. His eyes bore into Isak’s, an unappreciative expression covering his face.

“Um, it’s a bit more complicated than that. It’s a lot more about not caring how someone your attracted to identifies. Like what gender they mi-”, before the black belt could finish, Isak was pulling Olmeive into a one armed hug, congratulating him on his title shot. The regulars for the young fighter’s class were starting to stream into the gym.

Chill Even. Wouldn’t be the first cute guy to be a dick to you. Probably won’t be the last.

Pushing away his disappointment and frustration at Isak’s rather flippant treatment of his sexuality, Even decided it would be best to focus on the task at hand. Once all six pairs of students had stepped onto the mat Isak addressed them.

“As you guys may have noticed, Mahdi was unfortunately not able to make it tonight so, “ Isak transferred his gaze from the class to Even, an unimpressed look adorning his face, “Even here will be helping me. I know we’ve been working on leg locks quite a bit recently, so tonight we’re gonna switch it up and work on defending and securing arm triangles.”

“Kata Gatame.”

Isak turned his head to stare at the taller grappler.

“Excuse me?”

“Kata Gatame. It’s the Japanese name for that submission.”

If Isak’s rolled his eyes and harder they may have become stuck in a perpetual loop. The pansexual Jujutsu kanji on Even’s arm made a lot more sense now. Heaving out a labored sigh he replied to his substitute training partner.

“Jesus, you’re one of those guys aren’t you?”

Even’s jaw clenched unwittingly as he responded, his tone containing a smattering of
condescension.

“Someone who thinks you should call and define things by their proper name? Yes I would say so.”

The reference to Isak’s decidedly rude response earlier to the taller blonde explaining his sexuality didn’t go unnoticed by the mma fighter.

“No. A Ne-Waza nerd who doesn’t understand that Jujutsu was originally designed so that you could kill or disarm your enemy in battle and get back into said battle as quickly as possible without getting your fucking head chopped off.”

An uncomfortable silence permeated the area of the gym where Isak held his class. This was going to be a long training session.

19:12

“You know there are more ways than going knee on belly to pass guard right?”

Even was staring at his training partner with a raised eyebrow and bored look in his eye. Isak responded, hoping his words would finally shut the older martial artist up so he could focus on instructing.

“You know most people don’t have legs from a goddamn giraffe transplanted onto their hips right?”

A few audible snickers could be heard from the students currently waiting for their instructor’s to finish their demonstration. Instead of responding, Even quickly shifted his left leg in between Isak’s, placing his right leg between the calf and thigh of the fighter’s left leg. He then elevated his left while pushing and posturing to the opposite direction with his right all while yanking Isak’s head down to his chest, successfully turning the younger man over and quickly establishing mount.

A well earned, smug smile rested on Even’s face as sat heavy on Isak’s hips, crossing his arms. Isak’s face was red. Mostly from embarrassment, but not completely. Did this son of a bitch just sweep me!? Isak quickly saved face, pushing the bigger man off of him while addressing the class.

“While that was a great sweep Even, that’s not really what we’re working on tonight. Let’s try
The smile in Even’s face had been reduced to a subtle satisfaction as he rolled onto his back and opened his legs, Isak settling into the older blonde’s guard again. Isak moved himself and Even until they were parallel to the class, the best vantage point to observe the technique.

“Even showed us a good defense for someone trying to pass your guard. Which means we need a good offense to get around it.”

After stating this, Isak sat up on his knees to talk to his class.

“If I stand too tall in his guard, I risk getting a submission thrown on me.”

At Isak’s cadence, Even walked his right leg up to Isak’s shoulder popping the other one over his other shoulder when Isak attempted to retreat.

“So, we need to see stay close. Space equals waste guys.”

After saying this he collapsed himself down onto Even, probably harder than necessary for a demonstration. As Isak heard a slightly pained exhalation, he reminded himself not smile. As he continued to speak, the fighter’s voice was gently muffled by his partners shirt.

“Now, here he can still hit me, but he can’t really get any power into his shots. So, the next thing we wanna do is pick a leg, I’ll go with the right one so you guys can see.”

Isak slid his elbows in close to each other on Even’s stomach, the inside points only a few inches apart.

“I keep my arms close, my elbows in. Now if he tries snatching an arm, it’s way easier to break his grip and readjust.”

Even made a show of trying to control Isak’s hands as the shorter boy repeatedly broke his grip.

“Next, I need to make him uncomfortable. So what am I going to attack. The outside of the
thighs?”

The fighter shifted his hips inside his training partners guard, miming landing the inside point of his elbow to Even’s thigh. As he did this, Even secured his wrist, forcefully pinning it to the mat.

“Hmm, that doesn’t work so well does it? Maybe the tops of the thigh?”

Isak repositioned and started driving his elbows into Even’s quads, but the elder martial artist kept moving his legs while keeping his feet crossed behind Isak’s waist. Doing this, the younger man was unable to consistently work one spot in his partner’s thigh.

“Nope. That won’t do it either. Especially if your opponent has some crazy Muay Thai thighs.”

A few acknowledging laughs floated around the mat.

“Maybe the insides of the thigh?”

Isak brought the apex of his left elbow down into the shallow hollow of Even’s groin, keeping it glued to the inside of his thigh and harshly grinding along the sensitive tissue there. After several seconds, Even’s right leg gave out and slid off from Isak’s waist. Isak smiled at his class.

“Alright, now how do we get to half guard? Again, stick to him like glue. I’m going to slide my knee into the space separating his groin and the inside of his thigh and press as much of my weight as possible into the point of my knee while keeping my hips low.”

Since Isak was instructing while he was moving he now had Even’s right leg trapped between his own.

“Now it is possible to get this choke from half guard, but we’re gonna go with the sure thing. So I’m gonna stick my head to the mat,” Isak pushed his forehead to the spongy material, ”And if he has any idea what I’m doing he’s going to go for my neck.” Even now loosely wrapped his right arm around the smaller fighter’s neck.

“When he’s doing this you’re going to pretend to try to touch your head to the outside of your knee
while at the same time moving you head forward.”

Isak was now nearly is position to complete the submission.

“Now that I’ve cleared the arm I can secure the head”, Isak swiftly snuck his right arm underneath his partners head, “Pass to side control,” he then pushed his right knee through the space in Even’s guard, utilizing the same tactic he’d shown before, “Secure the arm”, with his right leg free Isak shifted his hips to a nearly perpendicular position to Even’s, sliding his left hand up to join the one behind the other man’s head, “And squeeze.”

Using the right side of his head and shoulder, Isak compressed Even’s right arm into to his own face and neck, the arms behind the taller man’s head flexing and squeezing together. As Isak slowly applied pressure to the submission he saddled his lips next to Even’s ear speaking in a hushed tone directly into his training partner’s auditory canal.

“You ever undermine me like that again in front of my students and I’ll choke you so fucking hard you won’t remember all your pretty little Japanese submission names.”

Despite being completely at the fighter’s mercy, Even couldn’t resist his sarcastic response.

“Sounds kinky.”, the older man struggled out, despite the blood flow in his carotid artery slowly being closed off. Isak decided to reinforce his point, squeezing the other man with an intensity rarely seen when he was only training.

“Am I fucking clear?”

“Crystal.”, was Even’s gurgled response.

Even made a show of tapping the mma fighter’s side, not only to show the class the submission was effective, but because he wasn’t entirely sure that given the chance Isak wouldn’t choke him unconscious. The young man disengaged himself front the submission and sat back on his heels, speaking to the class in a contrastingly up beat voice considering his previous threat to Even.

“Alright guys, let’s get to work. And ladies, if you have a male partner, remember the anatomy you’re dealing with please.”
This succeeded in earning a laugh from the class, Isak’s students getting into position and going through the steps of the submission. Once all the martial artists were focused on practicing, the fighter turned a pair of sharp, pine green eyes back to Even, pitching his voice low as he got up from the mat.

“I meant what I said.”

A loud, singular clap echoed across the walls of the gym as Isak started to draw the class to a close. The time slot was scheduled between 18:45 and 20:15. It was now well past 20:30. The boy made a note to himself to not entertain Even’s goads and taunts in the future. At Isak’s clap, the class formed into their respective pairs, waiting for any important announcements Isak may make.

“Good roll tonight everybody. You guys put forth a lot of effort.” Side eying Even, the shorter blonde continued.

“As class was in session I got some unfortunate news about Mahdi. He went to the doctor today to get what he thought was a deep muscle bruise checked out. Turns out it was a partially torn MCL. Because of that, he’s going to be out for the next six to eight weeks. So, meet your substitute co-instructor.”

Isak presented his hands beside Even as if he was showing off a consolation prize on a game show. The older man drew his lips into a tight smile as he spoke to the class.

“I’m looking forward to you teaching you guys. I can be a bit of an…..eccentric,” As Even said this he threw a quick glance to Isak as if you reinforce his displeasure with the other man’s previous behavior, “But I assure that eccentricity has it’s benefits. All of which I’m excited to share with you.”

Seeing his new training partner had finished talking, Isak dismissed the class and began to gather up his things. He pushed his water bottle, hand wraps and scheduling notebook into the small canvas bag. He was eager to get home; there was a fresh salmon fillet with steamed potatoes and sweet tahini sauce waiting for him. Once he’d zipped the duffel bag and thrown the strap over his shoulder, an annoyed looking Even approached him.

“Hey. Listen kid, I don’t know what kind of alpha bullshit you’re trying to pull, but it’s not gonna
work on me. I don’t have to do this. If anything this is a favor to Elias. You should just be grateful he even found a replacement for Ma-”, before he could finish saying the out of commission grappler’s name Isak struck back with a steel edge in his voice.

“You’ve been out of the sport for quite some time, so let me remind you of a little something, Even. A gym might be your home. It might be a place where you can bond with your best friends. Hell, it may even be a family for some people.” Excluding yourself on that one Isak? “And I would never deny someone that.” The fighter closed his eyes, breathing a sigh through his nose.

“Having said that, it’s still a hierarchy. There’s still levels because people are at different levels. Now obviously, you’re more skilled than me when it comes to grappling. Shit, you’re a second degree black belt. You’ve trained some of the best fighters in the history of the sport and I have a lot of respect for what you’ve done. But you’re not above me in this gym. Elias might be one of your best friends, but he is not a fan of nepotism. I’ve been here since I was seventeen Even.”

Isak paused to lock eyes onto the other man before continuing.

“And I’ve been fighting out of and for this gym since I was nineteen. Am I young? Yes. But I’ve been here for over four years. You’ve been here for less than four months. So when my students see you challenging me? Not fucking around, but actually subverting the authority I’ve built in this gym? It’s a problem. It disrupts things. And no, this isn’t some toxic masculinity or pride bullshit. This is about respect and integrity for how Bred Akse functions as an organization. That’s the key to this gym Even. If you keep insisting on ignoring that, you’re not gonna stick around very long.”

The older martial artist stepped closer to Isak. Even quickly spat out a response, his mouth moving faster that his brain.

“The nepotism thing, it goes for coach Schistad as well?”

Isak appeared to have been turned to stone, his brain shorting out at the terrifying revelation.

All he could finally get out was a near whispered, “You…saw us?”

Even scoffed, narrowing his eyes at the younger while shaking his head. This idiot thinks I’d out him?

“Relax, I’m not gonna out your or anything. Fuck, you think you’re the only closeted fighter I’ve met? No Isak, I wouldn’t do that to you. I was hoping to be friends, but if you want me to slot
myself into the bottom wrung of the ladder and earn my way up, I can understand that. All I ask is that we remain civil enough with each other to teach.”

Even’s words having abated some of Isak’s fear, he swallowed, clearing his throat whilst he nodded.

“I can do that.”

Even nodded concurrently before giving Isak a few parting words, keeping his voice low.

“And by the way, whenever your decide to come out, this whole gym is behind you Isak. Maybe you can’t see that, but I can. You have a family here, regardless of all the hierarchy stuff. There’s times I would’ve killed to have what you have here kid. So just….”, A heavy sigh passed through Even’s lips. “Just be careful. Getting involved with a teammate or coach…..it can get complicated.”

With that last word of advice the older man gave Isak a stiff, but cordial pat on the shoulder, collecting his own belongings and exiting the gym. The younger man stood still, mind still trying to process what had just happened. Even knows Isak. He fucking knows. And he’s right about Chris, the best scenario is you both get hurt and one of you leaves the gym. Shaking his head, Isak imagined his hair to be wet and the water droplets to be his unwanted thoughts. As the last one had been flung from his mind, he gathered his bag from where he’d dropped it to the floor, and quickly left Bred Akse MMA Gym.

Stuff for the fic

Hayabusa - A combat sports gear and equipment company. They sponsor a huge number of fighters and have a distinctive logo that makes their merch pretty recognizable.


Jujutsu - A Japanese martial art which was originally designed to be used on the battlefield if a soldier lost his sword or only had a smaller weapon such as a knife. The focus was to kill each your enemy as quickly as possible if you ended up on the ground. Jujutsu is also the parent martial art to Judo.

Jujutsu Kanji -https://i.pinimg.com/originals/9f/a5/89/9fa589de07a18d8ca0bc2cc75cd49e55.gif
Ne-Waza - The ground fighting aspect of Judo.

Even’s butterfly guard sweep - https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=H9IgqnhURCs

This actually isn't the exact technique Even uses, but it's very close.

Isak's arm triangle aka Kata Gatame - https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=AU89pfGPnKI

The arm triangle technique being used is actually more apt for mma, but Isak's students are at a high enough level that they can translate the more traditional setups into what will work best for the sport.

Muay Thai Thighs - Muay Thai fighters are known for their heavy leg conditioning as leg kicks are a commonly used technique in the sport.

Also, here's a quick breakdown of everyone's ages. Isak and his friends are a couple years older than they would actually be now. Pretty much everyone above Isak’s grade in the show is about a decade or so older than him for the sake of the storyline.

Isak - 21
Magnus - 20
Jonas - 20
Mahdi - 21
Noora - 30
William - 31
PChris - 31
Eva - 21
Eskild - 33
Even - 31
Vilde - 21
Sana (because of the plot) - 24
Adam - 31
Olmeive - 20
Elias - 31
Emma - 20
Sonja - 31
Mikael - 31
Yousef - 30
Iben - 30
Mutta - 30
Chris Berg - 21
Linn - 33

By the way I'm doing my best to find videos that are at least under 3 minutes; I'm not trying to take up ya'lls time hahah.
Well, what'd you think? The boys will definitely won't be fans of each other for a while, but they'll respectfully tolerate each other xD. Also there's more Chrisak drama in the next chapter, so be ready for that. Hope everyone is having a great night; look out for the next chapter in about a week or so!
Chapter Summary

Glory is brought to Bred Akse, Isak is honest with Chris and also realizes something about his identity.

Chapter Notes

Guys, I gotta say I have been really surprised with the response to this fic. I honestly didn't think it was gonna get very much feedback so thanks to everyone who has read, left kudos, and commented. I'm updating a bit early because I'll be spending the weekend with a bunch of friends watching UFC 229 and cause you all deserve it! Hope you all like the chapter, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

3 Weeks Later

Ekeberghallen Sports Arena

Nordstrand, Oslo

November 3rd, 2018

23:41

Olmeive recovered from the take down attempt quickly, but his opponent had snuck his arms underneath his own, locking his hands behind his back and driving him back towards the fence. Having a lower level of gravity than the taller man, the challenger was able to reverse the positions just as their bodies slammed into the cage. The fighter drove his head underneath the chin of his opponent, having pinned his right hand to the fence when they crashed into it. Kolumalu now had a single underhook on Olmeive. His left arm wrapped under the shorter fighters right while the other man’s right was secured around his neck, keeping his head in position, making it more difficult to try and throw a punch or elbow.

Olmeive could feel the shifting weight of his opponent; he was going to abandon the underhook he had with his left hand, duck his head down and try to shuffle out to the left. Now he just had to time the taller man. As soon as Olm felt Kolumalu’s left hand go slack, he immediately dropped his head down to his chest, pushing off the right hand he previously had pinned to the fence and swiftly bringing it up to block his face. Having been proven correct as he felt the air from the larger
man’s punch wiz by his head, Olmeive angled to his left side, countering with a short, but brutal left hook of his own.

Kolumalu was wobbled. Olmeive saw the glaze in his opponents eyes. *This belt’s mine.* As the shorter man prepared to throw a right uppercut to the body, the loud screech of the buzzer signaled the end of the first round. The challenger cursed internally. A few more seconds and he could’ve gotten the finish. The man casually walked back to his corner of the decagon, sitting on his stool as Elias pulled his mouth guard out for him and his corner men began giving him advice, starting with Magnus.

“Olm, you need to stop trying to fake your sprawl when he fakes to go for a take down. Just drop your hips down and keep your elbows parallel with each other.”

Chris nodded along with Magnus before dispensing his advice for the young fighter.

“Killer left hand buddy! But I want you striking off his take down fakes ok? When he’s coming back up, his head is dipping to the right, so think about that step in knee ok? You can win this title standing if you want to man.” Chris then looked to Elias, “You got anything Eli B.?” The boxing coach smiled at his friend, but shook his head, continuing to rub out Olmeive’s arms that were currently placed over his shoulders. The buzzer for the second round echoed through out the hanger like arena, signaling the continuation of the contest.

The referee looked across to Kolumalu, loudly asking, “Round two, sir are you ready?” A solid nod was the champion’s response. The ref then looked over to Olmeive, repeating the question, the other man gave the official a goofy grin, his eyes scrunching up as he did so. Exclaiming a loud, ‘Fight!’, the ref commenced the second round.

The first couple minutes saw a significantly more timid Kolumalu. This was to be expected from him after having gotten rocked in the first round. The pair traded leg kicks and jabs, mostly measuring distance for heavier shots. As Kolumalu faked a kick with his back leg, Olmeive moved his hands to block the shot, knowing how powerful the older man’s kicks could be. The instant the champion saw his opponents hands begin to move to the left side of face however, he pivoted off his left leg, smashing a heavily calloused shin into the flat of Olm’s ribs.

Luckily for Olmeive he was moving away from the strike and able to absorb it fairly easily. Before Kolumalu could even put his foot back to the canvas though, his challenger had fired a lightning fast left front kick into his lower right midsection, the ball of his foot stabbing into the other’s body and liver. A delayed grimace appeared on the taller fighter’s face. Olmeive bit down on his mouthpiece, feinting a jab to the other man’s already injured body before shifting his feet and throwing and angled uppercut across the curve of his opponents jaw. The strike dropped the already low hands of his fellow fighter and had his back bouncing off the cage.

As Olmeive was setting up to throw a follow up left hand, the referee flew in between the two combatants, waving the fight off, giving the almost official title holder the justification to run to the other side of the cage and climb it. Sitting astride the padded foam cover, Olmeive let out a
primal roar, an echo of ancestral DNA. After emptying his lungs of air, the fighter hopped down from the cage. Walking over to his freshly defeated opponent, the yet to be crowned champion dropped onto his knees in front of his colleagues stool, his still gloved hands held together in reverence. As he got up, he leaned into Kolumalu, thanking him for still taking the fight and telling him he hoped to have a rematch in the future. Only this time with both fighters having full training camps and training for each other only.

From the his seat on the floor, Isak was ecstatic for his friend and teammate. Olmeive noticed the boy and smiled, waving to him. The referee brought both mixed martial artists to the center of the decagon, waiting for the announcer to introduce the new NFC Lightweight Champion. Once the crowd had settled a bit an echoing, heavy yet tinny voice accounted the results.

“Ladies and gentlemen, referee Ognjen Topic has called a stop to this title fight at three minutes and thirty-two seconds into the second round. For your winner via T.K.O…….And new, NFC Lightweight Champion of the world, Olmeive ‘Sleepy Hollow’ Deichtner!” A resounding cheer reverberated throughout the relatively small arena. Isak slowly jogged to the raised platform of the cage, an official noticing him and stepping aside so the young man could enter the decagon. One of the benefits of training at a well known local gym.

The blonde featherweight arrived just in time to hoist the new champion up along with his coaches. Setting the lightweight champ back to his feet, Isak, Elias, Chris and Magnus noticed William Magnusson coming up behind Olmeive, clapping the younger man on his shoulder. Turning around, Olm saw that William was holding the belt, now his belt, and immediately gave him a crushing hug. Magnusson laughed at the fighter’s giddiness, motioning him to turn around and then strapping the title around his waist.

As Olmeive and his team were snapping victory pictures, Magnusson solicited a couple mics from a tech assistant. Calling him back over, William put his left arm around the new champ, handing him another microphone.

“Olmeive, that was insane man. You have anything you want to say, maybe even a call out?” The fighter broke into a huge grin.

“Thank you to my team you guys are fucking incredible. Bred Akse is the best gym in Oslo everyone make no mistake. Um, to my opponent, Leon Kolumalu. You know he didn’t have to take this fight, he’s been training for a different guy for over six weeks, so respect to him for going through with it.” Olmeive now exhibited a narrowing of his eyes before continuing.

“But you know boss, I wouldn’t have even had to be here if Geiranger actually came through. I mean, if I choked out everyone that ever offended me I’d be locked up for a very long time.” A swath of rolling laughs flowed over the crowd. “Which is why I’m calling out Friedrik Geiranger. This could’ve been your belt man, if you could learn to act like an adult. But shit, let’s do it. If you’re that easy to piss off I’m gonna make some quick money. What do you guys think? Geiranger for my first title defense?”
A roaring response from the crowd gave Olmeive his answer. But before any title defenses, a celebration was in order.

00:33

The heavy bass of “Above The Clouds”, by Gang Starr blanketed the air. The sound waves rode on top of and through the haze of weed smoke. Isak was making his way into the kitchen, brushing past the lateral heat of bodies moving in time with the warm, fuzzy beats of Guru and DJ Premier. Reaching into the fridge and snagging a bottle, the boy turned around and jumped slightly. Olmeive was a few inches from Isak, already three shots and four beers deep. Isak embraced his friend, the less intoxicated man taking on a significant portion of Olm’s weight.

Once they broke apart Isak had a large smile adorning his face. “Dude! You’re the lightweight champion, that’s so fucking awesome!”

The title holder nodded his head before responding. “I know bro! But Isak, check it out, that’s not even the coolest thing!”

Raising his eyebrows, he nodded for his friend to continue.

“That combo we drilled? I won the fight with it man! Well, I did backwards actually, check it out!”

The younger man clumsily extracted his phone from his front pocket, opening it and scrolling to a video a friend had sent him of the ending sequence of the fight. Isak studied the figures on the screen, observing their movement. As he cross referenced the combination on Olm’s phone with the one in his head, he looked to the other man. A proud smile stretched out on Isak’s face. He put a hand on his friends shoulder. The tired muscles beneath the champion’s shirt felt like corded steel wrapped in smooth silicone beneath Isak’s fingers. As he saw the martial artist’s shoulders and neck from his periphery, Isak found himself especially drawn to the light, rust colored scruff on Olmeive’s face and neck.

He hadn’t really noticed it till right now, but now he couldn’t stop thinking about. After snapping a pic with the new lightweight champion for his Instagram, Isak returned to the living room of his shared apartment. He stood just apart from the competing groups playing beer pong. The young man’s eyes were focused on the game, but his brain was entertaining other thoughts. Olmeive was featured heavily in some of the thoughts, something that seemed to happen after Isak got a buzz going.

It was like an itch he knew he’d never be able to scratch. There were flashes of that russet, week old beard. Flashes of it pressing into his neck. Of it trailing along his chest and abs. Of it meshing with the trail of soft, blonde hair Isak had growing down from around his navel. Of that contrasting soft scrape of facial hair against the smooth, paleness of his thighs. Isak actually felt his body shiver the tiniest bit after that thought. You need to chill dude. Isak agreed with his internal voice’s
assessment and made his way out of the room and up the stairs. When he got to the upstairs bathroom, he opened the door to a nostalgic site.

Mahdi and Magnus sat in a rather spacious tub at the opposite side of the sink. As he looked close, Isak noticed what appeared to be a third person. A pang of sadness struck and passed Isak within seconds. *Celebrate and get fucked up now. Worry about other shit later.* Opening the door all the way revealed someone who Isak was at best indifferent to spending time with. Even Bech Naesheim had his head of styled, antigravity hair resting back against the wall the bathtub was placed against. An open, attentive grin was on his face as Magnus told him a fantastical story about the first time him and Vilde tried BDSM. Mahdi appeared to be as disinterested as Even was invested. Isak told himself he didn’t want to interrupt Magnus, but he couldn’t help his eyes straying to Even’s mouth. Light reflecting off the thin coating of saliva on the older ’s lips.

Magnus paused when he saw Isak in the doorway.

“Dude, you’re letting the smoke out!”

Isak apologized as he turned around to close the bathroom door, taking a seat on the closed lid of the toilet next to the tub. Turning to the three men, he greeted Mahdi first.

“Yo Mahd Man! Sorry bout that MCL dude.” The out of commission grappler’s gave a non-committal shrug.

“It’s not too bad. Getting to catch up on Westworld and some Netflix shows.”

“Nice. Well no spoilers, I just finished the first season of Westworld.”

“Oh bro, you’re in for a treat.”

“Isak!”

All three heads turned to look at Magnus as he spoke to the other boy.

“Olm reversed that combo you guys drilled to win the fight!”

Isak let a small smile break across his lips as he acknowledged Magnus enthused statement.

Even locked eyes with his co-instructor, flicking ashes from the joint into a small metal waste basket beside the toilet.

“Why don’t you have a seat? This bathtub’s kind of ridiculously big.”
Although he still had his reservations about the man Isak accepted the offer.

*Maybe this is his way of putting me at ease….*

Squatting into the space beside the older Jujitsuka, Isak threw his legs over the edge of the bathtub, accepting the offered joint from Even and taking a heavy pull of the smoke into his lungs.

“Me and Mahdi were just reminiscing about the Pride days.”

“Isak, did you know Even met Sakuraba?”, Mahdi asked his friend, impressed excitement clear on his face.

Isak’s own face was molded more into a look of intrigue.

“Is that so?”

Even smiled back at the younger man, his eyes bright as they compressed into slits.

“It was mainly him tossing my scrawny fifteen year old ass around the mat, but it was pretty awesome! He’s a super nice guy, spotted me some cash for a cup of noodles actually.”

Isak stifled a laugh in his throat. He couldn’t help his response.

“So, getting tossed around by older Japanese dudes really gets you going huh Ne-Waza nerd?”

Even fixed his younger gym mate with a cocky grin.

“I suppose it just depends on the dude. They don’t necessarily have to be Japanese.”

He paused, making a barely noticed flick of his eyes to Isak’s lips and then back to his eyes.

“Or older.”

*Wow Even. Really not taking your own advice are you?*

Isak suddenly felt too close to Even. The mild warmth of his leg, side and arm pressing against him now feeling like a burning reminder of how attractive Even was and, more importantly, Isak’s growing level of intoxication. He decided he’d take one more hit of the joint to achieve his ideal
crossbuzz and then remove himself from the tub. The alcohol had given him a bit of courage, maybe the weed could give me some perspective.

After releasing the smoke from his mouth in little circles, Isak bid his farewell to his friends and Even. He had another, more important matter to attend to.

00:47

Chris was leaning against the arm of the couch, chatting with Emma and what Isak could’ve sworn was his ex girlfriend Iben. *Wasn’t she in Stavanger?* The thought drifted from the blonde’s head as he approached Chris, catching the last of his conversation with the two. Iben appeared to be talking about something that had happened a while back, but seemed to still be affecting her in some way.

“- a while, I mean the fact that he kept that from me was pretty harmful to our relationship you know? But, I think we’re really in a better place now. Totally honest, learning to actually talk to each other. Listen, not just hear.”

Emma and Chris nodded at the brunette at the same time Isak cleared his throat, getting the trio’s, unfortunately including Emma, attention. The kickboxing coach looked at his fighter, reading his eyes and face and quickly, but politely sending the girls away.

“I’m really glad to hear you guys are doing better Iben. If you’ll excuse me for a second, I think Isak needs to talk to me.”

The sentence was said as a statement, but Isak saw the question in Chris’s eyes. He followed the older man out of the common room and down the hall to his room. Isak’s heart rate instantly picked up. His mind racing with nervous yet excited thoughts. He didn’t know what Chris expected of him, if anything. And he wasn’t sure what he expected from himself either really. Which is why both men were surprised when as soon as the brown haired coach closed his bedroom door and turned around, Isak launched himself at the man.

His lips missed their mark a bit, landing on the corner of Chris’s mouth rather than flush on his lips. Isak rectified this quickly however, now pressing his lips fully to the other man’s. The lack of initial response nearly threw the blonde into a panic attack. Just as he was about to leap away from him and profusely apologize, Chris responded, perfecting matching Isak’s frenetic, nervous arousal with the wisdom of someone who’d been here many times before. Their lips moved together slowly, separating and rejoining like a lazy tide on a moon lit beach. Feeling a sudden bravery, Isak cautiously pushed a hand up the older man’s shirt and began to run his hand up and down the well defined muscles.

Chris chose this instance to break away from the young fighter, causing a shameful look to cross Isak’s face. The coach looked at his fighter quizzically, bringing a hand up to Isak’s neck.
“Hey, it’s okay alright? Just relax. To be honest I thought we were just gonna talk, but I like your idea better.”

Isak brought his eyes up, his mouth slowing mirroring a smaller version of the smile Chris was giving him.

“Guess I got a bit carried away.”, he shrugged shyly.

“Nah, it’s cool. I mean, I totally I get it.”

Isak smiled wider now and moved away from the brunette.

“Man, your humility. You’re giving the Dalai Lama a run for it ya know?”

Chris raised his hands, feigning confusion.

“Can’t seem to help it.”

The boys smiled at each other, a comfortable silence blanketing the room before Isak spoke again.

“What did you want to talk about?”

Chris’s eyes became more serious. He sat down on the edge of his bed, motioning for Isak to do the same.

“Listen, I don’t want to freak you out or make you think that you have to make a decision or something ok? But, if it’s at all possible, I’d like to know what we are to you.”

A rare flash of nervousness now showed on Chris’s face, surprising Isak.

The blonde thought about the question. He supposed he’d always had a bit of a crush on Chris. Even when he was seventeen Isak knew he found the older man attractive. Although he’d only recently begun admitting it to himself. Did he have feelings for Chris? Feelings like Eva has for Jonas? Or that William has for Noora? Don’t trick yourself Isak. He’s the first attractive man to openly express interest in you. You’re not in love, you’re in shock. Most of the time, Isak brushed off his internal voice. Always criticizing and over analyzing. Breaking everything down into it’s nuclei and electrons, if only to avoid having to experience a confusing or uncomfortable feeling. After a heavy swallow, Isak responded.
“Chris, when I first met you, I hated that I liked you. You were like a step brother I didn’t want to get to know, but the more I did, the more I realized how good of a person you actually are.” Isak paused, dragging his gaze up from his lap to meet his coach’s eyes.

“I do like you. Maybe not to the same way you like me, but in another time and place,” the fighter shrugged and nodded his head, ”I could see us together. And to be clear I’m not saying that we can’t be together. Not at all. But for as much as you know about me, you don’t know everything Chris. There are parts of my past that I….haven’t even confronted yet. And don’t be fooled, just because I’m aware of that doesn’t mean I’m anywhere close to fixing it.”

A heavy sigh broke free from Isak’s lungs. Go easy Isak. It’s not fair, but it’s what’s best for both of you.

“You are an incredible person Chris. You’re smart, you’re funny, you have a great rapport with your fighters. You’re a good man. And you’re a good coach. But I can’t do this. Can’t do us. Not, not right now. I mean, you and Even are literally the only ones who know.”

“That you’re gay you mean?”

Isak’s head jerked backwards.

“No. I mean, OK, sort of I guess, but like you know, I’m still a dude.”

Chris wasn’t sure if he should be more bewildered or concerned by Isak’s statement.

“You know gay guys are still dudes right?”

Isak frustratingly rolled his eyes.

“Of course. I’m just saying I’m not like Eskild or whatever. And don’t get me wrong, I love Eskild. But that’s just…..not me.”

Chris would be lying to himself if he said the rejection didn’t hurt. It was partially expected, but having now heard Isak’s feelings on his own situation, he put his feelings on the back burner.

“Hmm. You know Isak, Eskild actually told me something pretty interesting once. We were having a discussion about how big a part of someone’s life their sexuality really needs to be. And we both came to the same conclusion. People are unique. For Eskild, the culture his sexuality is usually associated with is more of a part of who he his. He identifies with it. But it doesn’t define him anymore than the color of his hair or…..how tall he is. You can’t hinge an entire identity on something you have no control over Isak. Someone who does that is doing a complete disservice to themselves. Because they’re not allowing themselves to actually go beyond all the things that only
define them because they had no say in it.”

The coach turned to his fighter, bringing a hand up to his neck.

“It varies for everyone Isak. But for some people, it’s a little more of who they are. And for others,” Chris’s eyes strayed off, landing on Isak’s left shoulder, “It’s a little more of….what they are. Neither is right or wrong, they’re just different. And thank you, for being honest by the way.” He gave Isak a wide, signature Chris Schistad grin.

“And don’t think I’m counting you out Valtersen. Maybe you’re not ready right now, but you’ll come around.”

Isak didn’t even try to stave off the smile that broke across his face. A full fledged one, slightly gapped teeth and all. *Maybe I don’t feel the same way, but this is why I like him.* The two men stood and walked to the door, ready to go back to the party and face whatever ribbing they’d likely be in for. *He’s right. It doesn’t have to be all of who you are Isak. Not if you don’t want if to be.* Isak exited the bedroom with a new outlook and a careful hand on the door of his own closet, not ready to turn the knob yet, but slowly warming to the idea.

Stuff for the fic

1. Ognjen Topic - A Yugoslavian born Muay Thai fighter and kickboxer who competes for the Friday Night Fights promotion at 155 lbs, 70.3 kgs.

2. "Sleepy Hollow" is a nod to Olmeive’s German heritage as the headless horseman in the story was a Hessian aka a German mercenary.

3. Above the clouds - [https://youtube.com/watch?v=Ucvta7xDo_4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=Ucvta7xDo_4)


5. Pride Fighting Championships - A Japanese mma promotion that was active between 1997 and 2007. Pride hosted some of the most memorable fights in the history of the sport. It, along with the early UFC and other organizations, brought up the fighters who are now considered to be the first generation of mixed martial artists.

6. Sakuraba – Kazushi Sakuraba is one of the most famous and important mixed martial artists of all time. He is best known for defeating four members of the Gracie jiu-jitsu family; Royler, Renzo, Ryan, and Royce. He is currently signed to the Rizin promotion, but I believe his contract has been frozen due to inactivity. In April of this year he started a submission grappling tournament entitled Quintet which is streamed on the UFC’s Fight Pass app.
Let me know what you think, I liked writing this chapter a lot. I had to figure out how to break down a believable fight in regards to writing, but actually ended up enjoying it. Oh, also I'm gonna be adding then Stuff for the fic section in along with the story text from now on, talk to everyone next week!
Chapter Summary

Isak has a preliminary meeting with a certain Moroccowegian sports psychologist and gets some great news from his manager. Even attempts to explain his vision for PurKonchus's campaign and realizes the aftermath of his incident at Stavanger isn't as dead or buried as he thought.

Chapter Notes

So first off, I gotta say I'm kind of embarrassed to be a UFC fan at the moment. The post fight melee at UFC 229 Saturday was pretty disheartening. However, I don't think what happened is a true representation of who Connor McGregor or Khabib Nurmagomedov are as people or fighters. I won't get into it here, but there's tons of resources out there if any of you want to look into it. Having said that, Sana has finally arrived! I really enjoyed writing her and hope you guys like my characterization as well. Look out for the Stuff for the fic section at the end of the chapter and let me know what you think! I'm a hoe for kudos and comments lol xD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mandag

November 5th, 2018

11:32

The office was reasonably spacious. A small bookcase was saddled against the right wall boasting the works of Bruce Lee, Jung, Griffith and Schulte among others. Across from the bookcase sat two comfortably firm, vinyl upholstered chairs, pitched just off center to each other. The walls were a soft, muted lime. The lacquer finished, oak desk at the back middle of the room gave a warmth to the space, the wood establishing a kind of character about the whole area.

Isak felt none of this. He was only here at Chris’s request and Elias’s well meaning yet aggressive urging. He didn’t want to be here, but he could understand why his coach’s might want him to be. The young mixed martial artist had won his last fight, but he’d been tentative the whole way through. He’d almost gotten stopped in the first round and the second he was essentially just closing distance to try to limit his opponents striking ability. Once he’d clenched or gotten him to the ground however, he wasn’t able to do anything. A referee standing the fighters up two times in one round? Not a good look for the judges.

If Isak hadn’t secured that triangle choke late in the third, the bout would’ve almost assuredly been scored as a split decision win for his fellow competitor. And although it may make the blonde boy a bit humiliated to admit it, the judges would’ve been right. And the reason he’d even gotten the
submission in the first place wasn’t because his opponent fell into a trap he set. No, it was because he got over excited and made a mistake. Sure, Isak did a phenomenal job at capitalizing on that mistake, but the fact remains. If the error wasn’t made he would’ve taken a regrettably fair decision loss, the first judge decided defeat of his amateur or professional career. Isak was nearly as uncomfortable with that as he was with possibility of being outed.

Which was why he was currently staring at a woman in her mid twenties wearing a dark maroon hijab, lightly applied ruby lipstick, blush and eyeshadow complimenting her olive skin. A pair of singed tree bark eyes bore into Isak with a coaxing look. Isak’s own phthalo green meeting her’s with a look that said ‘I don’t know what you want from me. I don’t even want to be here.’ The woman cleared her throat, writing something on the notepad she was holding before setting it down on the small black table in between her and Isak. She picked up the tablet sitting on the table and began tapping and swiping on it. Isak let out what he hoped came across as a dissatisfied scoff.

What Sana Bakkoush, B.S. Psychology degree holder, SiO sports psychology residency member and PhD undergrad heard, was the nasal complaining of a petulant child in a newly adult body. Mocking Isak with her own over exaggerated scoff and pairing it with a duck faced pout seemed to get the young man’s attention.

“I don’t sound like that!” Sana gave her new client a wide smile.

“Well, I wouldn’t know would I? It’s literally the first noise you’ve made since you walked in here. Now, we can try to communicate with one another in bratty harrumph language, or we can speak like adults. I get credit towards my PhD either way, so if you wanna brat it up go ahead.”

This solicited a groan from the younger Norwegian. He looked at Sana through his eyelashes, a defiant expression on his face.

“I didn’t even want to be here you know. Chris and Elias pretty much made me come. There’s probably people with real problems who need to talk to you.”

Sana shifted her eyes back down to the tablet, arranging her schedule for next week.

“At least stay till 12:15 so I can get my credit.”

“What the hell kind of sports psychologist are you?”

The Muslim woman smiled up at Isak.

“A pretty damn good one if I’m allowed to do my job.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t need you to do your job for me ok?”

She shrugged, the members on her A Tribe Called Quest t-shirt now leveling Isak with a half dozen equally unimpressed eyes of their own.

“That seven stitch scar on the left side of your nose seems to be telling me different.”

Daaaaaamn! She got you on that one Isak. The fighter narrowed his eyes, his mouth stretching into a thin line.

“What do you even know about mma?”

“Well in case you haven’t put it together yet, my brother runs one of the most popular mixed martial arts gyms in Oslo.”
Isak weighed his options. He could either sit here until 12:15, which would be another half hour, in uncomfortable silence or he could at least try to make conversation with Elias’s younger sister. The silence was too loud in his ears, so Isak chose the latter option.

“So um, you graduated from UiO?”

Sana popped her head up again, this time closing the tablet and setting it on the table between the two. She flashed her, hopefully, new client a bright smile and began speaking.

“Yes, I did. I graduated with a B.S. in Psychology with a focus on behavioral disorders in relation to athletic performance. It’s not a full on sports psychology degree, but I think it actually allows me to look at things from a different perspective.”

Isak looked mildly perplexed. His mouth opened before his brain could sign off on his words.

“So……you study how mentally ill people play sports?”

The boy asked the question in what he hoped was a genuinely interested way. The older woman’s eyebrows raised, her matte crimson lips molding into an affirming pout as she slowly nodded.

“I can’t say I’ve ever heard it put quite that plainly, but I suppose that is essentially what my profession is.”

“If you only treat mentally ill athletes, why am I here?”

“Well, you are here. So I guess I don’t only treat mentally ill athletes hmm?”

Isak felt his cheeks warming. This wasn’t the same embarrassment of Even sweeping him in front of his whole class the other day, but it was embarrassing none the less. A kind of intellectual agitation that Isak wasn’t very used to being on the business end of.

*Note to self, engage in battles of logic as little as possible with this lady.*

“So, like, what could you do for me anyways?”

He was expecting an exhaustive lists of techniques and mindfulness practices to make him a better, more aware individual thereby making him a better, more aware fighter. But that’s not what happened.

“Nothing if I don’t know what you want.”

*Fuck it. What’s fifteen minutes? It’s not like she can share anything you tell her, she’s under a confidentiality clause.*

“The UFC Featherweight Championship belt.”

“Lofty goals, and certainly something to aspire to. So, what’s possible right now.”

“The Norske Fighting Championships featherweight title.”

“Let’s focus on that then.”

Isak and Sana spent the next thirteen minutes discussing the young fighter’s mentality in regards to his training and performance. They weren’t going into the depths of Isak’s ego or unpacking any emotional baggage, but it was a good conversation. There was no way for him to tell, but the psychologist was silently observing things about the martial artist and filing them away. If he
really did want to participate in one of Sana’s treatment plans, she already had ideas about how to help the boy. Whether or not Isak would be receptive to them was another story.

12:18

Sana and Isak were stood in the doorway of her office, finishing up what the woman thought was a good, baseline conversation.

“Well, you have my schedule and the number of the office is on the card. Since I’m participating in an academic residency which adds credit towards my PhD, I’m not making any money. This means that this service is also free, Isak. If you’re dead set on not coming back, that’s fine, but you don’t really have anything to lose.”

“I’ll think about it.”, was Isak’s stoic response. However, it was also one of the few times in his entire life he’d said that and actually meant it.

The blonde thanked Sana for the session and threw a smile to the hipster-ish boy behind the reception counter before exiting the building. Isak immediately checked his phone, scrolling to his messages and becoming disconcerted with what he saw.

Dad: Hello Isak. I’m sorry it’s been so long since we spoke. Congratulations on winning your last fight by the way.

I understand if you can’t or don’t want to, But I’d like it if you could stop by the new house for a visit.

Mama misses you. So do I.

What the fuck does he think he’s doing? Ghosting your own kid for over a year and then requesting they come and see you? Isak’s thumb was poised above the phone’s on screen keyboard, ready to strike out a message of justified rage. However, he thought back to what Sana had told him. ‘Before you do something, ask yourself, will doing this cause me more problems or help me make more solutions.’ It was an unsatisfying conclusion, but the fighter knew responding emotionally would only translate into him feeling worse ultimately. He chose to assess the situation later and placed the phone back in his pocket.

The thing hadn’t spent more than a few seconds in his sweatpants when Isak heard a distinctive beat and the famous lyrics that went along with it. That ring tone was set aside for only one person on his contact list.

Don’t ever compare

Me to the rest that’ll all get sliced and diced
The rolling smoothness of L.L. Cool Jay’s rhyming was cut off as he slid the answer marker on his iPhone to the right.

“Is this my favorite manager?” An exuberant female voice answered back.

“Little Viking if you’ve got some manager side piece I will knock you out. Mama doesn’t even have to say so.”

Thankful for the timely reprieve from far more stressful matters, Isak tilted his head back and laughed.

“So what’s up? I mean, unless you just called to talk, I am pretty cool after all.”

A faux, sarcastically dismissive exhalation crackled back on the phone into the boy’s ear.

“We both know I’m the master of coolness. Anyways, that’s not what I called you about. I know it’s a bit soon to start looking for an opponent, only being a couple weeks after your last fight, buuuuut…..”

Isak waited for his manager to respond, left eyebrow making friends with his forehead. His left hand was making circular motions horizontally, his finger pointed out. He knew girl Chris couldn’t see him, but for whatever reason it helped ease the tension.

“I can get you a fight on the New Year’s card. I can’t promise it’ll be the main card, but I’m working on that as well.”

Isak’s eyebrows were now both making friends with his forehead, shaking hands even.

“Are you serious!? Dude, that would be so fucking awesome!”

A retired couple strolled by the ecstatic young athlete, shooting him a look of disapproval. Isak wasn’t even aware they were there. A bubbling, radiating laugh flowed into Isak’s ear.

“I am one hundred percent serious bro. Now I’m not gonna lie, it would be an upper echelon opponent. Apparently, some people think you pulled that last win off by the skin of your teeth. But, Eskild doesn’t see it that way, and I’m guessing that means William doesn’t either. This is a big opportunity Isak. I know we’ve been steadily chugging along the title shot train tracks this past year and this is the first step to making it pay off.”

The excited man now brought himself back down to the earthly realm. He put together what Chris was saying and had only one question.

“If I win my next fight, am I gonna get a title shot?”

“Hmm, I don’t know about after this one, but it’s absolutely gonna put you in the conversation Isak. Listen, I have to go pick up my aunt from the airport, but I’ll call you later this week.”

“That’s works great. Or, if you want, you can come into the gym. I’ll be free during the day
Wednesday.”

The manager responded saying that would be doable as well.

“Awesome. Hey, you know I probably don’t say it enough, but you’re not just a good manager Chris, you’re a good friend as well.”

The younger woman made a cooing ‘aww’ before replying.

“That’s beautiful Isak, really. You know I love when you get all soft on me. Just don’t do it in the cage. Always hard in the cage.”

The tall blonde couldn’t contain the eruption of giggles that poured out of him. Finally catching his breath he affirmed his manager’s words.

“Always hard in the cage, of course boss.”

Chris playfully scolded Isak for referring to her as such before the two friends said their goodbyes and Isak returned his phone to his front pocket.

_Fuck yes! I’ve got a fight on the biggest card of the year!_

_Beads of sweat were congregating around Even’s hairline and the back of his neck. His ears glowing like two beacons in a snowstorm. You see, over the years, he’d come to realize and classify different types of sweat. Exercise sweat, grappling sweat, over training sweat, running sweat, sex sweat, and just plain old ‘fuck, it’s hot out’ sweat. This was none of those. No, this was a classic case of nerve sweats. The creative director felt like he was back in grade school giving an oral report on a book he’d barely even thumbed through. And he was actually very well versed in the subject this time._

_He cleared his throat, hoping that would somehow get the three other members of the marketing campaign to give their feedback quicker. Perhaps Even should’ve hoped for something else. A tall, lithe blonde woman in her early forties was the first to speak._

“I get what you’re going for Even, but I don’t know if we have the resources for this. Even with access to your friend’s gym. And keep in mind, he has to be paid as well.”

_The creative director’s gaze moved to another member of their group, the only one who was older than all of them. He turned his hands up at Even, making a small shake with his head indicating he had nothing to add._

_Awesome input old man. Yeah, it totally makes sense that you’ve been working here longer than all of us and have nothing to say._

_Even’s now semi defeated eyes settled on the last person in the four member team, silently pleading to at least give some constructive, useful feedback. A confused smile showed over the young man’s face._

_“Really leaning heavy into that whole rainbow marketing thing buddy. Which is totally cool, but I_
don’t think most mma fighters care about diversity in the ad of a product they’re buying.”

Even collapsed back into the office chair he’d stood from a few minutes and sighed irritably.

_They’re all missing the point!_

“Well, Aleks, it’s actually not about the diversity in the ad, it’s about the diversity in the sport. Mixed Martial Arts is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse sports in the world outside of the Olympics. I thought it would be nice to highlight that.”

The younger man gave a non-committal raise of his shoulders.

“I can definitely believe that. But we live in Norway Even, and while I think it’s awesome you have a diverse group of friends and all, most of our customer base is still going to be white.”

Even had actually anticipated this response. It wasn’t an entirely bad one either, made sense, but maybe the kind of sense that actually ended up limiting their draw in the market. He smiled warmly at his teammate before replying.

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. We already know how to market to ethnically white Norwegians. Granted we’ll be coming up with strategies to attract combat athletes, but, hey, why not get ahead of the curve now?”

Aleks’s eyes narrowed just a tad as he sat back in his own chair, putting his hands behind his head.

“Now that you explain it like that, it’s easier to see what you’re going for. Still, we have to be careful not push our focus too much into the race, ethnicity, gender, whatever of the fighters in the campaign. Not to say it shouldn’t be something to use, but we can’t put all our eggs in one basket.”

Anja nodded along with the brunettes statement.

“I think it’s definitely something we could highlight, like you said Even. A down and out person of color using wrestling or boxing or mma or whatever it might be to elevate themselves? It’s a classic story, but it still works.”

Even brought his bottom lip into between his teeth, chewing softly at it. A nervous tic he’d had since childhood.

Yeah, it still works and it’s still cliché as fuck.

He restrained himself from letting this slip out, his brain graciously providing a better, more office friendly version of the words.

“It is definitely a classic story Anja, but I worry that it might be too classic. When fighting is the only way out of your situation? Well, I absolutely respect that, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s what the person wanted to do. What it means is that they’re good at it. Good enough to effect change in their own life. And I’m not diminishing that at all I just….” He trailed off, not able to complete his thought.

A gruff, elder voice picked up where Even left off.

“It’s sometimes more interesting if someone does something because they want to, because they love it, than if they just happen to be good at it and it’s their only option. A choice is, at times, more passionate than a necessity.”
The room was momentarily stunned to silence, Even in particular. The old man had said exactly what he was trying to, only far better than he would’ve been able to. Their senior coworker looked at them with questioning eyes.

“What? You guys act like I don’t speak or something.”

The blonde martial artist was reminded of the Ents in the Lord of the Rings films.

*You must understand, young Even, it takes a long time to say anything in this damn office. And I never say anything unless it’s worth taking a long time to say.*

Even smiled gleefully at the old man.

“Hapfthor, that is definitely what I was trying to say.”

A loud ping resonated throughout the small conference room the employees were meeting in, signaling the end of their allotted time to discuss the campaign.

*Damn, I wanted to hear what else Hapfthor had to say.*

Even clapped his hands together, getting everyone’s attention.

“Ok everybody, I think we got some good ideas going today, so everyone cool with meeting next week at the same time?”

A trio of confirming responses could be heard around the room. Even smiled.

“Awesome I’ll see you guys then!”

As he was filing out of the room, Even’s phone vibrated in the pocket of his skinny jeans, informing him of a text. Extracting the device from it’s denim prison, he felt a slight relief at seeing Mikael’s name on the lock screen. He unlocked the phone and brought up the text.

```
Mikael: Hey dude, you got some mail today
       One letter looks pretty….serious
       I didn’t open it or anything though
```

The man’s eyebrows drew together as he texted back.

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You: What kind of serious are we talking about?
       Mikael: The kind that involves lawyers.
```

He closed his eyes and took a long, slow, deep breath. The nervous sweat Even felt in the conference room was back in full force.
Stuff for the fic

1. 13:11 – A reference to a verse titled Al-ra’d (The Thunder) in the Quran that states: ‘For each such person there are angels in succession, before and behind him: They guard him by command of Allah. Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts. But when once Allah willeth a people's punishment, there can be no turning it back, nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect.’ Although Isak is tentative about it, he’s actually quite open to receiving mental coaching from Sana and is actually seriously considering it. This is also the first chapter where Sana has actual dialogue with another character, so I figured the title could be a little nod to her as well. Even though it’s impossible to tell, a number of scholars on the Abrahamic faiths believe the phrase ‘God helps those who help themselves’ to have likely been derived from this verse.

2. Robert Werner Schulte - A pioneering German sports psychologist who participated in the first sports psychology lab and published a book of his findings entitled Body and Mind in Sport in 1921.

3. Coleman Griffith – Considered to be the father of sports psychology in America. He published two major works in the field titled The Psychology of Coaching (1926) and The Psychology of Athletics (1928).

4. SiO – The Student Welfare Organization of Oslo and Akershus. The organization offers several resources for university students including mental health resources. Although I have to mention that I’m not sure whether non-students can take advantage of these resources. In this au however, they are able to.

5. Mama Said Knock You Out - [https://youtube.com/watch?v=vimZj8HW0Kg](https://youtube.com/watch?v=vimZj8HW0Kg)

Chapter End Notes

So, how'd you guys like my choice for Isak's manager? I was gonna go with Eskild at first, but he's actually more of a match maker for fights along with William and Noora. I'm also considering making him the announcer because c'mon, Eskild being an awesomely over the top, goofy cage fighting announcer? Be still my beating heart. Oh also, I'm pretty sure I may have a new job in the coming weeks so my updates may be a bit delayed, but they'll still be on a fairly regular schedule. Also Isak's fight is coming up in a few chapters. I have some ideas about the format that I might write it in, but it I'll ask you guys about that in the next chapter. Hit me up with some feedback if you'd like and thanks to everyone who's commented and left kudos! And even to the lurkers who haven't, y'all are the secret scaffolding of Ao3 lol!
Give Me Strength, To Get To Another Day

Chapter Summary

Even talks to Elias. Isak is reminded that Bred Akse is a family. Elias talks to William.

Chapter Notes

Welcome back to the story everybody! I hope y'alls weekend is going well. This chapter gets into Even's recent past a bit more. I'm planning on Isak's fight happening after the next two chapters. This is the first time I'll be writing out the whole thing, not just a portion. I was thinking I would have the fight be a chapter on it's own, bet me know what you guys think about that. See you in the stuff for the fic section and endnotes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Onsdag

November 7th, 2018

18:44

Elias Bakkoush’s face was a series of frown lines, creased brows and narrowed eyes. The words he was reading registered with him, he understood what had been written. The idea that someone had actually paid a lawyer to write them however, was as confusing as it was saddening. The gym owner lifted his now frustrated gaze up to the man sitting across from him.

“This is bullshit man! It’s been over a year since that shit with StavMAC went down. And you guys squared it all anyways right?”

Even’s shoulders have a lazy shrug as his only response.

“I’ll call Kreslin right now. I don’t know what he’s trying to pull, but I’m not gonna let him“

Even’s voice was rough from disuse as he spoke.

“It’s not Kreslin.”

Elias gave his friend a blank look, the kind of look that people have right before they’re about to have new information dropped on them.

“I know who it is. I’m just……disappointed that they chose to pursue this.”

The boxing coach now knew that getting that new information from Even would take some effort.
“Even, I get that after what happened nobody at Stavanger really wanted to be associated with you or whatever, but legal action? Didn’t you settle with them?”

The blonde met his friends eyes before nodding.

“I did. Their lawyer and mine eventually settled on a figure that was to be paid off within eighteen months and it has been. That’s not what I’m being sued over, Elias.”

“Then what is it?”

Even’s face displayed what could only be described as a frustrated smile.

“Punitive damages, man. From the terms of the first lawsuit, this case was ended a little under two years ago. But the window for filing subsequent cases is a maximum of two years. This new one is, unfortunately within that two year time frame.”

“That’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard! What the hell kind of punitive damages does this person think they’re gonna get!?”

This drew another shrug from the instructor, his eyes staring unfocused at the desk in front of him.

“Sponsorship money I would imagine. A lot of people had legitimate cases for property damage after…..after everything went down.”

“Oh, now I know you’ve got to be fucking with me. You haven’t competed in a grappling or jiu-jitsu tournament in over three years Even! How could they possibly think they’re gonna get money off you from companies that used to sponsor you?”

The distraught grappler met his friend’s eyes with his own.

“Because three years ago I was working at StavMAC Elias and I was competing when I wasn’t training fighters. And you’re right, there wouldn’t be anyway to track how much of my sponsorship money I have or haven’t spent. But, you know who knows exactly how much I received from sponsors during my time at Stavanger? The one man who did all the accounting work for every coach and professional fighter.”

Elias furiously shook his head.

“That’s your private financial information dude! They can’t do that!”

“They can if it’s in relation to a lawsuit. Especially one that’s piggybacking off another one dealing with the same defendant.”

The two friends sat in silence in Elias’s office, a general heir of helplessness, confusion, and anger swirling in the room. The heaviness in the air was broken when the pebbled glass door to the office was loudly opened. A bright, smiling Vilde Hellerud popped her head into the space.

“Hi boys, Magnus and Mahdi are going to get some food, you wanna-“.

The bubbly blonde cut herself short, the unease exuding from the office now finally hitting her.

“Wow, did someone die or something? You guys look pretty upset.”

A subtle flick of his eyes towards Even were met with an even more subtle shake of the taller man’s head.
“Nah Vilde, just uh, talking about some serious stuff. We’ll take a raincheck on that lunch ok?”

Vilde nodded respectfully, awkwardly joking she hoped they didn’t get too serious. Even took advantage of the moment to stand, stretching his long limbs. Elias did the same, leaning against the side of his desk and crossing his arms. He looked every bit a stern, youth football coach. Even would’ve laughed had the subject they’d been discussing not been so troublesome.

“You’ve gotta fight this man. It’s ridiculous.”

Even looked back at the man he considered one of his best friends. The tiredness in his eyes dulled the usual radiance of their blue hue. Even’s whole body language said one thing: defeated.

“I’m tired of fighting Elias. I just want this to be over.”

He turned and walked out of the office. Elias Bakkoush felt a profound anger stir inside him. The anger he reserved for individuals who hurt his friends. Ultimately, he knew it’s a good thing Even didn’t tell him who filed the suit against him. It didn’t make Elias’s fantasy of finding out who that person was and humiliating them in front of everyone at Stavanger any less mentally satisfying though. But then another thought struck him. Before Even could reach the door, Elias called out to him.

“Hey Even, who was the accountant?”

He responded, despite his better judgement.

“Nikolai Magnusson.”

As Even left the gym, he heard the stereo system start to play the beginning of “Roots Bloody Roots.” He could only hope that the cacophonous sonic violence of the Sepultura song wasn’t a sign of things to come. *Please don’t make this worse than it alr.*

**Fredag**

**November 9th, 2018**

**17:55**

Isak’s entire body was sore. The soreness that came about from a great training session. He’d gone six full rounds, each round with a different, fresh partner. The young man had been tired before, exhausted even, but this was different. This was……advanced exhaustion. He heard a muffled chuckle, angling his head to see a bemused, upside down Mahdi looking back at him.

“Is that what you do after a hard training session? Make SpongeBob references?”

The fighter didn’t realize he’d spoken aloud. Normal Isak would’ve fired back with a witty, comparable jab at his friend. All advanced exhaustion Isak could manage was, “Shut up. You and your….stupid busted leg.”

A full fledged laugh now resonated through Isak’s eardrums.
“Why even train six rounds Mahdi? It’s only a three round fight for fuck’s sake!”

“Because paduwan, I don’t train fighters to get tired. I train fighters past being tired so that when their opponent is gassing out, they’re as fresh as a daisy.”

Isak lamented his friends words.

“You don’t train fighters at all! You’re not even my actual coach. If I had just wanted someone to yell at me about perseverance for thirty minutes I would’ve called Chris.”

Mahdi gave the blonde a look of confusion. Isak immediately recognized his mistake.

“Not coach Chris dummy. Chick Chris, you know, my manager Chris.”

“Aha, well you know she technically is the reason you’re having to go through this so if you really want to be upset at someone…”

Mahdi trailed off as Isak thumped his uninjured leg with a scoff. Sitting up, the older boy met his friend’s eyes.

“I can’t believe this fight is in like, less than two months.”

“Yeah, and your opponent’s a fucking nightmare bro.”

Isak apparently still had enough energy to give the injured grappler his best set of sarcastic eyes.

“Loving the support buddy.”

“Just being real man. I said he was a nightmare, not that you couldn’t win.”

With the explanation of that caveat, Mahdi secured his crutches underneath both his arms and hopped away to go talk to other members of the gym. As Isak was heaving himself up from the floor, he saw a smiling face framed by wavy, chestnut brown hair. Feliciana greeted him.

“Hey kid, I heard about you getting on that new year’s eve card. That’s great Isak!”

The blonde smiled back at his teammate, speaking while he unstuck the velcro from his gloves and slowly pulled them off.

“Yeah, from what I’ve watched, I’ve got my work cut out for me, but it should be a good card over all.”

Out of his periphery, Isak noticed something, or rather a lack of something. The small squad of seven to twelve years olds that would usually be rolling around or watching Even in rapt fascination as he broke down a technique were absent tonight. Isak inquired to his half Brazilian teammate about the instructor’s whereabouts.

“Hey, doesn’t Even have a class from 18:30 to 20:00 on Mondays?”

Isak noticed how the kickboxer’s face immediately lost some of it’s cheer. A tight lipped smile that conveyed more information than her subsequent answer came over her face.

“Yeah he actually didn’t have class last week either. I don’t know though, probably be best just to ask Even, you know?”

Well that’s not happening.
With a pout pitched to the side of his mouth Isak gave a shrug he hoped relayed how little he actually cared before replying.

“As long as it doesn’t effect him helping me train for this fight.”

“Hmm, nice to know you care about your coaches so much.”

Isak’s brows drew towards each other at the sarcastic response.

“Give me a break! I’ve barely known the guy a couple months. And it’s not like we got off to the best start either.”

As the blonde was talking to Feliciana he was unstrapping the shin and foot pads that he’d worn when he was sparring. The bantamweight sighed, shaking her head.

“No matter how old boys get they can still be so stupid sometimes.”

Finally getting both sets of protective gear off, Isak raised his head to deliver a rebuttal, but found that his friend had already moved to another area of the gym, warming up to do a few rounds on a heavy bag.

*He is training you for this fight Isak. And he’s Mahdi’s replacement for at least the next month. Might as well get along with him. Besides, you really think you have enough energy to spare some bad vibes for the guy?*

Isak grunted as he got up, walking over to far left side of the gym and entering the men’s locker room. He hated when his brain was right.

18:11

Isak had a fluffy white towel wrapped around his waist. Well, it was fluffy. Now it held an odd moisture to it. It certainly wasn’t soaked, but it wasn’t dry either. It was a soothing, warm weight around Isak’s legs though. That combined with the relaxing atmosphere of the sauna had the mixed martial artist closing his eyes and settling in for what would be a good steam.

“Yo, Isak.”

The blonde jolted at the voice addressing him. The relaxing atmosphere he’d slotted himself into was now quickly melting away. Only partially from the heat of the sauna however. Isak’s eyes shifted over to his right find a shirtless Olmeive sitting comfortably, his legs splayed wide stretching what the older boy thought might be the smallest towel in Bred Akse.

*Jeez, just wear a loincloth why don’t you.*

The imagery that flashed in his head made Isak shiver despite the heat of the room. *Fuck, definitely don’t imagine that.* A distant noise shook Isak from his thoughts. He turned to Olm to see the lightweight champion fixing him with an expectant gaze before finally speaking.

“Shit man. Sorry, I was just thinking about my fight and everything. Probably gonna be my most difficult one yet.”

*I definitely wasn’t thinking about what it would be like to run my fingers over the beads of sweat on*
Isak’s friend and training partner made a noise confirming that he agreed with the smaller fighter. Olmeive turned just slightly to his left, his slack ankle now only a few inches away from Isak’s. The featherweight noticed this and felt himself blushing, immediately thankful he could chock it up to the steam permeating the small space. Clearing his throat, the blonde boy continued talking.

“So um, yeah man. My opponents a Cage Warriors veteran. Something like nine fights and a couple title shots. I have to say, I don’t know what brought him back to Norway. There’s much more opportunity in the U.K. or the states.”

Glancing back over to his fellow fighter, Isak was instantly aware of how intense Olmeive’s eyes had become. He was scared, nervous, excited and oddly aroused all at once.

“Can I ask you a question Isak?”

When the deep, smoothness of the champions voice hit Isak’s ears, he couldn’t help but feel a spark of electricity travel all throughout his body. He tried to swallow as subtly as possible before answering.

“Absolutely Olm.”

“Do you think people think I’m dumb?”

Isak’s head moved backwards, his chin coming closer to his neck.

“No way man. You’re an awesome guy Olm. You’re a good friend and training partner, not to mention the fucking lightweight champion. Why do you ask?”

Olmeive tilted his head toward Isak, his left ankle and foot now just brushing against the other’s, albeit unintentionally.

“Well, I guess because it seems that some individuals maybe think that I don’t notice certain things. But I notice a lot more than people might think Isak.”

The blonde’s pulse had skyrocketed. With the way Olmeive was talking Isak was expecting either a fist or a kiss, but he got neither. Instead the younger boy turned to face him completely before continuing to speak.

“I know about you Isak and I’m completely okay with it. And before you ask, no, no one told me. I might not be the sharpest knife in the drawer, but I can read people very well….. Growing up with a shitbag of a dad helped me with that. Not being told when you’re going to get a beating is pretty nerve-wracking. But, over time, you start to pick up on all the little signs, start to predict it. And then you can at least try to avoid it.”

Isak had nothing to say. Wow, that was not what I was expecting. Coming back to himself rather quickly, the older boy immediately began telling Olmeive how sorry he was he had to go through that growing up. Isak knew a number of the fighters at Bred Akse didn’t have the best upbringing, but this was the first time anyone had ever been this explicit or candid about it. Olm only shook his head, respectively deflecting Isak’s sympathies.

“I’m not fishing for pity man. No, I just…..” the champion paused, having difficulty finding his words, “I just want you to know that you’re not alone ok? Every member of this gym has been through something that fucked them up somehow Isak. Something that they had to recover from. I don’t know your past, I don’t know what you’ve been through, what has or hasn’t been done to
you. All I know is that you’re my friend and my partner and I want you to be happy. So if there’s anyway I can do that, you just let me know ok?”

Isak wasn’t sure, but that may have been the most that Olmeive had ever said to him that wasn’t about mma or combat sports in general. The lump in Isak’s throat prevented him from swallowing away the emotion he felt building up in him. No. You need to feel this. You need to know you have people who care about you Isak. He let out a stuttered breath and turned his head from the concerned eyes of his friend. Isak knew he couldn’t blame the sauna for the moisture now collecting in and falling from his eyes. Olmeive put a soothing hand on his friend’s shoulder giving it a squeeze and pat before getting up and exiting the sweltering room.

22:57

A person that was only watching the two men, without any context, might have assumed they were in some sort of bizarre staring contest. Each one seemed to be waiting for the other to speak or even blink. Elias was brainstorming ways to inform William about Even’s situation without blowing his friend’s cover. William was brainstorming all the possible reasons the owner of one of the top three mma gyms in Oslo had called him, rather abruptly if he was honest, at just before 23:00 on a weekday. Finally, after a few minutes of awkward silence, both men spoke at the same time.

“Listen, Elias, you’re nice to look at and all-“

“Does your brother still work for Stavanger, because-“

Each catching the other off guard, they both apologized before William welcomed his friend to continue.

“So, I don’t really now how else to put this man, but uh…..”, A long, tired breath broke free from Elias’s lips, “I think your brother may be trying to blackmail one of my very close friends with a lawsuit.”

The surprised face the boxing coach was expecting from William didn’t come to fruition. Instead the NFC’s president and co-owner had a look of expectant disappointment flash across his face.

“Nikolai has been known to be a piece of shit. It’s certainly not something I’d put past him. But having said that I don’t know how I’m going to be of much help.”

Unfortunately, Elias had expected this response. Anyone who’d been in the mixed martial arts scene of Oslo in the past decade knew how deep the rift between the Magnusson brothers ran. But from Elias standpoint, without letting a significantly larger number of people know about Even’s situation, is seemed like his only course of action.

“I know you guys don’t get along very well or really even at all, but I’m really trying to protect E-,” the gym owner paused at his own slip up before continuing, ”To protect my friend’s privacy. If you think there’s any chance you could get Niko to drop this thing, it’d be a massive favor if you could talk to him.”

The look of simultaneous sympathy and frustration gave Elias his answer before the man sitting across from him even began to speak.

“I can absolutely try to talk some sense into him Elias. I think you remember, however, that the last
time Nikolai and myself were together, he broke two of my ribs and I put his head through a car window resulting in him getting twenty-eight stitches. He’s also the reason why I can’t completely straighten the last two fingers on my right hand.”

The promoter held the aforementioned mentioned hand in front of himself as he spoke, demonstrating flattening his point and middle finger while his ring and pinky finger stayed somewhat curled.

“Well, I can’t say he didn’t deserve what he got. I mean, the fact that the guy basically ran to Stavanger after that is all the evidence I need to know he’s a coward. But look man, regardless of whether you’re able to convince him to stop this bullshit or not, I really appreciate it and so does my friend, even if he might not say so.”

The two men stood up and filed out of Elias’s office stopping in front of the main entrance to the gym. William turned and gave an amicable pat to the other man’s arm.

“I know we’ve had some differences in the past Elias, but I’m proud to call you my friend. And while Nikolai is my brother in blood only,” He fixed the black haired man with a look of sincerity, “You’re my brother in everything but. I’ll talk about it with Noora and let you know how it goes ok?”

Elias expressed his thanks to William before returning inside the gym and preparing to close up. He’d almost forgotten he wasn’t the only one there until he saw a familiar head of short, blonde curls putting away the supplies he’d used to clean the mats and exercise equipment.

“If, little viking, be honest, how much of that did you hear?”

Isak closed the door to the supply closet and turned around, crossing his arms to warm himself. Does it really cost that much to keep the heat on overnight?

“I heard enough to know that someone close to you is being sued. Oh and to confirm, well, reconfirm I suppose, that Nikolai Magnusson is a horrible person.”

Elias nodded slowly, oddly relieved that he wouldn’t have the guilt of not telling his student what was being discussed between himself and William.

“Well, just keep that to yourself ok Isak? My friend really doesn’t want-“ Isak cut his coach off as respectfully as possible.

“Hey, Elias, relax bro. I can keep a secret. And besides, right now I don’t really know anything anyways.”

The older man thanked him for his promised secrecy as well as for staying after hours to clean up.

“You know, that janitorial position is always open if you want to make a little extra scratch.”

The featherweight threw his eyebrows up to his forehead, peering at Elias through his lashes before letting loose a witty reply.

“I appreciate the offer coach but I prefer to get my brain damage from being punched and kicked. Getting it from cleaning chemicals is just so trite and boring.”

Despite the rather morbid nature of the joke, Elias had to reward his fighter with a laugh and shake of his head.
“Always the maverick huh Valtersen?”

The fighter gave his boxing coach a self satisfied smile before the two locked up and walked out of the gym.

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**Stuff for the fic**

1. StavMAC – Stavanger Martial Arts Center. In this story I’ll be using StavMAC as a fictionalized version of the real Stavanger MMA Gym.

2. MMA Rounds – Within professional mixed martial arts, the rounds are 5 minutes apiece with 3 rounds for nontitle fights. Title fights and usually main events are 5, 5 minute rounds.

3. The Sepultura song if anyone is interested lol - [https://youtube.com/watch?v=F_6jepFES](https://youtube.com/watch?v=F_6jepFES)

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**Chapter End Notes**

Tell me what you think! By the way, full disclosure, I have no clue how the Norwegian legal system works xD. I based my legal knowledge off Law and Order and old court TV lol. Comments and kudos make Even’s legal troubles go away!
It's Them Rose Tinted Cheeks, Yeah It's Them Dirt Colored Eyes

Chapter Summary

Isak catches the eye of a boy, William and Noora discuss Even's situation, and Isak learns he knows far less about Even than he thought.

Chapter Notes

Sorry, I'm a bit behind on this update guys! I was at a friend's last night and didn't have access to my tablet, which is where all my writing is. So this chapter delves further into Even's backstory and some of what happened after he left Stavanger. I don't wanna give to much away, but I hope everyone enjoys the chapter! See you at the endnotes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mandag

November 12th, 2018

11:20

He’d arrived about ten minutes early for the appointment, figuring it’d give him time to study more film on his opponent. Or more time to back out, right Isak? The blonde youth pushed his inner thoughts into a tiny steel cage at the back of his mind. It was a place only used when Isak needed to fully pay attention to something. He didn’t use it nearly as much as he thought he should, but remained focused on the fight playing out in front of him on his phone.

He’d turned the sound off not only to be courteous to the few students in the lounge area outside SiO’s mental health services office, but to also not be influenced by the commentary on the fight. Isak studied the man’s footwork, how he set up his punches with feints and positioning. Currently on the small rectangular screen, his future competition had his man backed up against the fence. He’d feinted a jab with his lead left before dropping his right shoulder down, appearing to go for a body shot. The other fighter took the bait, which allowed Isak’s opponent to cross his left leg just to the outside and in front of his competition’s, his right elbow coming up parallel to his own face as his hips turned through. The other man was just a split second too late in trying to throw his own punch however and ended up catching a spinning right elbow across the jaw. The momentarily stunned fighter had given Isak’s opponent just enough time to launch a compact, piston like straight left, dropping the man for a true walk off knockout. Jesus, this guy hits like a fucking freight train!

The fighter's eyes drifted to the title of the video. “Agmir ‘Angel of Death’ Holvien K.O.’s Andrew Fisher”. It was a video from over four years ago, but Isak doubted that Holvien’s power or
speed had diminished much in that time. *Of course his fucking nickname is Angel of Death.* Before the featherweight could become anymore concerned about the tenacity of his upcoming adversary, he heard his name being called. Putting his phone back into his pocket, Isak removed himself from the chair in the lobby of SiO’s mental health services office and strode up to the front desk. He noticed the same boy from the other week was working. What he hadn't noticed in their previous non-vocal interaction though, was just how fucking *cute* the guy was.

He had deep, coffee colored hair shaved short on the sides and kept longer on top. The boy's wavy locks were highlighted by matte auburn streaks, his eyes a dirty hazel that boasted shades of brown and green. He was clean shaven at the moment, but Isak could tell the boy could grow a decent beard if he wanted to. His lips were full, yet a perfect fit for his face. Near alabaster skin was accented by small smatterings of dark brown freckles and lightly flushed cheeks. Isak swallowed heavily. *Holy Christ, he’s fucking gorgeous.* Clearing his throat, the young mixed martial artist addressed the boy, who's name pin informed him his name was Tobias.

“Hi Tobias. I have an 11:30 with Ms. Bakkoush.”

Isak's voice held a hint of a question to it. The university student looked at him directly now, their eyes meeting. A colony of fluttering butterfly's erupted within the blonde's stomach.

“Oh hey. You're the dude from last week. And yes you do. Let me just buzz you through.”

The shorter boy pressed a button on what looked to Isak like a sound mixer. A low toned buzzing could be heard in the small space. As Isak moved to open the door, Tobias spoke up.

“Hope you have a good session….”

The fighter stood there with the door halfway opened for a few seconds before he realized what the other young man was subtly asking him. *Tell him your name, moron!* Reaching out a hand, Isak met the brunette halfway in a warm, friendly handshake.

“I’m Isak. You might be seeing more of me around here by the way.”

He was rewarded with a small smile and nod from Tobias.

“Can’t say I’d mind that too much.”, the student said, his small smile now a fully flirtatious one. Isak didn’t get a chance to wow the boy with a witty remark before he spoke again, this time with the slightest hint of urgency in his voice.

“You should probably get in there though. It’s already five after.”

“I suppose I should. You have a good day Tobias.”, as Isak talked he discreetly, well, what *he* thought was discreetly, checked out the smaller boy. He was very pleased with the lithe, wiry muscle tone that he could make out through the student's well fitted clothing.

“You do the same Isak.”

The young men parted ways as the taller made the short trek back to Sana's office.
The November cold snap had broken for a few days in Oslo, and William and Noora had decided to take advantage of it. They were seated outside of Engebret Café, a spot they’d both admired since their days in secondary school. The main difference now being that they could pay for their meals with their own money. Each had decided to break some important news to their partner, a fact they’d established while they were waiting on their food. Noora had volunteered to go first. She didn't speak, only retrieved a small, white, wand like object from her purse and handed it to William. It took the man a few seconds to realize what he was seeing, but when he did he was beyond ecstatic.

“Oh my God! Noora, this is incredible!”

The two shared wide smiles as well as a long embrace and kiss before sitting back down. It was only after the initial surprise and joy had been tamped down slightly that William realized he still had to deliver his significantly less happy news. He held his wife's gaze somewhat sympathetically before expounding on his own news.

“So, this probably isn't the news you want to hear after telling your husband you're pregnant, but I made a promise to Elias.”

Noora's face quickly went from overjoyed to concerned as she listened to her partner explain what he’d been told by Bred Akse's owner.

“Someone from the Stavanger MMA gym is suing one of Elias's friends. And from what he told me, there’s good reason to believe that Nikolai is involved somehow.”

A thoughtful expression came over the blonde's face for a few seconds before she replied.

“Is it Even?”

“Who?”

“Even Bech Naesheim? He teaches a kids jiu-jitsu class at Bred Akse. Actually, I think he’s helping Isak train for his fight next month.”

“Oh, right, of course. But why would it be him?”

Noora leaned back in her seat and leveled her husband with a playful smirk before answering.

“Aren’t you supposed to be the one with your finger on the pulse of Norwegian mma?”

William gave her a rather helpless expression, turning his hands over and raising them to show he didn't know what she was talking about. Noora continued.

“Well as much as I hate gossip, the word is that there was some sort of falling out between Even and one of the other coaches at Stavanger. Like, a gym-wrecking type of falling out.”

William's eyes widened at the new information. He’d had his suspicions before, but having a semi concrete answer now, things made a bit more sense. A decorated jiu-jitsu phenom that trained some of the most successful fighters in the sport just decides to get a nine-to-five and open a school for kids? It didn’t add up very cleanly. However, this didn't mean he didn't still have unanswered questions.
“So what happened?”

Noora shrugged and looked off to her left.

“From what I’ve gathered, Even settled out of court and paid off an agreed upon figure. Whoever is responsible for this lawsuit is likely suing for punitive damages. Possibly for loss of personal property.”

William usually enjoyed it when his wife showed her knowledge of the legal system, but he was disappointed that she had to in this case. He gave Noora a tight lipped smile.

“Yeah, that’s what Elias said as well. I just think that’s kind of…..cowardly I guess. But then again, if Nikolai is involved that’s to be expected.”

“You think he’s pushing someone to sue Even?”

“I think he hated that Even was the one bringing more attention to Stavanger instead of him.”

Noora scoffed and rolled her eyes before responding.

“Pardon my language, but he’s a fucking accountant. Why would he think he's bringing any attention to the gym?”

“Well, I suppose we can add delusional to the long list of character flaws he already has.”

The couple shared a quiet chuckle and spent the rest of their lunch discussing other subjects, primarily the fact that they’d both be becoming parents in a little under nine months. As they finished up their meals and went inside to pay, William remembered what Elias has asked of him. He knew there was zero chance of stopping his brother from pursuing whatever it was he had against Even. But, there was a reason that Noora was his primary legal consultant and contract drafter. She was far more that just a pretty face; the girl knew her shit. Which is why William decided to hazard one more question.

“So, do you think Even has any chance of fighting this thing? And I mean, is there anything we could do to help?”

Noora turned to the promotion owner after she’d squared away the payment for the couple's lunch.

“It's primarily dependent on the validity of the plaintiff’s claim. If the person suing him has actual evidence of property damage or can prove any kind of negative monetary or mental effects well….“ She paused and gave William a look of sympathy, “Even's best case scenario will probably be to settle again. Whether it will be in or out of court will likely depend on the figure the other person's lawyer comes up with. It’s unfortunate, but he doesn't have a lot of options.”

William sighed in frustration and looked off to the side, reluctantly nodding his head in understanding. He looked back at his wife and broke into a bright smile.

“Sorry about, kind of, sort of, totally ruining your awesome surprise by the way.”

Noora's eyes crinkled as she laughed and shook her head before looking up to her husband, leaning into him as he wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

“You didn’t ruin anything William. You just reminded me how loyal you are and how much you care for your friends. It’s part of why I married you to be honest.”
The two locked eyes as they came to the tram stop and shared a short, but passionate kiss before boarding the transit vehicle and heading home.

Torsdag

November 15th, 2018

18:56

Elias had told Isak he didn't have to worry about teaching his class when preparing for a fight. It was a song and dance the coach and student had done a total of seven times now, including the boy's amateur career. The blonde understand where his head coach was coming from. Not teaching would allow for more training, more specialization in regards to his competition. But for Isak, teaching was sometimes just as if not even more effective than any particular training regiment might be. It gave him a chance to break everything down again, to relearn technique and position. A lot of people looked at Isak and saw a troubled kid who wouldn't have cut it in the real world. Someone whose only option was fighting.

This couldn't have been further from the truth though. Isak's love of mixed martial arts and all the myriad disciplines it represented didn't come from wanting to hurt his opponents or feeling physically superior over them. Oddly enough, a lot of it came from a place of deep, intellectual intrigue. It wasn't just knowing that a technique worked and was effective, it was learning why. Studying the human body in regards to combat and athleticism. Although there were few people who'd be able to confirm it, the young fighter had been a pretty big science enthusiast, i.e. nerd, in his secondary school days. He still was in all honesty. He'd brought that same level of enthusiasm and curiosity into his mixed martial arts career. It was what made Isak a great fighter, but it could also be what paralyzed him into a state of near inaction. He was as determined as possible to completely eliminate the negative aspect of his approach to mma, but that was a task easier said than done.

The young man was currently demonstrating techniques working within the clinch with Bred Akse's recently crowned lightweight champion. The chances that Isak had broken a two week continuum on different sweeps from guard because his future co-competitor was a Muay Thai champion with a nasty clinch were exceedingly high. None of his students seemed to think it necessary to bring up however. A near half hour late Even Bech Naesheim, much to Isak’s chagrin, did though. He looked at Olmeive and Isak as they broke down setting up a trip from someone attempting to advance position in the clinch. His normally kind and accommodating blue eyes were steeld into flat lapis lazuli. Once the two fighter's were done instructing, an already wound up Even stormed over to Isak, latching onto the young man’s arm just above his elbow and yanking him off the mat as if he were a disobedient child. Isak threw off the elder's grip with derision and was about to lay into him for his seemingly random rudeness, but Even spoke first.

“What the hell are you doing Isak? Did we not agree we were working on sweeps from guard for the next two weeks?”

Although he was taken aback by the others uncharacteristic outburst, Isak attempted to remain
calm.

“Even, I don’t know what’s got you so upset, but you need to relax. We can always pick up where we left off after my fight. Besides it’s not like-“, the blonde boy was cut off by a verbal barb from his co-instructor.

“You understand the gym doesn’t revolve around you right?”

Isak’s jaw tightened, eyes narrowed.

“I understand that you’re upset about something. It doesn’t mean you need to be a dick.”

Even broke out into a sarcastic laugh, stating how hypocritical it was of Isak to say this. The younger man grabbed Even in the same manner he had been grabbed earlier, dragging him further away from the class. Isak had the older man backed into a spot on the wall, the taller blonde’s back brushing a section of rectangular cushion. The anger in Isak’s voice was being tempered, but it still got his point across.

“Listen to me Even. This is what you’re going to do, hey, hey!, “ Isak tipped the other man’s head up, forcing their eyes to meet, “You’re going to go in front of the class after they’re done with this clinch drill, you’re going to apologize for being late and you're to help me clean and lock up.”

Even's eyes were wide and quizzical. I should be upset at him, talking to me like that. Fuck…did I like that?

The Jujitsuka rolled his eyes dramatically and scoffed at Isak's firm instructions.

“Are you my fucking teacher now Isak? Gonna keep me in line?”

Isak crowded Even against the padded wall further, an authoritative bite to his words as he replied.

“If I have to be. And if I have to, yes.”

He leaned closer into Even, speaking lowly, trying to make his tone intimidating.

“I don’t have a problem disciplining you in front of the whole gym.”

Even did feel a bit intimidated, among other things.

“Whatever, Valtersen. I don’t have to do what you ask me.”

“Well good, because I’m not asking, now run along ne-waza nerd.”

The black belt wanted to keep going back and forth with Isak, but his body was having….other feelings about the young fighter's words. Ok, so the guy sounds good giving orders, so what? He walked around the shorter man, striding back over to the class and waiting for them to finish drilling so he could apologize. As the students were completing their work with the technique Isak demonstrated, Even made sure the younger was watching and started speaking.

“Hey everyone, let me get your attention for a sec, “ His eyes meet Isak's before he continued, “Isak is making me apologize ….“.
The softly abrasive texture made a sandpaper like sound as Even used the dish towel to clean the
heavybag. Isak had decided because he’d given such a lackluster apology, he could clean by
himself, while the mma fighter scrutinized his work. The instructor had attempted to appeal to
Elias, but the coach sided with Isak, saying Even's current attitude wasn't good for the atmosphere
of the gym. Although he though it was a bit ridiculous, Even acquiesced to Isak's wishes. The
younger was currently watching Even, messing with him while he was cleaning.

“If you were just cool, you wouldn't have to be doing this.”, Isak stated in a sing-song voice. Even
released a soft grunt of effort as he scooted around to begin cleaning another area of the bag. Isak
continued talking.

“Yep, Elias was actually thinking of letting me teach another class, one on having all the chill.”

Even smiled a playful grin.  

“Oh we'll see how much chill you have. He pressed his chest to the

clean, quarter inch foam that sat beneath the line of heavybags in Bred Akse. After this, the older
man shifted his knees further apart, putting his ass out on display. He made it appear he was
leaning to clean a spot on the bag and let out a slightly bratty huff.

“I can’t reach this spot.”

As Even's strong, large hands sanitized the collection of pads, gloves, headgear and other training
items in the gym, Isak decided to try to talk to the man again, sans butt ogling.

“So, I haven’t ever really asked how you got into mma and stuff.”

Isak pushed some air through his teeth, expressing his amusement.

“Then I was seven to twenty-one, my Dad was part of a marketing firm that dealt mainly with

athletics. He got on the mma bandwagon when it was still just a four door sedan.”

This coaxed and actual chuckle from the shorter man.
“But, I fell in love with Jiu-Jitsu. Whenever we were in Japan, I was always training traditional Jujutsu. I started to get pretty good after a few years, and when I was twenty, I won Abu Dhabi.”

Isak and Even's eyes met. The latter’s eyes were bashful in response to the reverence in the other's.

“Relax it happened just the once. But, a year after that, I got called up to be a training partner for Per Eklund. And I think you know the rest.”

He did know the rest. The amount of research Isak has done on Even would’ve been embarrassing had he not had the excuse of “getting to know his co-instructor”. But Isak was still a bit sour about the older man's earlier behavior and decided to make him aware of it.

“I guess that’s what I don’t get.”

The smaller blonde received a questioning look from Even. Isak explained himself.

“You’re one of the most decorated grapplers in Scandinavia Even. You can go into pretty much any jiu-jitsu school in Europe, hell, in the world and someone is going to recognize you. I don’t get what there is to be upset about.”

Even sighed as he set the focus mitts he was cleaning aside and addressed his training partner.

“All those accomplishments are nice, but they don’t make my life magically easier, Isak.”

Isak snorted and shook his head.

“Yeah, I guess having an insider helps.”

Even had an uncomfortable look on his face. He understood what the other boy was saying, but didn’t like what it implied. He told Isak as much only to have him laugh in his face.

“Everyone who got a leg up wants to pretend they were a paraplegic once they're successful.”

He spoke in a mocking voice.

“Oh yes. I got here all by myself. It was so hard to be me you know.”

Isak shook his head, muttering “Give me a break.”, under his breath.

Even immediately took offence to this and reprimanded the young fighter.

“Hey, don’t presume to know anything about me I haven't told you Isak. You don’t have any idea what I might or might not be going through. Or what anyone else might be for that matter!”

It was the younger who took offense now.

“Oh c’mon Even. You know I respect you and what you’ve accomplished. You helped get mma legalized and regulated in Norway! But don’t act like you didn’t have a huge advantage over other people.”

“That’s not-“

“I thought for someone who styles themselves as being so socially conscious you’d be aware of that.”

Even pinched his nose and shook his head.
“You can’t begin to understand what I’ve gone through Isak.”

Isak responded angrily now.

“Oh really, was it having to leave your own house because it became unsafe? Was is being homeless for three months? Was it your mom calling the cops on you when she doesn't recognize you anymore? Don’t talk to me about what some spoiled rich kid had to go through. And yes Even, that is what you are. What do you think you could’ve gone through that was worse than what happened to me hmm? What could've happened to you that wou-“ Even cut the boy off and replied with a scarily calm demeanor.

“I lost custody of my daughter Isak. I don’t know when I’ll see her again. *If* I’ll see her again. That's why you can’t understand this. And I’m not going go sit here and make you try.”

The wistful man pushed himself off of where he was leaning on the outer platform of the cage, scooping up his bag and water bottle, and leaving behind a stunned and ashamed Isak Valtersen.

Stuff for the fic

1. The song the lyric for the chapter title is taken from - *Tyler, The Creator: See You Again*
   This song is the feeling I imagine Isak has when he meets Tobias.

2. *Agmir's Spinning Elbow*
   The only difference in this is that Agmir's elbow stunned his opponent, but the follow up left hook is what knocked him out.

3. Andrew Fisher - An English mixed martial artist who currently competes in the featherweight division of the ACB (Absolute Championship Berkut).

4. Abu Dhabi – Referring to the ADCC (Abu Dhabi Combat Club) which is a submission wrestling world championship. I chose this tournament to highlight how high level Even's grappling is as ADCC consistently hosts the best practitioners in a variety of grappling based martial arts. In this timeline Even won the 194 lb (88 kgs) tournament in 2007. Also, fun fact, the 2nd place winner of ADCC's Men's 2007 Superfight Tournament was a Norwegian named Jon Olav Einemo.

5. Per Eklund – A successful Swedish mixed martial artist who was the first Swede to compete in the UFC. Per is often considered a pioneer for Swedish MMA. He had a final record of 14-5-1 (wins, loses, draws) when he retired in 2011.

6. MMA Legality in Norway - So it's weird that I haven't brought this up till now, lol. Currently, mixed martial arts as a sport in banned in Norway. Any combat sport that has a knockout as a means of winning a fight is also banned (boxing, kickboxing, Muay Thai, etc.) There are still a number of high level MMA gyms and fighters, however while they can train in Norway, they cannot compete there. Norway is the only Scandinavian country where MMA is illegal.
Soooo, what did everybody think? Anyone see this coming? Hahah. Anyways, we're going to start getting into the boy's pasts over the next few chapters, so don't be surprised if there's a few more....well....surprises. (Laughs at my own dumb joke) Let me know what you guys think about the way the story's going! Comments and kudos keep up Even's morale and make Isak not be so judgemental!
Civil Discourse

Chapter Summary

Isak invites his crush to his fight. Even consults his lawyer over the lawsuit. Isak and Even talk about their argument.

Chapter Notes

Welcome back everyone! I hope you're so having a good week and weekend so far. This would've been up earlier, but I had to cover a shift for someone last night. A lot of Even's past gets revealed in this chapter and Isak starts becoming a little more confident as well as understanding. I don't want to spoil anything so I'll leave it there. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Torsdag

Desember 17th, 2018

12:08

The next several weeks of Isak’s training camp and mma grappling class were uncomfortable to say the least. Isak and Even were acting like they had been shamefully caught fucking in a supply closet when in reality the two had had a rather unfortunate misunderstanding. If the younger martial artist had any apology to give, he kept it to himself. Although what Even didn’t know was that this was done out of shame more than anything. Isak felt pretty guilty for judging his training partner so harshly, but whereas before he would have to keep those thoughts and feelings to himself, he at least now had a place he could express them. A place where his feelings would be respected and talked about, even if he himself thought they were stupid. It was a Thursday, late in the morning when Isak finally broke and explained what had been bothering him to Sana.

“I was just such a jerk to him. I guess, maybe it was the stress of this fight, but he didn't deserve it. Especially because….well”, Isak paused, considering how much of Even's predicament he should actually explain, “He really is going through something difficult right now. Something….. I can’t actually even relate to.”

Sana gave a nod before dispensing her advice.

“So apologize to him. It's obvious this is effecting your relationship with him as a training partner and co-instructor. You should get ahead of it now before it can have a chance to effect your performance as well.”

Isak sighed and shook his head while shrugging.
“But I don’t even know what to say Sana.”

“It doesn’t matter what you say. As long as you’re being genuine when you say it. But don’t force it either. It’s going to be uncomfortable Isak, admitting you were in the wrong always is. But it shouldn’t feel like something you have to do. Just be honest with him. Even is a good person, he’ll understand. Despite what you might think he wasn’t always as chill as he is now.”

The sports psychologist looked as if she had stories of her own to tell about the older man and Isak asked her as much. She smiled, closing her eyes and shaking her head a bit.

“When you and Even are back on as….whatever you are, ask him about some of the stories from when he was around your age. Him and my brother got up to some pretty stupid shit back in the day.”

Isak smirked at the woman.

“And innocent Sanasol was just caught in the middle of it all.”

“Damn right I was! Those two were always trying to corrupt me.”

The two shared a laugh before moving on to other topics. They'd been doing visualization exercises the past few sessions. The only other mental coach Isak had used, when he was still in the amateur circuit, had taught him a few that he still employed. They’d established that the young fighter's main concern about the fight wasn’t so much getting hurt as it was proving everyone who considered his opponent too much to soon correct. Sana and her client worked on insulating himself from others opinions and predictions, at least while in preparation. It was something Isak had always had difficulty with; not putting stock into what people in the gym or even people online had to say about him as a fighter. Or anyone else for that matter. As their time drew to a close, the younger of the two's mind was drawn elsewhere however. This time to the boy who happened to be, to Isak's delight, stationed behind the desk in SiO's mental health department's lobby.

“So, does the guy in the lobby work here like full time or….?”

Sana cocked her head, shooting Isak a somewhat vexing look.

“I would hope not considering he's a student.”

The blonde let out a small huff.

“And how was I supposed to know that?”

“Um, because you've shown up early to talk to him the past few weeks?”

Isak's reply had taken a pit stop in his throat, the blood his brain was going to use to respond had filtered into his cheeks.

“I mean, I know his class schedule. If you want I could-“, Sana's recovered yet still blushing client cut her off before she could embarrass him more.

“No Sana, I don’t need his class schedule. And we are just talking by the way.”

The sports psychologist felt like a mother teasing her child about his crush.

“All I’m saying is you guys seem to enjoy each other’s company quite a bit.”, Sana said, hands raising in mock defense.
It was a topic they’d danced around significantly before. Isak had told her of his…unwanted… attractions. Had told her about his now defunct crush on Chris, although he didn't mention him by name. Sana was far more respectful than he had anticipated. She’d told Isak he wasn't the only closeted athlete she had worked with and he wasn't likely to be the last. The younger man originally had some reservations about telling her his insecurities in regards to his sexuality due to what he perceived might be intolerance from her religion. Sana had quickly shut his worries down however, stating that just because she was a Muslim didn't mean she held intolerant views. It also didn't mean she agreed with or even condoned some of the things spoken about in the Quran. For Sana Bakkoush, being a good Muslim meant being a good person. If at times that meant a rub with her own religious doctrine, so be it.

“I do know that Tobias would love to watch your fight though.”

Isak shot his mental coach a look of suspicion.

“Seriously? I mean, Tobi is a really cool guy, but you think he'd actually wanna see that?”

A knowing smirk came over Sana's face.

“Do I think the boy that you’ve been having weekly eye sex with in the lobby of my workplace wants to see you shirtless, in compression shorts, and sweating heavily? Isak, c'mon.”

The fuck? Has she been hanging out with Eskild or something?

The mixed martial artist hadn't thought of that, but now it seemed like a good tactic. Despite the boy's athletic build, he was still a bit shy about his body outside of the cage. He found himself blushing again while laughing off Sana's comment. The two stood and walked to the door of the office. They scheduled Isak’s next appointment before saying their goodbyes, the older woman wishing Isak luck in his fight.

“We have been talking a lot, maybe I just need to go for it.”

A rare wave of confidence crashed over him, giving him the courage to approach Tobias as he walked out of the hallway that hosted the mental health offices at SiO. He fixed the younger boy with a large smile.

“Hey man. Sana told me you might be interested in going to my fight on the twenty-ninth?”

Tobias lifted his head and returned Isak’s smile.

“Yeah I did. I can’t say I’m a huge mma fan or anything, but I have a friend who goes to a lot of local events and said she thinks I’d enjoy it. Do you know Emma Larzen?”

Shit.

“Uh yeah I do actually. She’s friends with a few of the people I train with.”

“No way! Well you know, I’d love to come and watch you train sometime. I did Tae Kwan Do when I was a kid, but I think it’s a little different.”

Isak giggled at the other boy.

“Just a bit. But I could probably get you a discount if you wanted to take a class or something.”

Wow Isak. Way to go on sounding like every gym bro trying to get laid ever.

“Yeah, that would be cool. Are there still tickets or…”
“Oh, uh yeah I could get you a ticket if you want.”

Tobias gave him an appreciative yet oddly bashful grin.

“Thanks Isak. I can’t wait to watch your fight.”

“Well, I’m glad to know you’ll be cheering me on.”

The boy’s exchanged their goodbyes and Isak walked out of the office building, bracing against the near freezing afternoon air of the city.

13:32

This was the second time in less than a month that Even was meeting with his lawyer. The first was to go over his options concerning the suit being leveled against him by one of his old teammates. The nature of the current meeting, however, was far different. Only a handful of times in his life could Even Bech Naesheim say he was truly enraged. Truly angry. Unfortunately for his lawyer, this was one of those times.

“Why the fuck wouldn’t she have just let me know!? If she needed money, she didn't need to fucking sue me! And to think that Julian was complicit in all this bullshit, I just-” The fury of the towering jiu-jitsuka was almost too much for himself to handle. He brought his hands up to his hair, entangling them and releasing a bellowing cry of frustration. The man’s legal council tried in vain to calm him down.

“Even, I totally understand why you’re upset. And it’s one hundred percent justified in this case but-,”

“You know I thought we were all moving on”, Even collapsed into the chair sitting in front of his lawyers desk, making the woman weary as everything not heavy or tacked down seemed to shake, “I thought we had gotten past this. I mean, I never expected her to forgive me. I wouldn’t have forgiven me, but man…..this is just….fucked up.”

Once it appeared that he'd finally run out of steam, Even's lawyer addressed him as calmly and quietly as possible, hoping to placate him.

“Even, I agree with you whole heartedly. What Iben is doing? It’s disgusting. It’s kicking a man while he’s down because she can’t stand to think that you might go on to live a happy and productive life. But, unfortunately, it’s all legal. I know it feels like blackmail, and in a lot of ways it is. That doesn't make it any less legitimate though. Our best course of action right now is to accept these terms and wait until you can resubmit your appeal for shared custody.”

Even was repeatedly shaking his head back and forth.

“I just don’t get it. I understand her being taken away from me, I don’t like it, but I get it. I understand the StavMAC lawsuit. I even understand the mandatory hospitalization. But I can’t understand this.”

An expression of genuine sympathy washed across the older woman’s face.

“I don’t understand it either Even. But my job isn't to understand it and neither is yours. What we
need to be focusing on now, is getting things ready so that when the judge does look into your appeal for shared custody, he can’t point to anything as a reason why it shouldn’t be granted. So let's put our energy into that. Making your home suitable for an eleven year old girl isn't something I’d expect you to do overnight Even. But I can help. I can tell wh-

“I know what my child, what my daughter, needs to live a happy, safe life Kirstjen. I made sure she had all of it for the first eight years, I’m not going to just suddenly forget now.”

Although she didn't appreciate the younger man's tone, she let it slide considering how taxing and draining his current situation was.

“I don’t know what to tell you Even. Right now, as difficult as it might be, I’d only focus on what’s going to get the judge to think about granting you partial custody again. Throw yourself into your work if you need to. Spend more time at the gym, whatever it might be. But if we're going to fight this, really make this judge reconsider his decision, you’re going to have to put in the work son. The good news is, I’m here to help you with that as much as I’m able to.”

A sly smile crept across the lawyer's face.

“And just between you and me, I may have….slipped…and accidentally ran my key along Mrs. Dahl’s new car the other day.”

It wasn't the justice Even was seeking, but it still brought a lip flapping, fondly dismissive laugh out of him. And considering his current state of mind, that was about as good as it was going to get right now.

17:17

Even, Noora, and William were all packed into Elias's office, discussing, well, venting about his legal situation. Elias had relayed the information he'd received from William to his long time friend, but Even wasn't surprised, his lawyer had basically told him the same thing. So, when the newly expecting parents came by the gym to discuss the New Year's card with Elias, it quickly devolved into the three lamenting the circumstances their mutual friend was in.

“So the whole follow up lawsuit it bullshit?”, William asked. Even sighed and nodded.

“Pretty much. I guess her idea was if I’m too busy dealing with this one, then there's no way I’m fighting a custody battle.”

Noora's eyes compressed into slits. She had never really had much of an opinion about Iben Sandberg back in the day, but she certainly did now.

“So after eight years, she decides she wants to be in her own daughters life again?”

Even turned to respond to the question.

“Maybe. Although it was about the time I started working at StavMAC. That was back around twenty-fourteen. Me and Iben had always been cordial. We were both ok with how everything happened. It’s not like I was keeping Lilli from her mother or something. But, for whatever reason, she decided she wants to be a part of her life a year after I was working at Stavanger.”
William spoke up now.

“Didn’t you stop competing in grappling tournaments around twenty-fifteen?”

“I did. I had a nice little nut saved up in sponsorship and win money.”

“I ain’t saying she's a gold digger…” The group's eyes shifted to Elias as he said this.

He held his hands up defensively.

“What? I’m not. But you gotta admit it is a bit weird.”

Even snorted at the idea.

“Iben knew how much I was making, she could've picked a far more lucrative target if that were the case. No, I think it’s because….well….”

The tall blonde suddenly looked uncomfortable.

“Listen, Iben's dad was in poor health around that time, so I think she wanted them to actually meet before he died.”

Noora looked at Even cautiously.

“Your daughter never knew one of her grandfathers?”

The jiu-jitsu instructor shrugged before responding.

“Iben never seemed intent on getting them to meet one another. And Lilli never brought it up, even though she knew she had another granddad. I think Julian was trying to…..help her deal with her dad’s death. Get some closure. Maybe Lillian and Mr. Sandberg meeting was his way of attempting that. I can’t be sure.”

William was now thoroughly confused.

“Wait, Julian Dahl? Like that me and Noora went to school with?”

“That’s the one,” Elias informed the man, “Him and Iben tied the knot a few years ago.”

“I still don’t understand why she chose to do this now.”, Noora exclaimed.

Even stated he wasn’t sure either, only that he wished she would stop.

Like you don't know exactly why she's doing this Even.

Eventually, the four started discussing the New Year's card. One of the things William and Noora loved about being the owners of a smaller mma promotion was the relationships they had with different gyms. They got to know the fighters and coaches, got to work with them to make the best, most exciting matchups. Over the years the pair had come to develop their own favorite gyms and fighter’s, although this bias wasn’t carried over into the business side of things. The friends were breaking down the lineup of the card when Even asked a question.

“Isak has the first fight on the main card right?”

“He does”, Noora replied, “He’s fighting Agmir Holvien. Don’t tell the little viking, but Agmir's actually retiring after this fight.”
Elias eyes widened.

“Seriously?”

William responded to him with a confirming nod.

“Yep. I mean, the guy's a few years shy of forty, has won multiple Muay Thai championships, had a great run in Cage Warriors. I don’t blame him. Not an easy fight for Isak though.”

“Tell me about it.”, Elias sighed.

“I think you guys might be surprised.”, Even said, a sly smile spread across his lips.

The gym owner clapped him on the back.

“Hey, I hope you're right man, for your own sake.”

The friends shared a laugh before William and Noora informed them they had a prenatal appointment to get to. Even left the small office shortly after, getting ready before Isak came by the gym for their training session. He'd talk to the younger martial artist afterward, make everything copacetic. If Even had learned anything during his time training fighters, it was that having any unresolved issues between coach and student going into a bout was a great way to lose. And Even didn't plan on losing.

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Isak and Even were laid across from each other; Isak in his long sleeve, Under Armour compression shirt and loose training shorts and Even in his 10th Planet skeleton shirt of the same style. Each man was breathing hard and deep. Their training session was productive. Even had figured out the best way to keep Isak engaged was to make their grappling a game. It's almost like I'm teaching the kids. He'd set a timer on his phone to go off everyone two minutes. For every two minutes that Isak could defend a submission from Even, he got a point. And those points went towards a goal. In this case, it was Isak getting to use the steam room and shower first. Isak didn’t reach his goal.

“You got”, Isak paused to inhale harshly, “Lucky old man. I almost had you like…fucking five times.”

Even laughed through his own heavy breathing.

“Yeah you did. But I won out in the end huh? Experience beats enthusiasm young one.”

Sitting up, Isak scoffed at his jiu-jitsu coach.
“Please, you know if that was on the feet I would’ve picked you apart.”

“Hey, don’t threaten me with a good time.”

The two shared a laugh before a silence fell over them. The only sounds were the hum of the heater and the low volume of the Japanese funk Even had put on the stereo system. It was slowly growing on Isak. Now would be a perfect time for that apology Isak. The younger blonde's inner voice vaguely sounded like Sana. He cleared his throat and turned to see Even still laying on the mat, his breath now back under control.

“Hey Even, um, could we talk about….about what happened a couple weeks ago?”

The older man's eyes opened and met Isak's. They were their usual warm, slightly glossy blue.

“We can. But it’ll have to wait until after I shower. And don’t worry, I won’t use all the hot water.”

The boys smiled at one another before bring interrupted by a disgruntled Feliciana.

“Actually, you won’t be using any hot water Even.”

“Shit”, Isak lamented, “Is the fucking hot water heater broken again?”

“Yep. Second time in a two months.”

Even sighed and flopped back onto his back.

“I was really looking forward to almost falling asleep in there and having Isak yell at me for using all the hot water.”

“Hey, you said you wouldn’t use it all!”

Even shrugged and smiled at Isak.

“Yeah, not knowingly.”

Feliciana informed the other two she’d be washing up at home and bid them adieu. Even got to his feet, pulling on his jacket and jeans. Isak made sure to look away while the other man was dressing himself.

“We can still talk, if you’d like.”

Isak waited until Even was looking at him and gave a small nod.

Once the two were dressed appropriately for the nipping cold of Norwegian winter, Isak decided to begin his apology.

“Listen, Even. I’m sorry…..well I’m sorry I was an asshole basically. I didn’t know what you were going through, and I guess because I’ve seen so many people in the gym really work their way up that me not seeing when you were doing that….”, Isak paused to gather his thoughts “Well I shouldn’t have assumed that you were successful because someone was pulling strings for you. So….yeah…I’m sorry.”

“Apology accepted Isak.”

The shorter boy was somewhat shocked.
“Wait, really? That's it?”

Even nodded slowly.

“That’s it. We were both emotional. Neither of us were thinking very clearly. People say things they don’t mean when they're not thinking clearly.”

A few long seconds of silence dragged on before Isak raised the question he really wanted to ask.

“When did you have a kid?”

“When I was young and dumb. I wouldn’t undo it for the world though. My daughter's mother and I decided to have the baby, but it became clear after the first year that she didn’t want to be in our child's life. She was in school at the time and I was traveling pretty extensively for my jiu-jitsu career. For the first few years of her life she was raised by me and my parents. After I stopped competing in tournaments I was able to dedicate more time to her.”

“Why did you lose custody of her?”

Isak realized how rude the question was immediately after he asked it.

“Fuck, Even, I’m sorry, you don’t um….shit.”

Even consoled Isak.

“It’s ok Isak. I’m um, I’m not really comfortable talking about that with you. With anyone to be honest. Not….not right now anyway.”

“Absolutely. I totally understand. Anyways um….I guess what I’m really sorry for is being so judgmental. Calling you a spoiled rich kid and everything.”

Even laughed while answering.

“You weren’t entirely wrong.”

“Seriously?”

Even smiled big and shrugged then nodded.

“Me and my friends got up to some pretty stupid shit when I was around your age. I’m sure having parents who were fairly generous in regards to my….” Even tilted his head back and forth, trying to pinpoint the phrase, “Spending money helped me out in that.”

Isak was intrigued now.

*Sana did say I should ask him about him and his friends antics when he was my age.*

“How so?”

Even smiled and motioned Isak over to sit on a short stack of folding mats, looking like a father getting ready to regale his child with a fantastical tale.

“So I was seventeen and had just won my first black belt tournament in Osaka. Me, Elias, my friend Mikael and Mikael’s cousin were all celebrating. Mikael sees this adorable Japanese girl right? Like crushes super hard right away you know?”
Oh, I know.

Isak nodded, listening attentively.

“So, we finally convince Mikki to go talk to this girl and it turns out she doesn't speak any Norwegian. Shocker there right? Anyways, as the night goes on she sort of melds into our group and we all start getting pretty tipsy on sake and whiskey.”

A disgusted expression formed on Isak's face. Even laughed.

“Not mixed together! Anyways the girl tells Mikki, using me as a shitty drunken translator, that she has to catch a flight back to Okinawa later that night. Now, Mikael's cousin, Zara, has and uncle who owns a small, private airport on the edge of Osaka bay.”

Isak put the pieces together quickly, initially gasping and then laughing in disbelief.

“Even, you didn't!”

“I didn't! But Mikki and Zara convinced me, Elias, and this girl they knew what they were doing. So, we….borrowed this little puddle jumper and piled in.”

“They flew a fucking plane drunk!?”

Isak couldn’t tell whether Even was fabricating the story or not.

“I mean….drunk is a harsh word Isak. Pleasantly buzzed maybe?”

Both martial artists erupted with laughter before Even continued.

“So apparently Mikael and Zara’s aerial navigation skills left something to be desired.”

“Oh no”, Isak paused to laugh, “What happened?”

“Well, the flight ended up being longer than it should’ve been, but of course none of us noticed that. Anyways, we ended up sort of semi crash landing in this poor rice farmer’s field. And we weren’t even on Okinawa, we were on this other island called Ishigaki.”

The boy’s giggled with one another again. Even resumed the story.

“Isak, oh my God. He was soooooo pissed at us!”

“No shit! I would be too!”

“He chased out of his rice field with a katana dude. Like, I know it sounds stereotypical or whatever, but it really happened! The Japanese girl that was with us told me he was calling us a bunch of foreign, motherless, cowardly animals. It was fucking crazy Isak.”

“Did the girl get back to Okinawa?”

Even nodded rapidly.

“She did. And the Okinawan police we waiting for us when we got there. Oh man, that was a fun one to explain our parents.”

Isak gave Even a wide, genuine smile. The one he gave people he trusted and respected.
“And why has Elias never mentioned this?”

Even shrugged.

“Probably because that whole experience haunts him to this day.”

Both men shared another round of guffaws before their laughter died down. As they were locking up the gym, Even heading towards his car and Isak toward the tram stop, the older man called out to his student.

“Isak!”

“Yeah?”, Isak replied.

“I enjoyed that. I think we should talk like that more often….you know…just chill.”

Isak felt a smile creep across his face and he nodded.

“Yeah. Yeah we should. Good night Even.”

Even returned the smile.

“Good night Isak.”

____________________________

Stuff for the fic

1. Norwegian Custody Laws – I’m basing Even's legal situation on Norway’s child custody laws, which are pretty similar to America's in a lot of ways.

2. Ishigaki- A small Japanese island known for producing high yields of great quality rice.

3. Isak's Under Armour shirt

4. Even's 10th Planet shirt

5. 10th Planet – A California based, international Brazilian Jiu-jitsu academy. The academy was started by a famous practitioner named Eddie Bravo. The Norwegian academy is located in Bergen.

6. Even's Japanese Funk song

Chapter End Notes
How are you guys liking the Evak dynamic? They're both starting to come around hahah. So, Isak's fight will be coming up very soon, but if y'all are amenable, I was thinking of doing something a little different. I'm planning on posting a prefight chapter the middle of next week. It would be significantly shorter than my regular chapters, but would be more of an attempt to capture Isak's attitude before his actual fight. Also, the fight is almost finished, and it's more than my normal chapter length would be anyway. Although this one turned out that way as well hahah. Well, let me know what you guys think and give me some ego sustenance with those comments and kudos! Have a good rest of the weekend everyone, I'll be posting Wednesday night so I'll see you sexy mofos then!
Prefight Ritual

Chapter Summary

Isak gets ready to fight.

Chapter Notes

Welcome back! So, I wanted to post a sort of anticipation chapter before the actual fight. My objective here was to highlight how important routine and ritual can be for a fighter, particularly when it comes to getting into a competition mindset. I hope I've accomplished that, see you guys at the end for a few more notes and the Stuff for the fic section!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lørdag

Desember 29th, 2018

21:51

Chris had finished wrapping Isak’s hands a few minutes ago when the event tech came in and told them they had fifteen minutes till showtime. The striking coach had gone with a wrapping technique that gave Isak's fingers a bit more wiggle room. It would come in handy for the amount of grappling the younger man planned to do in his impending contest. Currently, he was going over take down setups off punches with Elias, the older man trying to bait Isak with long jabs and Isak feinting to get inside before dropping down to secure an implied single leg. Isak knew it wouldn’t be that easy in the fight, but it at least helped to calm his nerves. As the coach and student were working on Isak setting up trips in the clinch, the event tech came back into the room. It was time.

As Isak allowed Chris to put his gloves on for him and secure the velcro around his wrist, he shot a glance to Even. The other man gave him a small smile and a nod. Isak smiled back. With his gloves on and his blood pumping at a nice, even pace, Isak slid his sandals on, got in front of everyone and opened the door. A few moments later the fighter got to the hallway that led out into the main atrium of the arena, flanked by Oslo Athletic Commission officers and a policewoman. The policewoman gave Isak a tight, but genuine smile, “Good luck kid.” With that, Isak heard the a cappella rhyming of Prodigy, the intro to Mobb Deep's “Shook Ones Part Two” blaring throughout the arena’s p.a. system.

Word up son, word

Yeah, to all the killers and the hundred dollar billers
For real niggas who ain't got no feelings

Check it out now

As soon as the haunting beat struck Isak's eardrums his entire demeanor changed. During his walk to the cage, everything else besides the task at hand eroded away. Isak Valtersen ceased to exist for any other reason than to soundly defeat his opponent. His sole purpose now was to make all the weeks of training, the hours of sweat and exertion, worthwhile. To make his team and his gym proud. Isak arrived at the ref station right below the short stair step up to the cage. He removed his shirt and sandals before the cutman applied Vaseline to his cheeks and eyebrows. He then spread his arms to allow the official to complete his inspection. As the featherweight was being checked over by the ref, the song had reached it's hook.

Son, they shook

Cause ain't no such things as halfway crooks

Scared to death and scared to look

They shook

Cause ain't no such things as halfway crooks

Scared to death and scared to look

As the hook concluded, the ref finished his check and Isak gave all three of his cornermen a hug before entering the decagon. He took his ritual skipping jog around the cage, letting the fingertips on his right hand brush over the fence before settling into his designated corner. The walkout song faded out and the noise of the packed crowd was all Isak could hear for a few seconds. Then a jovial, jazzy piano began to play, accented by loud horns. The fighter was vaguely aware of Chris laughingly asking Elias, “Dude, is that the fucking Austin Powers theme song?”

Agmir Holvien was as relaxed as any man who was about to go fight in a cage could be. He was shuffling along to the beat, bobbing his head and smiling widely at the crowd who answered him back with a loud cheer and round of clapping. The veteran mixed martial artist reached the ref station just as the song was peaking, dancing his eyebrows to the beat. Once his own Vaseline had been applied and the referee's check was finished, Agmir entered the cage and did a heel to heel skip around the mat, fist bumping Isak along the way. Eskild entered the decagon to introduce the fighters.

“Ladies and gentlemen of Ekeberghallen Sports Arena, are you ready for the first fight on tonight’s main card?”

A near deafening roar responded back from the crowd enthusiastically. Eskild smiled as he looked over to Isak and gave him a wink and a smile. Isak returned the smile with one of his own and gave a slight nod to the announcer. It was a little routine the pair had been doing stretching back to Isak’s first fight as an amateur. The featherweight wouldn't admit it if anyone asked, but it did quell his nerves a bit.
“Fighting”, Eskild started dramatically, “Out of the blue corner. This man is a mixed martial artist with a professional record of two wins and one loss.”

Eskild held out the o in loss.

“He stands at one point eight meters, and weighed in at the featherweight limit of sixty-six point two kilos,” Eskild said matter-of-factly,” Oslo, let’s hear some applause for….”

Eskild paused, allowing the anticipation of the crowd to build. Isak was fairly well known to the Ekeberghallen crowd at this point, but Eskild's showmanship was still appreciated.

“Isak, The Little Viking, Valtersen!”

The crowd erupted into cheers and claps. Isak felt a familiar shiver down his spine. The redheaded announcer then spun around to introduce Isak's competition.

“Fighting out of the red corner,” Eskild spoke with a smooth, measured tone, “This man is a Muay Thai based fighter holding a professional record of seven wins and two losses.”

He then went back to the jokingly smug voice when listing Agmir's attributes.

“He stands at one point seven meters and weighed in at exactly sixty-six kilos, ladies and gentlemen, presenting the two time Nordic Muay Thai championship winner….”

The air was electrified as Eskild held the pause just under what would've been too long.

“Agmir, The Angel of Death, Holvien!”

The announcer then introduced the referee.

“And your official for this featherweight bout is Mr. Jan Mirdek.”

The ref gave an acknowledging wave to the crowd. With both fighter’s and the ref announced, Eskild took his leave from the cage and the doors were locked.

The official looked to Isak.

“Blue are you ready?”

Isak gave a singular nod.

The ref turned to his opponent.

“Red are you ready?”

Agmir smiled and nodded.

The referee stepped back, placing his hand in a vertical position out in front of himself.

“Fight!”

Isak Valtersen’s fourth professional mixed martial arts fight was officially underway.
Stuff for the fic

1. Isak's Fight Shorts and gloves
2. Agmir's Fight Shorts and gloves
3. Isak's Walkout Song
4. Agmir's Walkout Song
5. Fighter Rituals - As banal or trivial as it may seem, small things like running around the cage or touching it can have a huge effect on a fighter's mindset. Fighter's, in my opinion, have the most unique psychological profiles in sports because of the innate danger of their sport(s) and because they're competing by themselves. If y'all wanna find out more about fighter psychology, check out Vinny Shoreman or Stephen Ladd.
6. 66.2 kgs - 146 lbs

Chapter End Notes

I'll be posting the next chapter by Sunday. I've tried to break everything down in a way that is exciting and easy to understand while still being realistic. I did a good little bit of research on positioning and had to work out a few of the logistics by actually practicing/doing some bag work so I've literally broken a sweat for this story lol (like, a drop maybe xD). I look forward to posting the next chapter though, I think you guys are going to enjoy it, but we'll see!
Elbows in the Clinch

Chapter Summary

Isak "The Little Viking" Valtersen vs. Agmir "Angel of Death" Holvien.

Chapter Notes

Ok everyone! The big night is here! I'm posting this after watching UFC Fight Night: Denver which was fucking incredible, so I'm pretty hyped lol. I've done my absolute best to make everything easy to understand and visualize while keeping it realistic and believable. I hope y'all enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ekeberghallen Sports Arena

Nordstrand, Oslo

December 29th

22:03

Round 1

The two competitors met in the center of the cage, touching their open left hands together. As they pulled back, Agmir faked a turn of his hips as if he were about to throw a kick, causing Isak to react to the faux strike. Agmir flashed a quick smile at his opponent and Isak made a show of shrugging his shoulders, returning a closed lip smile of his own in acknowledgment. To anyone who wasn’t familiar with the striking aspect of the sport, it may have appeared that Agmir was just goofing on Isak a little, making him react to get in his head a bit. While that was a possibility, Isak knew the real reason behind what he was doing was to data chunk Isak’s reaction, filing it away to be used against him later.

After the men had exchanged their mild antics, Agmir fired off a heavy kick to Isak's lead left leg. The taller fighter was able to catch the worst of it on his own shin, effectively nullifying the strike, but just nearly weaved out of the way of a follow up left hook from the other competitor. Isak, threw a left jab just as Agmir whipped another kick at Isak's left leg, this time using his lead leg. The younger fighter landed his jab, but the snap on it was diminished from the kick he unsuccessfully checked. The kick wasn’t particularly brutal, but over the course of the next fifteen minutes he knew they would add up quickly.
Agmir then switched to southpaw and threw a fast, bursting combination; right jab, left hook feint to the body, finishing with an angled straight right hand as he moved to his left that caught Isak just under his right eye. He’d rolled with the shot relatively well, but was still able to feel the lingering power in the strike. Isak responded with a quick, snapping kick to the inner calf of Agmir’s lead leg, his shin smashing into the difficult to condition tissue. The older man's leg seemed to buckle for just a second as Isak dipped off to his right, however Agmir timed Isak's follow up right hand perfectly and rushed into clinching range.

The blonde could feel the strength of his opponent as he secured his right arm around the back of his neck, the crook of his elbow sitting just above Isak's collar bone on his left side. He brought his right forearm up, intending to prevent Agmir from advancing in the clinch, but the more experienced fighter reacted too fast for Isak to defend. He wrapped the younger martial artist’s right arm up with his left, the crease of the limb tightening several inches up from Isak's elbow. This was exactly what the newly professional fighter had been training to prevent.

Isak tried to weave his left hand in over top of Agmir's right arm to break his grip, however as Isak thought he was about to accomplish this, the older man created just enough space between the two to slash a right elbow at Isak’s face. He was as able to move his head away since Agmir was no longer controlling his neck and caught the strike with the very tip of his nose. If Isak wasn’t breathing hard already, he would've let out a sigh of relief. Just as Isak was reversing their position and securing his left arm around the back of Agmir's head, the Muay Thai champion swiftly adjusted his hips away from Isak's and threw a right knee at the other's gut.

Isak had to reposition and unsquared his hips to avoid being hit with the full brunt of the strike, but as he did the shorter fighter used the outside of his right leg to hook behind Isak's left forcing him off balance. As he was attempting to regain his position, the younger man was driven back into the fence. It was by no means ideal, but it was better than being tripped and taken down. The men were now engaged in a battle of head position, Agmir tilting his own head down a bit in an attempt to drive it under Isak's chin and begin to disrupt his balance on the cage. Isak was moving his head back and forth, angling in a way that his opponent couldn’t capitalize on.

Abandoning the jockeying for head position, the older fighter shifted his hips slightly to the right, thrusting his knee into his opponent's right thigh, hoping to soften Isak and get him to move. Isak's thighs may not have been conditioned to the level of Agmir's, but it was going to take more then a few well aimed knees to get him to move. The other fighter sensed this and quickly changed his strategy. He slipped his right arm from around Isak's neck, keeping it close to the other competitor's chest before thrusting up with his elbow, the outside edge of his hand facing the ceiling. With his head free, Isak was able to lean his head to the right and counter over the top of Agmir's elbow strike with his own, landing a glancing, but precise blow across the other man’s right eyebrow. The area began to redden quickly.

Abandoning the undertook Agmir had on Isak's right arm, the two men separated, but not before
Isak stepped forward to nullify a lightning fast right high kick his opponent threw off the break. Although he’d successfully avoided the strike, the younger fighter had walked right into a left hook, thankfully however, he was able to roll with the worst of it. A quick glance at the clock told Isak there were under two minutes left in the round. The previous minutes had been fairly even, but apart from his elbow in the clinch and a few other cleanly landed strikes, the positioning, pace, and movement had all been controlled by Agmir. Isak knew he needed something significant if he wanted to win the round. The two adversaries moved back into the center of the cage, Isak firing off his jab, baiting Agmir into countering. As he did the former Muay Thai champion landed another kick on the calf of Isak's lead leg. There was significantly more power on this one, but the younger fighter couldn’t be bothered with thinking about Agmir’s power right now.

As he went to follow up with a left cross, Isak was able to strike over the top of Agmir's punch with a right hand, catching him cleanly on the end of the strike. The older man wasn’t wobbled, but he had been caught somewhat by surprise. Isak took advantage of this and shot in for a takedown, grounding himself on his left knee before wrapping his right arm around Agmir's waist and his left high up on his opponent's right thigh. He tried to stand up and hoist the shorter man into the air, but the veteran had already anticipated this and was able to use his left leg to hop backwards until he was pressed back against the fence, now in the opposite position he'd been in previously. Isak tried to hook the inside of the elder fighter's left leg with his right heel as he turned off the cage to his left, but Agmir was able to throw a few short yet effective left elbows across Isak’s cheek, forcing the other fighter to abandon his hold on the man’s right leg and causing them to break again. As they did however, Isak was able to time a hard kick to Agmir's left thigh, the other man not having enough time to react after he'd put his foot back down.

Isak attempted to proceed with a right straight, but Agmir was able to duck his head to the left and move away from his opponent just as the buzzer indicating the end of the round went off. The ref stepped in between the two fighters and each man went back to his corner. Isak sat down heavily on the small stool Elias provided him with after he and Chris had entered the cage. Even had elected to stay outside, but was pressed against the fence, ready to dispense advice to his fighter. Chris spoke first, pressing a bag of ice to the slight bruising already starting to show around Isak's left leg as Elias held another one to the back of his neck.

“That was a close round man, but I like what I saw. If you clinch with him again, try and land that elbow. If you can open up that scar tissue around his right eye that would be great for us. And that trip off the cage will work, but I need you to keep your head closer to his chest. That'll take away the short elbow as well.”

Even nodded and then spoke up.

“He’s right Isak, and when you pull him off the cage, don’t worry if you can’t get your heel completely behind his leg, you just need to make his knee straighter than yours. Elias, what you got?”

The gym owner smiled at Isak, nodding as he spoke.

“Boxing looked great that round bro, and your jab is landing, but he’s using that leg kick to get in range. When you land your jab, I want you following up, he can’t throw that kick nearly as hard if he’s moving away from your punches.”
The other two coaches nodded in agreement as Even gave one final piece of advice.

“Oh, and when you're moving him back that left leg is wide open Isak, you don’t have to get to the cage to set up the trip.”

Chris gave the fighter a few sips of water as the ref walked over and informed Isak's coaches they needed to exit the cage. The men got up, but not before Chris gave their fighter a few words of encouragement.

“You got this little viking!”, Chris yelled as he was leaving the decagon, “I wanna see some fucking blood this round!”

Isak knew he'd meant it as somewhat of a joke, a bit of a reprieve from an otherwise intense situation. Had Isak just been sparring or drilling technique in the gym, he would’ve been amused. In his current state of mind however, Isak took it as a challenge. This was actually, unbeknownst to the featherweight, Chris's true intention behind the statement. Although if it only helped his fighter relax and settle into a groove easier, the kickboxer would celebrate that outcome as well. The fighters prepared themselves for the second round as both their teams stepped out of the cage. The referee came back to the center, looking to each martial artist separately and asking if they were ready. Each responded affirmatively. The official nodded and began the second frame of the contest.

“Round two, fight!”

**Round 2**

Isak immediately implemented Elias's advice, doubling up on a snapping jab before timing Agmir and landing a right hook as the other fighter was leaning away from the punch. Although he was able to land, since his target was moving away, Isak had overreached with his hand and the older fighter was able to feint a punch with his left. This made the taller competitor raise his hands up defensively, but he left his midsection open for a stabbing, powerful front kick that landed just under his sternum, compressing his diaphragm and briefly knocking the wind out of him. As Isak backed up defensively Agmir swung a lunging lead left hook, but the other man saw it for what it was; a chance to get back in the clinch.

Isak timed his shot off the punch, angling his head down and meeting the veteran combatant by scooping up his open lead leg. With his head pushed firmly into the center of Agmir's chest, the other man had no range with which to throw effective strikes. As the other mixed martial artist hoped back towards the cage, Isak was able to extend his right leg behind Agmir's left. The older man’s backward momentum did Isak's work for him as his second leg was taken out from under him and both fighters were sent falling to the mat. Agmir had enough awareness to pull Isak into his guard as the two landed, throwing his legs around the other man's waist and hooking his feet together. Isak had watched enough footage of the other fighter to know he was no slouch on the ground, but he was confident in his own skills as well.
The shorter man unhooked his legs from Isak's waist, trying to position them on the younger man's hips so he could push the other fighter away and stand up. Isak knew what Agmir was attempting and raised himself up as he was unhooking his legs, able to get his right hand underneath the older fighter's left leg. Isak knew he had to be cautious not to accidentally sink himself into a submission and so he made sure to keep his left arm on the outside of Agmir's other leg. Moving backwards, the taller featherweight dipped his head, shifted his hips to the right, and threw the older fighter's right leg over his own body. He then landed a short, hard right elbow across Agmir's eyebrow before the man could shift his own hips back over and move out of the way. Isak noticed a small trickle of blood begin to run from his opponent's right eyebrow as he reset to throw another strike. Agmir used the time for this setup to shift his hip to the left and scoot back to the fence. Isak was on him like glue though, instantly settling a knee between the other man’s legs since he was unable to establish mount. The older fighter had some well rounded defensive jiu-jitsu, Isak would give him that. Being the taller fighter, Isak couldn’t get his own head under Agmir's chin to control his head in their current position, but he was able to trap the shorter fighter's wrist and hand to the mat with his right hand secured firmly around the other's left. Agmir threw a few short shots to the left side of Isak's head, but there was no power behind them. The men were in somewhat of a stalemate and the annoying yet ineffective punches were mainly to get Isak to move. He did eventually, shifting his head to the right and pressing it against the left side of Agmir's jaw. The other fighter moved his head to relieve the pressure and Isak was able to land a short hook left hook.

While he was a bit distracted with getting off more strikes on his opponent, Isak didn't notice that the former Muay Thai champion had snuck his right leg up to his left hip. As the younger featherweight prepared to throw another short hook, Agmir timed him and pushed Isak off balance as hard as he could. The result was Isak slipping and missing his punch and the older fighter moving his hips to the left along the fence and then quickly standing up. As he was doing this, Isak had recovered and when Agmir was stood back up fully the taller fighter fired off a fast high kick aimed for his opponent's head. Then other fighter was able block it as he moved away from the strike, catching the brunt of it on the glove and forearm of his left hand. Isak then threw a follow up jab, just missing Agmir before timing him with a right uppercut to the body as he moved his head to avoid the previous punch. Chris would be proud, Isak had opened up a small cut on his opponent and was starting to settle into a bit of a groove as well.

When Isak went for a follow up left hand, Agmir leaned off to his own left side, stepping deep into Isak's space and drastically reducing the power any follow up shots might have. Before he could move away from his opponent to reset, Isak found himself on the receiving end of a right elbow. Agmir inverted his arm as he moved, landing the strike vertically in the same spot he'd caught Isak in round one. Although this time the other fighter hadn’t gotten out of the way in time and had caught the elbow flush on his right cheek. The older man appeared to have rocked his younger opponent for a second and it was now Isak initiating the clinch. Agmir kept moving forward until Isak found himself in the same position from round one. He chanced a look at the clock and felt relieved there was almost less than a minute left. Confident he’d won the round due to his takedown and effective combinations, Isak decided to coast till then timer ran out.
This would prove to be a mistake however as Agmir began working to pull his opponent off the fence. Thinking he was trying to break from the clinch, Isak went with him. As he moved backwards, the shorter man pitched his hips off to the left, placing his right leg in front off Isak’s left and torquing his body. Isak was sent sprawling to the floor of the cage, but because he had clung on so tightly to the other fighter he was actually able to roll through and ended up in half guard with Agmir. His left leg was settled in between the other man’s, wrapped around his right in an attempt to control the fighter on the bottom. Agmir was wise to Isak however and yanked his head down to his chest, locking his fingers behind his head and keeping his elbows close together. This would make it nearly impossible for the taller man to get off any significant strikes as he’d need to posture up before he did so.

Isak was finally able to break free after several seconds and begin reigning down punches, but Agmir shifted his head and torso to the side, catching one of the shots under his right arm and trapping it. He swiftly brought his right leg underneath Isak’s left arm pit, securing it around his upper back. As he tried to shift his left leg to the inside however, the taller fighter was able to grasp Agmir’s ankle tightly, compressing his leg up to his chest uncomfortably and raising up on the balls of his feet to try and throw a few more punches. The older man was able to move enough so that nothing significant landed, but Isak knew he couldn't underestimate his opponent's ground game anymore. Isak wasn’t able to land a shot, Agmir did catch him with a glancing up kick on the jaw though, turning the other fighter's head to the left and throwing him off balance. The two men stood up quickly, ready to reengage before the official called time, each competitor heading back to his own corner.

Isak sat on the stool and let out a long, heavy breath. As the cutman began applying a cold compress to the swelling under the featherweight’s right eye, Even gave his advice.

“That was a close round, really close, but that takedown won it for us. If you can't stop him getting to the fence, when he does you need to control his legs Isak. Try and secure them with your own, don’t worry about getting mount. If you can't, then control him on the fence, sit off to one side and then drag him down when he’s trying to get back up.”

Chris gave a confirming nod to Even before speaking to his fighter.

“Good recovery from that elbow and I like how you rolled through on that trip. He’s starting to time your jab though, so I want you following up with legs kicks ok? Mix it up with your striking and don’t be afraid to go to the body. Oh, and aim at that cut, it’s starting to open up a little more.”

Elias fixed Isak with a smile and enthusiastic nod.

“That was great little viking! You kept him off balance for most of the round and he wasn’t able to get anything going. But you need to start using your reach advantage ok? Start catching him on the end of your shots. And like Chris said, mix it up in there, have some fun. You’ve got this one Isak!”

The boxing coach gave his fighter an affectionate pat and squeeze on the shoulder, exiting the competition area before the young fighter rose from his seat and prepared for the third and final round. The referee called the two from their respective corners and looked to each of them.
Each fighter had a round a piece and was determined to cinch up the win. They moved around one another cautiously for the first thirty seconds or so. Isak threw his jab, elongating it a bit more than he had been. Agmir parried the shot, catching it on the inside of his hand and directing it off to his right side before stepping into Isak and landing a crushing kick across the front younger fighter's thigh. Isak turned to reposition, but hadn’t kept his hand up and caught a long right straight with his mouth as he moved backwards. Agmir came forward, firing off a left hook to the body that Isak rolled with. As he was moving off to his own left side however, his opponent caught him slipping and landed a debilitating right knee in Isak's solar plexus. The taller featherweight was sucking air, backed up against the cage trying to recover when Agmir reset, throwing a jab that snapped his head back. Isak had been caught with several cleanly landed strikes, but he still had his wits about him.

In his periphery, the less experienced fighter noticed Agmir setting up a right hook to the body. He knew the spinning elbow would follow, and timed the older man perfectly. As he spun to land the powerful strike, Isak ducked under his arm, pulling both the other fighter’s legs together and sucking them up off the mat while he drove his head into Agmir's chest and pushed forward. The shorter competitor, thinking he was close to ending the fight, had been completely taken off guard and was now on his back. Isak had been able to use the element of surprise to his advantage and swiftly stepped off to the side when the two landed, his legs now on the outside of Agmir's hips. The younger man slipped his right hand underneath and behind his opponent's head, letting himself get a much needed recovery. Agmir was trying to induce a scramble, but Isak laid heavy on him, restricting the other's movement.

When he'd cleared the cobwebs, Isak began attempting to mount the shorter fighter, but he had his right knee raised high to his chest, preventing his competitor from doing so. Agmir shifted his hips out to his right, but Isak was ahead of him, snapping the older man's head down to the mat, his arms wrapped tightly around the other featherweight’s head, the inside points of his elbows nearly touching. As he did this Isak broke his own grip, sliding the forearm of his left arm under Agmir's chin and pulling guard, quickly pushing his hips closer to other fighter's before flopping to his back and tightly wrapping his legs around his opponent's waist. He then pulled Agmir's head forward and down while bridging his hips and torso up, trying to submit his fellow fighter with a guillotine choke. The men were sweating profusely however and Agmir was able to pop his head up from the other's grip, a smear of blood now staining Isak's chest from the older man's cut.

Agmir was now in the position Isak had been in the round before, showering Isak with a plethora of punches and elbows. The taller man was able to deflect most of the strikes off his forearms, but he knew if he didn't move the fight would be stopped. Deciding to setup a submission, Isak caught one of Agmir's punches as he was pulling it back from where it had landed on the canvas. He clung to Agmir's right arm like a leech before moving his left leg up the older man's back and popping it over his head. The action lead the other fighter right into Isak's trap as he turned to his left. If he
tried to go to his right, Agmir knew the younger featherweight would simply slide his other leg in between them, extending his legs out and securing an arm bar. In trying to avoid the arm bar, Agmir had given up his back. Isak moved his left leg back up over the other's head, pulling his back into his chest as Agmir attempted to lean forward in an attempt to get away.

Isak now had his legs wrapped firmly around his opponent's front, his right stretched across the shorter fighter's lower midsection and the back crease of his left held tightly over his right foot. Every time Agmir drew a breath, Isak tightened the body triangle, not unlike a boa constrictor. Now that he'd secured the triangle, it was a fight for the choke. The Muay Thai practitioner had better choke defense than Isak thought he would however, constantly trapping one of his hands beneath his armpit and holding onto it with two hands. A frustrated look at the clock told Isak he should have enough time to find the choke, but it remained to be seen. Agmir kept leaning forward, forcing the other man to pull him back. The pair went through this hand fighting, leaning, and pulling routine several times over the course of the next ninety seconds.

More than once Agmir gave an exasperated glance to the referee, nonverbally asking for a standup. But bother fighter’s, while in somewhat of a stalemate, were still very active; Isak constantly searching for the finish and Agmir constantly defending. The younger fighter began attempting to roll is opponent onto his front, trying to flatten him out to work the choke in, but was unable to get enough momentum to do so. The round ended with the two in the same deadlocked position, Isak unlocking his legs and rolling to his back, his body bruised, beaten, and exhausted and his mind blank and content. Agmir was in much the same position, taking a well needed breather before getting to his feet and offering a hand to his fellow mixed martial artist. Isak took it with gratitude, allowing himself to be pulled into the older fighters embrace. The competitors patted each other on the back, shouting over the wildly cheering crowd.

“That was a hell of a scrap kid, thought you had me a few times!”, Agmir yelled happily, his mouth next to Isak's ear.

The other fighter heaved out a laugh and nodded.

“Dude, I thought you had me a few times. That elbow had me fucked up!”

“You got yours in too brother. I’m gonna need some stitches after this one!”

“Sorry bout that man, had a promise to keep to my coach!”

“Hey, no worries. Wouldn’t be here if I was afraid of my own blood would I?”

The fighter's shared a laugh, each of their corner teams flooding into the cage to congratulate them on a well fought bout and to hear the decision. Isak and Agmir stood on opposite sides of the ref, each hoping his hand would be raised. Eskild stepped into the decagon after receiving the decision from the judges. He gave a wide eyed glance to the blonde mouthing a “wow” before bringing the microphone up to his mouth, the Oslo crowd settling to a dull roar.

“How about that to start off the main card!”

A resounding cheer rang throughout the arena, bringing a smile to the announcer’s face.
“Ladies and gentlemen, after a grueling three rounds we have a decision from the judges. This fight has been scored thirty twenty-seven, twenty-nine twenty-seven, and thirty twenty-seven, for your winner by unanimous decision…….”

Eskild held the crowd, and fighters, in suspense. He shifted his eyes back and forth between the competitor's, a small smile breaking over his face as he relieved the tension in the cage and arena.

“Isak, The Little Viking, Valtersen!”

Isak immediately dropped to the canvas, tears gathering in his eyes. He hadn’t expected to have such an emotional reaction to winning, but the truth was he had been through a lot in the past seven weeks, physically and otherwise. He raised up when he felt Agmir pulling him up and hugging him.

“Save the tears for the title belt kid.”, the older said affectionately.

Isak laughed and nodded as Agmir went on to congratulate his cornermen on a great fight and win. The three men rushed Isak, wrapping him up in a huge celebratory hug before hoisting him above their heads while they celebrated. Isak was laughing and smiling, his body and brain on cloud nine. He spotted Tobias in middle of the front row. His cheeks were flushed from cheering and a look of awe shown in his eye. Isak giggled at the younger's face and gave him a wink with his right, trying to hide his discomfort. The hazel eyed boy reflected the giggle and responded with an open mouthed smile. Isak Valtersen had just defeated the toughest opponent in his professional mixed martial arts career, but he had another fight to win as well. One that couldn't been won inside the cage.

Stuff for the fic

1. Scoring in MMA - I'll be using the unified rules of MMA for this fic which are based on the 10 point must system from boxing. This means the winner of each round will get 10 or less points and the losing opponent will get 9 or less. Most rounds, unless a draw, will result in 10-9 rounds.

The rounds are scored on:
Effective striking and grappling, aggression, and control of the fighting space, i.e. the cage.

In this chapter, the scoring was as follows.


R2 J1: Isak 10-9 Agmir 9-10 J2: Isak 10-9 Agmir 9-10 J3: Isak 9-9 Agmir 9-9. This would mean that one judge scored the round as a draw, but two scored it for Isak so Isak wins this round.

This brings the final score to 30-27 Agmir, 29-27 Isak, and 30-27 Isak. Had there been one judge who scored a winning card for Agmir, it would be a split decision. If two judges scored the fight a draw, it would be what's called a majority draw. To my knowledge there has never been a full draw, meaning all judges consider the fight a draw, in the history of the UFC.

2. The Decagon - Because the UFC has a copyright on the octagon as a shape used for mixed martial arts, no other organization is able to use it without their permission.

Sorry for the boring numbers game hahah, but I hope for whoever read it it helped explain the scoring in the sport a little better!

Chapter End Notes

I gotta say guys, I'm pretty proud of this, but. I still want your feedback though. Let me know if you're unclear on anything or want any explanations. I'm finishing up then next chapter now. Also this has nothing to do with the chapter, but I literally couldn't stop listening to Troye Sivan while writing this. Having an adorable, gay Australian pop star croon to you as you write about men fighting each other in a cage is the kind of cognitive dissonance I need apparently. I gladly accept payment in ego boosting in comments and kudos! Have a great Sunday and next week everybody!
Reunion

Chapter Summary

Isak and Jonas see each other again after nearly 4 years. Eva and Jonas announce their engagement. Isak receives two unexpected visitors.

Chapter Notes

Welcome back my beautiful readers! I've got another chapter for everyone! I think I can safely say this might be my first cliffhanger, but I hope you guys enjoy it. Also from now on I'll be including links to pictures and music within the text. Videos to help with visualization and other information will still appear in the Stuff for the fic section, but I know for me it's nice to be able to see a picture/play a song and still be reading the story, so now y'all will have that option too. Enjoy guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

23:26

The small room was populated by Isak's cornermen and the post fight doctor. Unbeknownst to the victorious featherweight, he'd sustained a small fracture to his right hand early in the third round. He hadn't even noticed it until the last fight on the card was over and he was pulling his socks on. The doctor was lightly manipulating the last two fingers on Isak's hand, pulling back when the blonde made a noise of discomfort. He turned to talk to Elias.

“Yep. Classic boxer fracture. It's small and horizontal. With a cast or splint, it should heal and set within six weeks, maybe less.”

Isak scoffed behind the doctor.

“Six weeks? I can’t train for six weeks?”

The doctor raised his brows and looked at Isak.

“Sure you can, if you want to make it a full break and not just a fracture. I’m sure your coach would love that.”, the doctor replied sarcastically.

Isak looked back at him, annoyed.

“Thanks doc,” Elias, told the medical professional, “We'll be sure to keep it safe and secure.”

He shot Isak a slightly exasperated glance as he escorted the doctor from the room. The younger man was already showered and dressed in his street clothes. He'd opted to go with his coal grey skinnies and a copper and black flannel over a white undershirt. He’d finished the outfit with a heavy, quilt stitched jacket in a deep red. As he was carefully putting the outerwear on, Chris
decided to say what everyone was thinking.

“Well, let's get Isak fixed up and then go get free drinks!”

Isak and the other two chuckled at the kickboxer's bluntness, Elias giving him a good natured shove as the four gathered their belongings and exited the makeshift locker room. As the fighter and his corner men were walking through the hall leading to the back entrance of the arena, Isak caught a flash of curly yet somewhat shorn brown hair and bold eyebrows.

“Jonas?”, Isak asked, an air of hopefulness in his voice.

The brunette turned around abruptly.

“Isak!”, he exclaimed loudly.

The longtime friend's rushed to one another, vaulting themselves into the other's arms and spinning joyfully. When they separated, each had a huge smile on their face.

“I was just looking for you dude! Me and Eva were gonna meet up with you at Bjorn's. I came back here to use the bathroom and thought I saw you, man. Isak, fuck it's good to see you.”

The pair laughed before being interrupted by Even clearing his throat. Isak looked to him questioningly letting out a quiet “oh” before introducing his best friend.

“Even, this is Jonas”, Isak paused to clear his own throat, “My best friend.” It was said as a statement, but Jonas saw the question in his friend's eyes.

The two shook hands, Even delivering an eye crinkling smile.

“Even Bech Naesheim. Isak's grappling coach. And the reason he won his fight.”

Elias and Chris scoffed in tandem, looking at each other then chuckling. Elias saw that the two younger men needed to catch up.

“Hey little viking”, he said, “We're gonna go track that doctor down and get you a splint ok?”

The featherweight smiled and nodded, telling Elias he'd meet up with him and the other two coaches before they left for the bar. A brief silence settled over the pair. Not an awkward or wistful one. Just an…..empty one. It was Jonas who finally spoke up.

“So…”, he began, looking Isak up and down, “You look good.”

The friend's shared another laugh.

“I usually pull off a black eye like nobody's business.”, Isak replied.

This brought forth a chuckle from the other man before he responded.

“Seriously though Isak, finally getting to see you fight, live? And then I get to watch that?”

Jonas made a short whistle, indicating how impressed with Isak's performance he was.

“I mean, I didn’t really get like over half of what was happening, but you looked great man. Really proud of you!”

He placed an arm around Isak, giving the boy a squeeze before letting go. The blonde thanked his
friend, noticing the vague glaze over his eyes. He must already be a few beers deep. He suggested they brave the cold while they waited for his cornermen, but Isak also wanted to take a few puffs from his CBD pen. Agmir had chewed up his lead leg, the pain not fully hitting him till several minutes after the contest.

Once the boys had headed outside, Isak retrieved his vape pen from his jacket pocket and took a few puffs. Jonas shot him an imploring look. The fighter giggled, relinquishing the pen and stretching his arms above his head.

“It won’t get you high, by the way.”, Isak informed his friend.

The brunette released a long breath of vapor before giving the item back to Isak.

“What’s it for then?”

“Helps with inflammation.”

“Oh?”

The other boy nodded while exhaling.

“What sort of inflammation?”

A dubious smiled spread across Isak's lips. He hiked up his left pant leg drawing a disgusted expression and noise from Jonas. The featherweight’s lower leg was a patchwork of deep, purplish bruises and red marks, standing out against his pale skin.

“Why didn't it look like that during the fight?”

“My blood was pumping, it probably just looked red.”

There was a momentary lull in the conversation as Isak took one last inhale from his vape. He placed it back into his jacket’s zipper pocket before clearing his throat and speaking again.

“So, how long have you and Eva been back in town?”

Long enough that I wish I had seen you sooner.

Jonas cleared his head and replied.

“Oh just after Christmas actually. We've got a little apartment near the university and she wanted to spend our first Christmas together there. You still shacked up with Eskild?”

“Nah, I moved out when I turned nineteen. I actually live with coach Chris right now.”

“Schistad, “ Jonas said with a knowing nod, “He's not still crushing on Eva is he?”

Isak scrunched up his nose and shook his head.

“I don’t think he ever was to be honest. I think he just liked fucking with you. He doesn’t strike me as the Lolita type.” Even though when I was seventeen I wished he was. “Won’t have that problem anymore though huh?”

It took the other man a few moments to get Isak’s reference to his engagement.

“Oh, yeah man. Everybody is gonna be at the bar, so we were thinking of breaking the news
Isak nodded, smiling at his friend and then shaking his head, chuckling.

“I can’t believe your getting fucking married dude.”

“It's not like it’s happening tomorrow Isak!”, Jonas responded, laughing along with him.

“Hey.”

The two were interrupted by a small, low pitched voice. Isak turned around immediately breaking into a smile as a bundled up Tobias mirrored his own.

“Hi! I’m so happy you were able to come dude! What'd you think?”

The smaller boy held his hands in his coat pockets as he shrugged.

“To be honest, I was kind of disinterested until your fight. I mean I totally respect all the men and women that fought tonight, but I gotta admit”, He paused, giving Isak a warm, open lipped grin, “It's more enjoyable when you have something at stake. I was freaking out in the beginning of the third.”

“Yeah”, Isak nodded while laughing, “I was too. If he landed that elbow it would've been a wrap.”

Jonas looked between the two young men, a slight scrunch of confusion contorting his face. Isak noticed and quickly explained.

“Oh, uh Jonas this is Tobias. Tobias, Jonas.”

The newly introduced individuals shook hands before Jonas asked how he knew Isak. The blonde swallowed heavily, his face blank but his eyes showing a controlled panic as they flicked over to Tobias.

I’m not ready for that conversation yet.

The younger boy was quick on his feet though, easily covering for Isak.

“Oh, uh Jonas this is Tobias. Tobias, Jonas.”

The university attendees commiserated with one another, Jonas responding with an, “Amen to that.”, and an amiable fist bump. The trio were interrupted by Elias who had poked his head from the exit door, telling Isak to come inside so they could secure his injured right hand. Jonas took his leave of the other two, letting Isak know he’d be riding with him over to the bar. It was just Isak and Tobias now. The shorter boy cleared his throat, getting Isak's attention as the strode over to the back door of the arena.

“So…”, Tobias started, “Did I just lie because your friend doesn't know you're gay or because he doesn't know you have a mental coach?”

The blonde had a shaken look on his face. Tobias quickly remedied it as he pulled the door open for the taller boy and they both headed inside.

“Hey, I’m not judging, Isak.”

He looked around briefly before taking Isak's hands gingerly in his own, stepping closer to look
into the blonde's eyes.

“I don’t want you to feel like you need to hide anything from your friends.” Isak smiled, giving the other boy's hands a squeeze with his uninjured one before shaking his head.

“It's not that. It’s just……if Jonas knows I’m in therapy, he might think it's because of something that happened a few years ago.” *Something he could've prevented. Don't lie to yourself Isak.*

Tobias nodded, saying he understood. Elias came around the corner of the short hallway, the two separating quickly. The boxing coach flitted his gaze between the boys before addressing Isak.

“We got a splint from the doc. Chris is getting cranky. Says his liver needs a workout. C'mon.”

Isak snorted at the message, following behind Elias. Once the door to the main atrium had shut, Tobias waited a few seconds before pushing the fighter against the wall connecting their lips in a soft, melting press of flesh. Isak inhaled through his nose, surprised, but by no means displeased. Before he could deepen the embrace Tobias nose bumped his black eye, making the taller of the pair wrench back with a quiet “Ow”. The other boy giggled.

“Sorry man. Couldn't help it though. You looked so fucking hot tonight.”

Isak felt a blush coming on before he waved off the student's compliment. Tobias chuckled and looked up at Isak, a fondness clear in his eyes. It excited Isak. Made him feel a confidence he wasn’t used to. Made him want to hold this boy's hand in front of everyone. And as good as it made him feel, it also scared the shit out of him.

“Isak?”, the question took him out of his head.

“Oh, sorry. What'd you say?”

“I'll see you at Bjorn's ok?”

Isak smiled and replied that the other boy would. The two shared a brief kiss before Tobias went back down the hall to the exit and Isak went to the arena floor to get his injured hand taken care of. As he was walking to where Elias was ready to splint the compromised appendage, he tried to hold onto the feeling he had when he was kissing Tobias. In his entire life, he still didn't have any other feeling to compare it to. It brought up a question he'd been ducking for weeks now.

*Am I ready for a relationship?*

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23:45

The nondescript top forties list filled the room with a underlying bass that warmed the patrons. Isak and his team, along with Noora and William, were sitting in a table just off to the side of the bar. A warm wave of heat periodically blew into the friends space making the crossbuzz Isak was riding even better. Every few minutes of conversation he'd sneak a glance over at Tobias who was currently talking to, well, being benevolently interrogated by, Eskild. The two seemed to get on well and Isak was thankful for that. The discussion at his own table soon turned to his opponent's sudden retirement. Sudden for Isak at least. The celebrating featherweight was completely unaware that his team were already aware Agmir had planned on retiring.
He swiveled his head to the promotions co-owners. “Did you two know about this?” Noora and William looked like parents who’d been caught in a lie by their child. William leaned away from the table, slinging an arm around his wife before making a point of raising his hand and shrugging.

“Even’s then one who made us promise not to tell you anything.”

Isak now switched his gaze Even, letting out a playful scoff. The joint the boys had hot boxed with Jonas was melding beautifully with the three beers the blonde had polished off. He readjusted his posture, making himself draw up to his full seated height and crossing his arms, shooting a playfully indignant look at his grappling coach.

“And why, might I ask, was I not informed of this?” Even produced had his own false expression of incredulity.

“Um excuse me young man, It’s my job as a coach to keep your thoughts on the actual fight. Not what your opponent will do after.”

Before Isak could respond with his own jab of friendly banter, A certain sports psychologist interrupted the pair’s conversation.

“Actually Bech Naesheim, that was my job for this one.”

The tall coach broke into the blinding smile Isak had become so accustomed to over the past few months. “Sana!”, Even exclaimed happily, stretching across the narrow table to hug the younger woman. The two shared a mutual smile before Even continued.

“I haven’t seen you since you and Yousef had Rahi back in March!”

“Yeah, we'd love to catch up with you sometime. Yousef has a couple of your kids in his twelve and under class you know.”

Even responded to Sana with a look of causal surprise, nodding his head.

“Absolutely. I’d love to get lunch or dinner sometime”

“Certainly. It won’t be tonight though. My poor husband has his hands full with Rahi. He's been watching his namesake’s old fights with his grandpa lately.”

“Wait till Elias starts teaching him. Yousef better learn how to bob and weave.”

The whole table enjoyed a laugh before Elias gave Even a fake scalding.

“Hey, you know our gym doesn't promote violence against brother in laws,” he said, turning back to his sister, “No matter how cute it might be.” Sana rolled her eyes while holding a fond smile on her face. She placed a hand on Isak's shoulder and gave the seated boy a friendly squeeze.

“Great win tonight by the way.”

Isak smiled at his mental coach.

“I should be thanking you Sanasol.” The undergrad pushed her bottom lip into her top to prevent a prideful smile from adoring her face.

“I just did my job Isak.”

As she finished exchanging goodbyes with the rest of the table Isak was struck by a kind of
happiness he rarely felt since he was a child. It was the same feeling he got when his father would scoop him up into a twirling hug after he scored a goal in football. It was inherently different with Sana. She couldn't sweep him into a twirling hug for one. At least not comfortably. But the feeling of making another person’s effort worth it, that felt the same. Isak was a people pleaser, even if he wasn’t always aware of it. It was a driving force behind his will to win.

Shortly after Sana had taken her leave of the extensive group of friends, a loud, clinking noise reverberated throughout the cozy watering hole. This caught the attention of all the customers, their eyes turning to settle on Jonas. The university student was standing on the top two support cylinders of a bar stool. Two fingers and his thumb on his right hand had empty Tuborg bottles pushed onto them. Flanked by a red faced, but smiling Eva, Jonas drunkenly shrieked out, “Warriors, come out and play!”, in his best New York accent, which proved to be particularly bad. Eva snorted out a laugh, softly hitting her fiancé with the back of her hand.

“I told you no one would get it!”, she said as a room of bewildered friends looked on. Even was quick to respond, rushing to defend his newly made friend.

“I resent that!”, he exclaimed loudly. A short burst of laughter echoed through the bar from friend and stranger alike. Even and Jonas had bonded over seventies American cult classic films on the ride to the bar.

“Seriously though guys”, The curly haired boy started, managing not to slur his words, “I have a huge announcement…..” The pause kept all the couple’s friends in suspense. After an extended pause, Eva smiled, sighing and rolling her eyes at her plastered fiancé. Flinging her left hand into the air to show off the engagement ring she loudly proclaimed, “Me and this idiot are getting hitched!”

A wave of cheers and “congrats” washed over the young couple. They began making the rounds to each group of their friends, starting with Isak. The blonde boy embraced both his friend’s tightly.

“I’m so happy for you guys!”, he said enthusiastically. The trio began reminiscing fondly over their days in secondary school. It was surreal for them, even still for Jonas and Eva to a certain degree. Before the friends could continue their discussion however, Eskild interrupted the large group of friends with a good natured, but sassily asked question after he’d hooked his phone up to the aux cord that connected to the bar’s stereo system.

“Um, excuse me”, he began, a playfully perplexed look on his face before It turned into a wide grin, “Am I the only who feels like dancing?”

“Play that shit you sexy bitch!”, girl Chris yelled out, holding out the I in bitch and receiving a wave of cheers from the group as Eskild pressed play on his selection. A whistling electronic beat bounced off the glass and wood of the establishment as the first verse began.

I woke up pissed off today
And lately everyone feels fake
Somewhere I lost a piece of me
Smoking cigarettes on balconies
As Eskild danced over to Isak, Elias gave up his spot, going to the empty space between the bar and the short stretch of booths with everyone else and beginning to dance. Isak looked at Eskild suspiciously.

“Odd choice for a post-engagement announcement song dude.”

Eskild waved off the comment, smiling and rolling his eyes.

“If you really knew this song you’d be praising my taste young one. This song is in fact romantic as fuck.”, the redhead informed Isak saying the last three words in heavily accented English. The blonde shook his head, telling Eskild, “If you say so”. The more Isak paid attention to the lyrics however, the more he had to concede the announcer’s point.

**When your tears flow down your pillow like a river**

*I’ll be there for you*

*I’ll be there for you*

**When you're screaming but they only hear you whisper**

*I’ll be loud for*

*But you gotta be there for me too*

Eskild looked at his friend with a smug, but exuberant eye, making Isak smile and give an eye roll of his own as he unconsciously began bobbing his head. After several more seconds, it became clear that only a few people in Isak's friend group has elected to not flood the makeshift dance floor. Mahdi, while now only in an orthopedic knee sleeve for his nearly healed tendon, was dancing in his seat with who Isak recognized as an on again off again girlfriend sitting on his good leg. As the song reached its bridge, Isak caught eyes with Tobias. The two had a whole conversation with just their eyes and minute movements of their facial muscles.

Isak flashed a vaguely wistful smile to the younger boy.

*I really would like to be dancing with you.*

Tobias pushed his brows to his for head, tilting his head just slightly and returning Isak's smile.

*I know that's too much right now. It's ok. I respect your boundaries.*

Isak responded with a barely noticeable shrug and squint of his eyes.

*I'm really sorry.*

The brunette gave his own subtle shrug, adding a small, comforting smile and short head nod.

*It's ok Isak, I understand this is new for you.*

The song reached its conclusion as another one by what Isak assumed was the same artist began. He closed his eyes, letting the slower, rumbling rhythm soothe him as some of his friend’s came back to sit down and finish their drinks. The ones remaining were mostly all couples, now dancing
slowly as the pre chorus filled the air.

Yeah, there’s so much history in these streets
And mama’s good eats
Oh wonder on repeat
There’s so much history in my head
The people I’ve left
The one’s I’ve kept

The chorus kicked in right as Isak heard his name called. He kept his eyes closed. Willing the voice saying his name to go away. To please be an auditory hallucination induced by smoking too much weed and drinking too much alcohol. Isak had no such luck. As he opened his eyes regretfully, he was met with the proud, excited, yet very obviously awkward and apprehensive faces of a pair of people he hadn’t seen in over a year. A bevy of emotions rushed through the young fighter, but when he finally spoke, only two words, each in the form of a question, came out. “Papa? Mama?”

Stuff for the fic

1. **Boxer Fracture** - A break in the 5th metacarpal bones, i.e. pinky knuckle, common in combat sports that involve striking. Isak’s isn’t a full break across the bone and therefore will likely take less time to heal.

2. **Tobias** - Finally found a reference picture for him!

3. **Rahi** - So in my headcanon for this fic, Sana and Elias's dad is a boxing fan and his favorite boxer is a Frenchman of Moroccan descent named Khalid Rahilou. Yousef and Sana named him Rahilou, Rahi for short, in honor of her father.


5. **Troy Sivan - There For You**

6. **Troye Sivan - Suburbia**
I'm sorry about the ending guys, but I'm evil lol. I hope everyone enjoyed this chapter! The links should work for the songs, but if they don't let me know, I've included them in the Stuff for the fic section too. Also I've started a Spotify playlist for the fic. Just search the story name or my username on here, minus the 91, and it should come up. There's no real rhyme or reason to the songs lol. It's all songs I enjoy though. Oh and I finally found a picture for what Tobias looks like. Let me know what you guys think of the direction of the story! I've got some pretty big plans for a few characters :). Those comments, kudos, and bookmarks inspire me like nothing else! I'll be back in about a week with another chapter. Oh and have a happy Thanksgiving! Or whatever the equivalent holiday is where you live, if there is one. Have a great week everyone!
Reconciliation

Chapter Summary

Isak reunites with his parents after over a year. It doesn't go how he thought it would.

Chapter Notes

I hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving! This chapter is a little shorter than usual, but there's a lot of important character development in it (No spoilers). The next chapter will be back to the normal length. Enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Søndag

Desember 30th, 2018

00:08

Even and Mutta were talking business. Mutta had recently bought out a less than reputable supplement company and was questioning himself on the decision. The renaming and rebranding had seemed to go well, but the inevitable “wait, weren’t they selling PED's to athletes?” seemed to be a ubiquitous question when he was courting investors. Which brought him to Even. The boy’s had gone to Oslo University’s school of business and entrepreneurship in their early twenties. They created grand, drunken plans when they passed their exams, although they never seemed to come to fruition. At least not until recently.

The friend’s hadn't seen each other for a little while, not since Sana and Yousef’s son was born. But it was nice to catch up, even if it was over their mutual nine to five drudgery. Mutta told Even how skeptical and cynical investors were, how difficult the name, even once it changed, was to scrub clean, and how dismissive the people who actually had invested were. Even told him of creative constraints, of co-workers who could see the bigger picture, but only in one color. The two commiserated before abandoning their respective gripes and going on to talk about Even’s recent substitution as a coach.

For Even, it was feeling more and more like he had a decision to make. Mutta told him as much. It would make sense and would give him something to do instead of worrying about his nonexistent yet ever impending custody battle. But Even hadn’t seen his daughter since he left Stavanger. They had talked sure, skyped, Even had even sent her a singing telegram for her birthday. Even if it was at school and she had been a bit embarrassed, it was still appreciated. Lillian knew her father loved her. That love didn't always protect her though. She’d witnessed the falling out Even had with his teammates and friends at StavMAC. The gym respected him enough to keep everything hush hush. There’d be no mention of it in any of the mma media. Not even locally. Still, it hurt Lillian to see her dad in that kind of pain.
Being kept on as a coach for Isak was seeming like a good idea more and more. But, tonight was for celebrating and Even let Mutta know that. The two long-time friends clinked their shot glasses.

“To new directions!”, the raven haired man exclaimed.

“And one direction!”, Even followed up.

The two shared at one another briefly before cracking up and downing their shots. The bar had started to mellow into a pleasant hum as it usually did between midnight and the wee hours of the morning. The men were discussing the state of Norwegian mixed martial arts casually when Even noticed a rather odd couple walk in from the cold, the dying breaths of frozen air giving one last gasp as they dissipated into the warm room. It wasn't that they were particularly odd really, but Bjorn's did seem to draw a certain demographic. And that demographic was rarely a couple in their early to mid forties, looking a bit unsure but also excited. The out of place pair seemed to be looking for someone. As Mutta was scrolling through and replying to emails on his phone their conversation petered out, the friends content to simply enjoying the other's company.

Even moved his eyes along the people in the bar, noticing their various levels of intoxication. He noticed something between Isak and Tobias as well. A sort of silent, covert conversation it would seem. Even still wasn’t sure how he felt about Isak's…..newly found companion. The kid seemed nice enough, Even had only ever met him one other time when he'd stopped by the gym to return Isak's wallet one day. He was cute and had a sense of fun about him, but that could just be youth. He wished Isak and Tobias the best though. God knows the boy could use someone who can help him become more sure of himself outside the cage.

The baby boomer couple had reached Isak's table now. The gears started turning in Even's head. These are probably his parents. Why weren't that at his fight? Maybe they were, but wouldn't they have wanted to see him? As these speculations were passing through his mind, Even noticed a silent panic on Isak's face. A dash of what looked like anger as well. Although he knew the boy wasn’t a lightweight, Even had just watched Isak finish his fourth beer in less than ninety minutes. And Isak was the kind of fighter who didn’t eat before a bout. He excused himself from his conversation with Mutta and began making his way over to his fighter. He searched the small sea of newly familiar faces, searching for one that noticed what he was noticing as well. Even wouldn’t have guessed it due to the man's previous alcohol consumption, but the face he found was Jonas's. The two shared a brief, but acknowledging meeting of eyes before making their way over to Isak’s table. Jonas may have still been drunk, but recognizing his best friend was in need seemed to be enough to make him reasonably sober.

“Marianne?”, Jonas postulated to the nervous looking blonde woman, “Marianne Valtersen?”

The woman in question turned around, her focus switching from Isak to Jonas. A confused expression shown across her face before a wide smile of recognition replaced it.

“Jonas!”, she replied, happily taken by surprise, “Oh my God, how long has it been sweetie? I don’t think I’ve seen you since you and Isak graduated! How's your family? Oh! I got the RSVP for you and Eva's wedding date! Congratulations honey!”

The curly haired student flashed a quick look to Isak, relieved when he noticed the significant reduction in panic in his eyes and face. Jonas guided Marianne to the table he and Eva were sitting at with Mahdi and his girlfriend. He hoped Even had enough tact prevent any outburst from Isak. He'd only met him a few hours ago, but Jonas liked Even. He seemed like a genuine person, someone who really had his best friend's best interests in mind. Even offered an outstretched hand and wide smile to Terje Valtersen. The two men shook hands firmly before Even began speaking.
“It's so nice to meet you Mr. Valtersen. My name is Even Bech Naesheim and I was one of your son's coaches for this fight. You see, Mahdi would normally train jiu-jitsu and grappling with Isak, but he was out with an injury and I’m actually good friends with Isak’s head coach, so I stepped in. I have to say,’”, Even looked over to Isak, giving him a silent assurance, *relax, I got your back*, before returning his eyes to Terje’s, “You have a very talented son Mr. Valtersen. I really think he has quite a bit of potential.”

He may have been a complete stranger to Isak's father, but the respectful introduction and follow up compliment were enough to disarm him. He looked mildly perplexed as he replied. “Oh um, yes thank you very much. It’s nice to meet you Even. I’m afraid I can’t take credit for Isak's skill though. He’s developed that all on his own.” The man's voice held a simultaneous tenor of pride and regret. Even had never asked about Isak's relationship with his parents and the fighter had never told him, but he was starting to put it together and his heart ached for Isak when he envisioned the picture it made. Shooting the one-forty-fiver another glance, Even was relieved to see that he appeared to have calmed down. Settling into a stewing frustration rather than a forthcoming volatile reaction. He turned back to Terje.

“I'm getting some water before I close out my tab, could I get you anything Mr. Valtersen?” The man seemed to be almost in awe of Even's hospitality, but answered that he would take a water as well. The black belt didn't miss the somewhat befuddled expression on Isak's face. *Maybe his father has a drinking problem?* Even left the father and son alone as he went to order the waters and pay his tab.

Isak's face appeared almost flat, expression devoid of any happiness. Devoid of *any* emotion actually. He appeared to be frozen in time. The blonde knew what Even was trying to do. He didn’t necessarily like it, but he understood it. And truth be told, he'd do the same for Even if he was in a similar situation. The blonde cleared his throat softly before speaking to his father.

“Why are you here, papa?”

“To see you son.,” he replied, his tone indicating he may be confused by Isak's question. The fighter restrained himself from rolling his eyes.

“Why are you really here?”

Terje’s expression spoke of a man who had held himself in heavy contempt, most likely for a considerable amount of time.

“Isak”, he began ,”I’m here to see you. Your mother is as well. Listen, I know I wasn’t there for you all. When you needed me the most, I tucked my tail and ran. I know I can't ever change that.”

He paused to let out a labored sigh.

“I just want to be your life Isak. Your mother and I both do. We love you so much son. And I know I wasn’t happy when you chose to start fighting, but from the way your coach tells it and from what I saw tonight, you’ve been doing pretty well for yourself. And you did it by *yourself* son.”

Isak released a light scoff.

“It wasn’t by myself papa, it was with a whole gym behind me. With friends who love me and with people that I consider family now.”

“True, but you put in the work Isak. You set your mind to this and wouldn't let anyone get in your way. You chose to walk your own path, and even if I’m not very good at expressing it, I’ll never
stop being proud of you for that.”

Isak couldn’t help it. He wondered if there was an innate, uncontrollable emotional reaction in higher primates when a father told a son he was proud of him. A shot of oxytocin with the hypodermic needle that was evolution. It wasn’t that Isak hadn't heard his father say similar things before, but honestly, this was the first time he actually believed him. The conflicting feeling made him uncomfortable enough to change the topic.

“How’s Mama been? Since….since I saw her last?”

Terje’s entire face morphed into a level of happiness Isak couldn't recall seeing since before he was a preteen.

“Oh Isak she's wonderful! She's finally been receptive to the treatment. Her medication is working and is on point. She's been so happy! I don’t want you to begrudge her for this son, but it was her idea to come see you. That alone speaks volumes to her level of improvement. She's back in the garden club as well, and started up her knitting again. It's really been incredible to see Isak.”

The younger Valtersen noticed a thin veneer of tears in his dad's eyes, his own unacknowledged emotions welling in his eyes as well. He sighed and cleared his throat again, blinking the salty liquid back.

“That's awesome Papa, really. I’m happy for you all. I…I know how….hard it could be with her at times, so, yeah that's amazing.”

He flashed a quick but authentic smile to his father. The older man returned it.

“I wasn’t entirely honest before by the way. We actually came to see if you’d like to join us for mass tomorrow. I know it’s not really your scene, but I know our friends at church would love to see you.”

The report Terje had been building with his son was in danger of crumbling.

“You and Mama, still go to the same church?”, Isak asked, his voice holding a weariness. He still remembered the homilies the priest had given. Still remembered how they made him feel wrong when he was in the early throes of adolescence, noticing boys more than girls. His father smiled and shook his head.

“No, we've…..”, he broke his eye contact from Isak to find the right word, leaning forward slightly, then popping his head up when he did, “Moved on from that church. As have several of our friends.”Isak didn’t know why, but his father then lowered his voice, leaning into the table a little more.

“That's the other thing son, it isn’t only your mother's state of mind that's improved”, the two turned their heads to see Marianne smiling with the newly engaged couple, looking through wedding venues online with them, then turned back to each other, “It’s her view of the world as well.” The father and son looked back to Marianne again, this time not saying anything for several seconds, just watching a woman they both loved be truly happy for the first time in years. Terje gave a sigh.

“So, you think you could join us tomorrow? We'd be going to eleven o'clock service.”

“Oh, um I mean I would certainly like to but…”, Isak gestured with his left hand to his injured one, including his face in the gesture as well.
“Yes!”, Terje exclaimed, “Of course, you need to your rest. Need to recover. I understand.”

“No I mean, uh”, Isak unwittingly gulped, thankfully it wasn't very noticeable, “I could come by afterwards? Or you guys could come by the apartment. Chris would probably love to see you guys.”

Isak’s father’s eyebrows rose in mild surprise. Apart from Even, he was the only coach the featherweight’s parents had actually met. And that was before Isak was even fighting, back when he first joined the gym and the kickboxer was teaching him traditional Muay Thai. He’d made quite the impression on the then seventeen year old’s parents. When Isak requested money for an mma gym membership, his parents were not only confused, but somewhat concerned. Isak had never really shown an interest in combat sports. He’d enjoyed football, but that was when he was much younger. When the couple met Chris and saw Bred Akse though, it diminished a lot of their worries. They knew their son would be in capable hands. That Bred Akse was about learning, building character, making better human beings, not just better martial artists. Terje smiled.

“You know I think I’d quite like to see Chris as well. He’s obviously done a bang up job as your coach. No pun intended.”

Isak couldn’t fight the small smile forming across his face. He couldn’t remember the last time his dad made……well, a dad joke. Maybe we really can start over. Who's to say they don't both deserve a second chance? Let’s be real, you weren’t always the easiest son to have either Isak. Agreeing with his internal voice, Isak nodded, telling his father he’d let Chris know. The male Valtersen’s looked back over to Marianne again. Eva and Jonas looked appreciative but a bit overwhelmed, Isak’s mother dispensing advice on different catering services, what silverware was best, how the cake should be made and presented. Terje released a small chuckle to himself.

“I suppose I should round up your mother and head home before she becomes your friend's unofficial wedding planner.”

Isak huffed out a short laugh.

“Yeah, she should at least be getting paid for it right?” The men shared a quiet but genuine laugh with one another before Terje signaled to Marianne, the woman nodding at him before giving her parting advice to the yet to be bride and groom. As she settled in front of Isak and his father, the two now standing, she exhaled a short gasp.

“Oh Isak, our whole reason for coming here was to talk you and I haven’t said a word! I’m so sorry sweetie.”

“It's ok Mama, I promise.”, Isak said, a small grin on his face, “But actually if you don’t mind, I was thinking you and Papa could come by my apartment after mass tomorrow? Chris will be there as well, I know you guys probably have a lot you could talk about.”

“Oh, Master Schistad?”

Isak snorted and shook his head lightly. “You don’t need to call him that Mama, but yes.”

“Is he still with that Ifen girl?”

“Iben. And no, they broke up a while ago. Probably for the best though to be honest.”, Isak informed his mother.

“Hmm, well I know he'll find the right woman one day”, she stopped, as if considering something briefly, then pursed her lips and gave a small shrug, “Or man I suppose.” She gave Isak a quick,
weirdly knowing smile, “But we will certainly look forward to seeing you both tomorrow.” Isak's
eyes had widened in surprise, not entirely sure of the reality of the words he'd just witnessed his
mother speak. He shook himself out of it quick enough to answer though.

“Yes. And we will look forward to seeing you as well. It….was good to see you guys by the way.”

The parents brought their son into their arms, the familial trio all savoring the embrace before
separating and saying their goodbyes. It wasn’t until Isak had sat back down and ordered a steak
sandwich, perks of knowing the kitchen staff, that he realized the meaning behind his mother's
seemingly out of nowhere comment. *I never told her Chris was bi.*… He groaned and thunked his
head down on the mahogany table, letting out a muffled “ow”. He heard the scraping of the chair
opposite him and looked up, not surprised to see a heavily buzzed Christoffer Schistad sitting
across from him. Isak sighed, folding his arms under his chin.

“So, did you get what I got from what that weird, half right mom's intuition thing?”, the blonde
questioned his friend and roommate. Chris smiled a wide, toothy grin.

“You mean that you mom thinks I’m your boyfriend?”

Isak pulled his lips into his mouth and nodded.

“I sure did buddy. Good thing is, I’m not so it doesn't really matter.” Chris widened his eyes a bit,
shrugging, “Unfortunately, I don’t think your boyfriend got the memo.” Isak squinted his eyes,
moving his head back slightly. “Tobias isn’t my boyfr…..”, the fighter trailed off as looked over to
where the younger boy was sitting, finding the chair empty. “Shit!”, he cursed under his breath.

“Yes. That's exactly what I need. My roommate, who is also my coach, showing up to have brunch
with my parents late and smelling like sex and weed.”

Chris put his hands to his chest and scoffed.

“Hey! Relax little viking! I'm gonna be on time.” With a shit eating grin Isak's coach ventured off
to enjoy said blunt and threesome, leaving Isak wondering.

Chapter End Notes

How’d you guys like the chapter? Isak is starting to rebuild relationships with his
parents and Jonas. Although the Jonas chapters are yet to come. Mosey on down to
that comment section and give me some feedback y’all! I hope everyone has a great
week and I'll be back next weekend with another update!
Chapter Summary

Isak bonds with Even more, has a surprise on the tram ride home, and brunch with his parents and Chris the following morning.

Chapter Notes

What's going on everyone! I've got another chapter for that ass and I hope you guys like it. I've got a new job, so my updates may not be as regular as they have been, but I'm gonna try my best. Y'all's comments and kudos are the key ingredient in my creative fuel so let me know what you think. Have a great week, hopefully I'll be back next Saturday with another chapter, but we'll see! Enjoy everybody!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

00:43

Isak tried contacting Tobias a few times. He called, he texted, no response. Noticing his student's distress, Even walked over asking the boy if he was ok.

“Yeah”, Isak said, “I think there might have been a misunderstanding between me and Tobi though.” Even nodded in sympathy, leaning on the table and looking at him.

“Well whatever it is, I’m sure you can explain it to him. Seems like reasonable guy.”

Isak quirked a small smile and nodded as he replied.

“Yeah, he is.”

“Listen, I’ve had a lot of fun and I’m really proud of you, but I’ve got to work Monday and I could use a day to recover.”, Even told Isak, endearing himself to him with a wide grin. The younger man nodded, saying he had fun, but that Tobias's abrupt exit had worried him too much to fully enjoy his win and Jonas and Eva's engagement announcement. Although he did already know about the latter. The two saddled up with the cashier and closed their tabs before saying goodbye to everyone, Isak's teammates and friends once again congratulating him on passing the hurdle with flying colors. The men donned their winter coats and made the short trek to the tram stop, content to sit in the chilly stillness. After a few minutes with the tram no where in sight, Even softly cleared his throat and decided to ask the question that had been burning away in the back of his mind since he first became aware of Tobias's existence.

“So you and Tobias….that's getting pretty serious?”

Isak pitched his head in Even's direction, his brows drawn in.
“Um I guess so? I mean, we’ve been talking a lot. With training camp and everything it’s not like I’ve had a lot of time to spare for him.”

“But you would want to if you could?”

Isak shrugged and nodded.

“Yeah, I mean……I can’t really say I’ve felt anything like this before. Maybe it’s just cause a guy that’s way out of my league likes me. Or maybe it’s because a guy I could actually be with likes me….but, I can’t be sure.” Even snorted and shook his head.

“He’s definitely not out of your league Isak. You shouldn't sell yourself short, even if you are.” He smiled goofily at the younger man, bumping his shoulder.

“Pffttttt”, Isak responded, “Everyone is short to you dude.”

The two shared a light laugh, both recognizing the tram that was quickly approaching. The friend's stepped onto the transit vehicle and found two unoccupied seats, each finding it odd how barren the shuttle seemed for this time of night on a Saturday. A group of teenagers sat towards the back, noticing Isak's entrance and talking quietly amongst themselves. Even turned to his fighter, Isak's response to one of his earlier questions had prompted another one.

“Hey, what did you mean when you said”, Even paused, considering how to phrase this since they were in public, “Someone you could actually be with?”

The question made Isak's cheeks flush a bit, but thankfully the cold had already reddened them, so it didn't show. He sighed and then turned to Even, lowering his voice.

“If you ever tell anyone this, I will not only deny it, but I will find you, and I will fuck you up. I’m serious Even. Straight up Liam Neeson shit bro.”

A smile curled the ends of the black belts lips, but he nodded anyways, making a show of zipping his mouth shut and flicking away the key. Isak produced a friendly scoff and then spoke.

“So, when I first started at Bred Akse I was just doing Muay Thai right? And Chris was my instructor.”

Even nodded in understanding.

“Well, the thing is, whenever we would spar, other students I mean, although newer people did exclusively spar Chris until they learned control. But, anyways, I would be fine doing drills, learning technique, coming up with combinations, all of that. Chris um…..he actually kind of used me when he wanted to show proper technique for certain strikes.”

The older man watched as Isak seemed to fondly recall his early days at the gym, before fighting professionally was even an inkling in his mind.

“Whenever I had to spar other students though, I would just lock up or it would be like I forgot everything I had learned. So, I started having privates with Chris on Saturdays. After a month or so, it really did help. I was way more confident and my performance anxiety, “ Isak made finger quotes while saying the words, “Completely went away. I also, sort of, kind of developed a bit of a crush on Chris. Which was super weird and embarrassing cause he was like my stepbrother or something at that point.”

Even stifled the laugh rising in his throat, Isak meeting his eyes and mirroring his smile.
“What?”, the fighter asked. Even shook his head letting out a short laugh and replying.

“No it’s just….Jesus Isak, you were like a fucking PornHub category or something!”

The younger blonde scoffed for real this time, pushing Even but laughing with him at the same time.

“Well I would hope not considering I was seventeen at the time.”

Even smiled, nodding in agreement.

“Yes, probably for the best.”

“Anyways, Feliciana had just turned pro and we all went out when she won her first fight. Some strings were pulled and I got into the club where we were celebrating. As the night went on, I may have had a bit too much to drink and um….”, Isak paused now, feeling himself turn red at the mere memory his actions on the night in question, “Basically, sort of….tried to hook up with Chris.”

Even inhaled sharply, mock scandalized, moving his hands to his chest.

“Isak, you didn't!?"

“I definitely did.”, Isak said, shaking his head at the memory, a smile belieing his true feelings. “But, I do have to say, Chris was a gentlemen. Let me down easy, even when I drunkenly created a venn diagram on a cocktail napkin explaining how much we had in common.”

This pulled a genuine laugh from the older martial artist, Isak enjoying the way Even's eyes squinted when he was genuine in his expression. The student and coach sat comfortably in silence for a minute or so, each observing the snow covered city through the rectangular prisms of glass lining the tram’s sides. Out of the corner of his eye Isak saw the trio of teenage boys glancing over at him and Even speaking in hushed tones and talking back and forth. It looked like they were debating about something.

The featherweight felt his hackles rise just slightly. Since his inception in martial arts, and in particular in mma, Isak had thankfully never gotten in a full on street fight. He had delivered heavy yet nondeilitating leg kicks to a drunk who thought he had a chance against a trained fighter, had broken fights up in the gym between new members whose egos hadn’t adapted yet, and had even bobbed and weaved around an inebriated university student who wanted to prove his masculinity in front of his obnoxious girlfriend. All without throwing a single punch. Well, in the case of the university student a stationary pole that neither he nor Isak was aware of ended up throwing the punch.

So when he saw the three boys approach, his brain began naturally running through scenarios. He knew Even would be invaluable, the man may not be as adept a striker as Isak, but he knew how to throw a punch and had phenomenal standup grappling skills. Isak felt the nervous energy increase as the trifecta came closer. *Fuck. If I fight these idiots I’m gonna be out of the gym even longer. Not to mention the ear beating I’m gonna get from Elias.* But as the boys came closer, Isak noticed something he hadn’t even taken into consideration. A sort of nervous reverence, combined together with the excitement one might have when meeting an idol. The trio had reached Isak and Even's seats, timid smiles on each of their faces.

The one out in front of the other two spoke first, his dark eyebrows already pinned high to his forehead.

“Um hello.”, he started respectfully, “You’re Isak Valtersen right?”
A reactionary smile broke over Isak's face.

“Last time I checked.”, he responded.

Wow. Cool dad joke bro.

The boy standing to Isak's left now spoke up excitedly.

“We watched your fight dude! That was amazing!”

The third boy only gave an enthusiastic nod, agreeing with his friends. Isak's attention switched to Even now, his own face showing some surprise as well as happiness.

“Well thanks man, I really appreciate it, but Even here needs some recognition too.”

The jiu-jitsuka laughed as Isak patted him on the shoulder closest to him, shaking his head.

“Nah. I just gave Isak the tools. He’s the technician that has to apply them in there.”

“Well you did a great job man.”, the boy who appeared to be the de facto leader told Even. He quickly switched his eyes back to Isak though, the three teens clearly more interested in him.

“Um if it's cool with you, I was thinking you could sign our tickets? Josef’s gonna give his to his little brother since he wasn’t able to actually come to the fights.”, the raven haired boy stated, indicating his friend by pointing a backwards thumb at him. Isak was taken somewhat by surprise, but it was a far better surprise than the one he had been expecting. He fixed the teenagers with a big smile, the novelty of the moment momentarily reducing the pain the smile caused to his bruised cheek.

“Absolutely dude! Oh um, shit, I don’t have anything to write with though…”, Isak informed the boys. Even quickly solved the problem, producing a small, silver ball point and smiling at the youths. The trio, including Isak, thanked him and he got to work on signing the ticket stubs. When he was on the last one he looked to the boy he now knew was Josef.

“Hey Josef, what’s your little brother's name?”

The blonde teenager was suddenly jolted out of the surreal situation for a second, responding once he realized he was being asked a question.

“Oh, uh, Dagfinn, his name is Dagfinn. Dag for short.” Isak nodded while writing the short message, continuing to talk as he did so.

“Oh cool. Are you from Finland?”

“My parents are yeah. Dad moved here for work after he married my mom.”

“Well, I don’t how much that'll be worth in Finland, but give it a few years, maybe your brother can get a pretty penny for it yeah?” The teenager snorted as Isak handed him back the autographed ticket.

“Yeah right, if he ever tries to sell this I’ll steal it back from him!”

The five males enjoyed a laugh together as the tram came to a stop.

“Oh!”, the third boy exclaimed, looking around to his friend's then to Isak, “Is it cool if we get a picture real quick?”
The featherweight nodded and agreed, the boys kneeling down in front of Even and Isak. As they were setting up the shot, Even moved his body over to the right. Isak looked over to him questioningly.

“What’re you doing man?”

He put his hands up.

“This is your time to shine Isak, not mine.” Isak pursed his lips, letting out a puff of exasperated air.

“Bullshit dude, c’mon, bring it in.”

Even acquiesced and leaned into Isak's space, positioning himself so all five faces were captured in the frame. The group all put on smiles, each one authentic, before the boy with the dark hair snapped a picture. The teenagers quickly rose from the cold metal floor of the tram and thanked Isak for his time. The fighter smiled and told them it was no trouble. An honor to meet some fans in person actually. The boys took their leave of the pair waving as they crossed the street to start their short trek home. Even and Isak were left in a calm, comforting silence for the remainder of the tram ride. When Isak’s stop arrived a thought struck him. He turned to Even, speaking at the same time the older did.

“Do you want to-“

“So what do you-“

Each stopped, realizing they were interrupting the other. Even told Isak to go first.

“Well, uh, Chris isn’t gonna be staying at the apartment tonight. Had an appointment with a fat blunt, a hot Danish girl, and her boyfriend if I remember correctly.” Even released a short chuckle.

“Oh, I know even after your stop it’s a bit of a hike. Wanna just crash at mine tonight?”

Even considered the option for a few seconds before accepting it, both men stepping off the tram, bidding the driver a goodnight and acclimating back into the winter wonderland of Oslo in December.

“So”, the older said, “What was that?” Isak chuckled.

“It would appear I actually have fans Even.”

The taller blonde rolled his eyes, but smiled.

“No, I mean that. I’ve never seen schmoozing-with-the-public-Isak before.”

Isak smiled small and gave a rise of his shoulders.

“I don’t know man. It just happened. Almost like it was a reaction or something.”

“Hmm”, Even responded thoughtfully, “Well, all I know is you’re gonna give McGregor a run for his money in those UFC press conferences.”

Isak laughed heartily, nudging his grappling coach.

The two each met each other's gaze, fond eyes making short ups and downs before returning to the snow covered sidewalk in front of them. All in all, Isak had a good night. He’d get in touch with
Tobias tomorrow and find out what was wrong, if anything. Even had an enjoyable night as well, meeting his fighter's long time friends and feeling proud for having taken part in Isak's success. His face was flushed from the below freezing air. There was another reason for his rose tinted cheeks, but it was one Even made sure to keep his distance from. Even if his heart was telling him not to.

12:08

The following morning proved to be pleasantly uneventful. Isak woke up around ten, just in time to see Even off and wish him luck on his team’s presentation for their first online advertisement. The two had conversed over different ideas each member of the advertising campaign team had. Isak didn’t say it, but he was excited to see the finished product. True to his word, Chris showed up between eleven and twelve, thankfully not smelling of the activities he had enjoyed in the wee hours of the morning. Isak's parents were already there when Chris arrived. It didn't take long for the topic of conversation to meander into Isak's love life, or rather lack there of. Apparently Marianne had known Chris was bisexual due to a convoluted gossip chain that eventually somehow got back to her garden club through a friend that went to yoga with an older woman who's nephew was……Well, yeah, it got convoluted. When the subject reverted back to Isak, he decided if his parents were going to make what for all intents and purposes seemed like a concerted effort to be part of his life, he should at least let them know a little about it.

As Chris was clearing the dishes from the duo's small kitchen table, Isak spoke up.

“There um, there is actually someone I'm….. involved with at the moment.”

His parents were surprised at their son's admission. Even before either knew he was gay, Isak hadn't brought girls home to meet his mama and papa. Although back then it was probably better that way. The brief “relationships” Isak had been in were last ditch efforts when his friend's jokes about him being gay started to hit too close to home.

“Is it someone from the gym?”, his father asked, curious as to who the young man that had caught his son's fancy could be.

“Um no. He’s actually a secretary for UiO's mental health services office. I met him there when I was getting some coaching from a sports psych undergrad who's doing an internship there. We uh, just kind of hit it off I guess.”

“Have you two been on any dates?”, his mother asked. Isak smiled and shook his head.

“Not really. I’ve pretty much been in training camp for the last six weeks. But honestly mama, I’m a millennial, I don’t know if I’m even supposed to go on dates.”

Chris had finished up the dishes, padding back over in his woolen socks and wrapping an arm around the younger man.

“Kids these days am I right guys.”

This produced a chuckle from Isak's mom and a smile from his dad. Chris informed them it was good to see the couple again, but he needed to rest so he could open the gym in the morning. Isak saw through the excuse, knowing the brunette was likely sleeping off the remnants of a raucous night. But the kickboxer had been true to his word about showing up on time. Marianne decided to break out the question all three were expecting. Even though Isak didn't necessarily know how to
“Well Isak, when are we going to be meeting this boy?”

“Uh you may have actually seen him last night. He was kind of in the corner. Long hair on top, shaved on the sides, dark red highlights. He was wearing a green Fjällräven jacket?”

This seemed to jog Isak's dad's memory.

“Oh”, he let out, the authenticity of the surprise in his voice making Isak a bit uncomfortable, “He's the boy you've been talking to?” The sarcasm on Isak's face couldn’t have been more evident.

“Jeez, thanks Papa.”

“Oh, no I just…”, his father huffed, scrambling for the right words, “Well, a father can be happy that his son caught the eye of a very attractive young man can he not?”

Isak shrugged and smiled; his dad's uncomfortableness was far more entertaining than his own. Terje rolled his eyes before trying again.

“Good job Isak. I'm impressed. Is that any better?”

Isak and his mom shared a brief, mirrored expression of humor before the Valtersen offspring shook his head, laughing as he spoke.

“Oh my god dad. Now you sound like some Russ dude, like, congratulating me on a conquest!”

Terje stood his ground.

“Well, if it comes to that I suppose I will.”

Marianne and her son turned to each other, each had there mouths open in silent expression of disbelief as well as breathy laughter. Terje continued defending himself, although at this point it wasn't really necessary.

“What?”, he asked, brows sprinting to his forehead, “Isak is an attractive young man with a lot to offer. I think we should be celebrating that!”

The two other Valtersen's were now conversing entirely in smiles and giggles, Marianne thankfully stepping in to save her husband from further embarrassment.

“Well I have to say Isak, this has been very nice. But I need to get home to prepare for the new year's eve celebration we're hosting. Which you are welcome to come to by the way.”

Isak replied he’d check his schedule and let her know. As his parents moseyed out the door, Isak's mother informed his father she would endure the cold air in the car while it heated up. Terje turned his son, a smile writ large across his face.

“You know, I can’t say the bit of boxing training your old man did in college to stay in shape relates much to what you do Isak, but I think you’ve improved a lot since your last fight.”

Isak was taken by surprise.

“You saw my last fight?” His father nodded.

“I’ve seen all of them Isak.”
“Why did you never try and talk to me?” Isak's tone would've likely been adversarial before last night, but now it sounded more like actual curiosity. Terje sighed, pursing his lips and moving them towards the left side of his face.

“I wanted to give you your space. I knew you weren't ready to forgive me. Or to even talk to me. And I don’t blame you. But honestly Isak, I would’ve waited till the end of the world if it meant you were safe and happy.”

Isak's jaw tightened, his eyes misting up just slightly. He fell forward into his father, embracing him in a way he hadn't done in a long, long time. Terje returned the hug, hearing his son whisper a quiet, but reverent “Thank you Papa.” The man moved away to look upon his boy, smiling.

“Of course. You’re my son Isak. Nothing will ever change that.”

There was a time when Isak would resent that fact, but it had passed. At the extended beep of a car horn, the father and son parted ways and Isak returned into the warmth of his shared apartment donning a small, private smile.

Stuff for the fic

1. It's common, especially in regards to martial arts with a striking base, for the students to spar the instructor, sensei, master, etc. until he or she has decided that the student has enough control to spar other students. This is oddly enough more the case with adults than with children as children haven't developed the strength to really hurt or injure someone yet.

2. Ego can definitely be a hindrance when trying to learn a martial art, particularly if the person does not deal well with repeated failure. Having said that it can also be a huge benefit, especially if a fighter puts on a particular persona to calm themselves before or during a fight. Contrasting examples of this could be Conor McGregor and Georges St. Pierre. Conor is loud, brash, often flippant and comedic and regularly talks to his opponent's inside the octagon. Georges is an embodiment of the respect endemic to so many martial arts and is not what would be known in the world of mma as a "shit talker" or "trash talker". There are merits to both styles and personalities and neither is necessarily right or wrong, just different.

3. The difference between a trained fighter and an untrained person, i.e. a "civilian", can be so massive I don't really have a comparison for it. I suppose the best analogy would be a human's sense of smell and a dog's. I'm always amazed at how ready to use violence some people are who have absolutely zero formal training and would be picked apart if they ever confronted a real martial artist and that person chose to fight them. I could go into a whole spiel about how martial arts is about knowing it so you don't have to use it, but I'll leave it at this: don't get into fights with people, period!

4. **Fjällräven** is a Swedish outdoor clothing company founded in 1960 that sells apparel for hiking, camping, hunting, and a variety of other outdoor or "rugged" activities. They also produce the iconic Kanken backpack which is worn by the character Megan in the U.S. iteration of SKAM entitled SKAM Austin.
So I've been thinking about going back through the chapters and adding the date and times to help you guys keep track of the timeline. I've got it down in my head and in a plot outline, but I thought it would help everyone keep track of the story easier. Let me know what you think after I add in the dates and times and I'll hopefully been updating with another chapter around this same time next week. Hope everyone is enjoying the fic!
Dress Code Violation

Chapter Summary

Isak gets a new job to help with rent, is informed of some fantastic news, makes plans with Chris and Feliciana and decides to get some help regarding his relationship with Tobias.

Chapter Notes

So first of all, mea maxima culpa to all my readers. This should've been out Saturday, Sunday at the latest. However! It's out now and I hope you guys can find it in your hearts to forgive me! (Okay I'll stop apologizing now) Anyways, this chapter breaks down Isak's nickname and has some more bonding time with Even. I don't wanna spoil anything so I'll let you guys get on with it. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Onsdag

Januar 2nd, 2019

9:23

Come Monday morning, the bruising on Isak's left leg had changed colors from a purplish red to some sort of transitional yellow. His eye was still a bit swollen in addition to being bruised and his hand was splinted and would be for the next several weeks. All of these were things that any mixed martial artist might have to deal with after a match. Isak's appearance was pretty normal considering his profession. That morning, Chris let him know before he went to the gym that while his profession might also be his passion, it wasn’t going to pay the current bills. Especially considering the fact that their landlord had to hike the rent again. Which brought the blonde to where he was now. In a small office adjacent to the back storeroom of a local coffee shop. The would be manager was looking at Isak with a concerned eye. Isak wasn’t necessarily bothered by it, pretty used it to it now in fact. It didn’t make it less uncomfortable however.

“So”, the interviewer said, “Currently you are a….”, a disquieting look flashed across his face, “Cage fighter?” Isak snorted to himself internally.

“Um, I think the uh…”, Isak responded slowly, his sarcasm not getting through to his would be supervisor, “Politically correct term is mixed martial artist. But yes, I currently am.”

“Well, Isak, I don’t know much about mixed martial arts or fighting, but we do have an appearance code here at Java. And unfortunately, having a black eye isn’t a part of it.”

Isak restrained himself from rolling his eyes.
“I thought as much. Which is why I applied for every position except barista.”

The momentarily flustered man thumbed through Isak’s application, his eyes widening a bit when he realized Isak was being truthful.

“I apologize Mr. Valtersen, I should’ve taken more time looking over your application. The good news is we do have some openings apart from barista. Although your training would include that as well. How much experience do you have with janitorial work Isak?”

“Um, some I suppose? You see at my gym I have to clean and lock up at least once a week. So I’ll clean the pads, mats, gloves, spray down the cage and ring. All sorts of stuff.”

The manager nodded his head as Isak spoke. Afterwards he informed Isak of the different duties of the job, how he’d likely be openings up most mornings; usually with a coworker. Isak took all the information in, pausing to ask scheduling questions and about the pay rate. He had to be honest with himself, his mma grappling class wasn’t totally covering his own expenses. And that was to say nothing of Isak’s personal spending money, of which there was currently little. As far as his reason for choosing to fight professionally, finances had little to do with it. Isak knew he could rely on his parents generosity if he had to. But that was part of being a fighter for the blonde; being self-sufficient and not depending on others unless necessary. And getting this job would be part of that, especially considering that local business’s didn’t appear to be chomping at the bit to sponsor the young mixed martial artist.

“Well Isak”, the middle aged man said, wrapping up the series of questions, “When can you start?”

The blonde was surprised. It wasn’t like he was endearing himself to this dude.

“Uh, Monday morning? Also a morning shift would be preferable. I can’t train now because, well,”, he gestured to his right hand, “But I still have a class to teach on Tuesdays.”

The manager smiled, nodding and telling the young man not to worry, that the shifts at Java were fairly flexible. Isak left the establishment feeling good. He wasn’t always the best at interacting with the public, but from the looks of it that would be a small part of his duties. As he was waiting on the tram to take him to get breakfast, he noticed a buzz in his pocket and looked at his phone.

**Eli-B da Box Man:** Can you come into the gym today? Even and Mutta are scouting for some fighter’s to feature for a PurKonchus ad campaign.

Isak knew he must’ve looked a fool, standing nearly in the middle of the street, smiling like a maniac at his phone. But he didn’t really care. PurKonchus wasn't a huge name outside of Scandinavia, and were really centralized in Norway, but a sponsorship or position as a combat sports consultant would be invaluable. He replied immediately.

**Isak:** Heading there now.

9:53
Elias, Mutta, and Even were all hanging out around the boxing ring in Bred Akse. Elias's father and uncle had helped him build it themselves. Well, with a little help from their friends as well. Although the man was a boxing enthusiast, the Bakkoush patriarch had been pretty skeptical about his son's idea to open a mixed martial arts gym seven years ago. Now however, he couldn't be more proud.

“Gotta say”, Mutta sighed, reminiscing, “Surprised the old girl's held up this long.” Elias smiled and nodded.

“Yeah man. This ring’s seen more rounds than most fighters.”

The three friends shared a short laugh, moving onto more business oriented topics.

“So did you tell him?”, Even said to Elias.

“About him being in the ad campaign?”, Elias responded, snorting and shaking his head, “Nah man. Isak would've probably forgotten where he was and walked into oncoming traffic or something. No. As far as he knows, he’s just helping you and Mutta scout the gym.” Even grinned, happy that he'd be able to offer a pleasant surprise for his friend. The trio of friends, and for Even and Mutta now business partners, had discussed the ad campaign at length before asking Isak to come in. All three liked the idea for it. The whole ad team would be taking credit for it, but it was really Hapfthor's idea. He and Even had talked about a short video that highlighted the multiculturalism in the sport and decided Bred Akse was a great gym to show that. Even had his company issued camera slung around his neck. An album on the device already boasting several different shots and snippets of video. The pictures and video would be cut together later by PurKonchus’s editing team. Even was excited to see the result. As the friend's continued looking through the shots the creative director had taken, the door to the gym swung open, a multilayered Isak strolling into the space. He looked around briefly before spotting Even, Mutta, and Elias and walking over to them.

“What's up boys!”, Isak said, exchanging pleasantries with the men before shedding his coat and hanging it on the rack beside the door. The featherweight clapped his hands together. “So, who were you guys thinking of for this ad thing?” The older men smiled secretively to each other before Even broke the good news.

“Well uh, you, actually Isak.” The young man's eye widened to anime levels. He looked around for just a sec before confirming there weren’t any other Isak's in the gym. Once Even had laughingly let him know that he was indeed the Isak they were looking for, the shorter blonde was ecstatic. He threw his arms around the older man, reaching out to pull Elias and Mutta into the hug as well. They broke the campaign down to their younger friend, Isak smiling and nodding the whole way through, going over the raw footage and pictures in Even's camera. He was then asked to stand against one of the padded walls in the grappling training area of the gym. The coach took a number of shots of his student, instructing him to smile or frown, look serious then slowly break into a grin. The whole ‘photoshoot' only took a few minutes, but Isak and the rest of the gym members involved would be waiting a while to see the finished product.

Once the photos had been taken, Isak was motioned over to the boxing ring where Feliciana and Chris had just finished a few rounds. The woman smiled brightly at Isak as the two began discussing her upcoming Muay Thai bout in Denmark. It was a qualifying fight to get into a tournament bracket later on in the year for the Nordic Muay Thai championship. Oddly enough, this was the same championship that Isak's recently vanquished opponent had been champion of two years in a row before making the switch to mma. After he removed and cleaned the body protector and other training gear, Chris sauntered up to the pair, a smile on his face and question in
his eyes.

“You know Isak, I was gonna ask you about this earlier this morning, but it slipped my mind.” Isak shrugged, telling his coach to inform him now.

“So, obviously you’ve got some experience as a fighter, but me an Ana were thinking you could get some as a cornermen too?”, Chris said, looking back and forth between his two students. Isak wasn’t really expecting the invitation, but it would be a great opportunity for him. He nodded eagerly before replying.

“Definitively man. It’s not like I can really train right now anyway with my hand fucked up. Plus Mahdi’s pretty much healed up and I know he’d be cool taking over my classes for a bit. The fight’s next week right?” Feliciana nodded while taking a much needed gulp of water.

“Yes, next Saturday in Copenhagen. And, word on the street is…”, she paused dramatically, both men playing along and leaning in like a pair of gossiping teens, “There’s gonna be a couple scouts from Glory’s Danish office there.” The fighter had a playfully smug smile on her face, nodding as Isak and Chris oo’d and ahh’d. The particulars would be worked out in the coming weekend, but the featherweight was excited he’d be cornering one of his teammates. It would also give Isak a chance to travel outside of Norway. For as diverse as the sport of mixed martial arts was, the young fighter had still never left the country to compete. And although his first foray into the larger world of combat sports wouldn’t be as a fighter, he reveled in getting to do it all. For the next hour or so, Isak talked to Even, Mutta, and Elias about the ad campaign and his recently accepted invitation to corner his gym mate. As the time started to push towards eleven o’clock, he remembered the post fight appointment he had scheduled with Sana. A sudden sense of urgency struck Isak. He didn’t want to be late for his appointment and, if he was being honest with himself, was hoping to catch Tobias at work and maybe get some answers about his disappearance over the weekend. In his concern about getting to the appointment on time, Even offered a solution.

“Wait, don’t you need to get back to work?”, Isak questioned his friend and coach. Even's lips morphed into a slight, mischievous smile.

“As far as my boss knows, I am working right now. And besides, it wouldn’t be any trouble for me to take you.” Even told his student. The younger man, shrugged, telling Even as long as it wouldn’t get him in trouble. The men bid their goodbyes to their friend's at the gym and bundled up in their winter coats, scarves, and hats. The up and coming fighter didn't know what to expect as far a Even's choice of vehicle went, but the stylish yet sensible Audi seemed to fit the jiu-jitsu practitioner well. The midmorning sun glared off the glossy, gunmetal blue, making Isak squint his eyes as he admired the car. He himself had never been an auto enthusiast, but he could appreciate the visual aesthetics of a well put together ride. He asked Even if the car was a gift, a joking jab at Even's familial wealth. The older man laughed, shaking his head as he and Isak buckled up.

“Nope. This one was all me. Actually my first purchase after I won the ADCC’s back in two-thousand seven.” Isak smiled, telling Even it matched his personality. Nothing too flashy, but enough to catch an eye for a second or two. Even gasped and quickly shot his eyes over to his fighter.

“Isak Valtersen, was that….was that a compliment? About me non the less?” Isak scoffed with a smile and shrugged his shoulders to his ears. “It’s been know to happen from time to time.”, he replied to his coach. The two enjoyed another small laugh, Even focusing on the road again and Isak looking out at the window at the streets of Oslo as they flew by. The silence was by no means uncomfortable, but it was noticeable. Isak decided to change that.

“So…”, he started, “I never told you why I got into mma did I?”
Even raised his brows in response, giving Isak a brief smile and glance before refocusing his eyes on the traffic in front of them.

“Uh no you didn't. I’d love to hear it though.” Isak returned the smile before launching into his own reverie.

“Well, when I was like sixteen, a.k.a. still young and dumb-“, Even interrupted him, a teasing twitch of his lips tipping Isak off to his friend's impending joke.

“Wait, you mean you’re not now?”

Isak let out a false sigh of exasperation, pushing his coach's shoulder lightly as to not disrupt his driving.

“Anyway!”, he said loudly, “Before I was so rudely interrupted-” Even broke in again saying “Oh sorry. Please continue for our audience Mr. Valtersen.”

Isak rolled his eyes with a smile, deciding to ignore the warm sensation in the pit of his stomach when Even referred to him as Mr. Valtersen.

“Jonas had this weed dealer right? He was kind of a dick, but he got us really great shit, so I guess we kind of let it slide.” Pfitt, yeah Isak we let it slide. “He was a couple grades above us, but during first year we got invited to this party with a bunch of older kids that Jonas's dealer sold to. He got into it with this college douche about skimping on a quarter or something and they started fighting in the living room. Now neither of us knew it at the time, but Elias actually did have some mma training so he was piecing the kid up.”

“Elias? That was the dealer's name?”, Even asked. Isak said that it was and continued. Like you could ever forget his name Isak.

“So then, the guy's friends got involved. Now, Elias was drunk so one on one was pretty easy for him, but three on one?”, Isak paused to shrug and sigh, “That's when me and Jonas got involved. I mean involved is the wrong word. We were just pushing and throwing punches like idiots. I think I accidentally punched Jonas at one point.”

This brought a giggle out of Even, which in turn put a smile on Isak's face.

“Anyways, this was also before I hit my last growth spurt, so I was hovering around one point seven meters on a good day. And these guys were way bigger than me and Jonas. But eventually one of them got Jonas on the couch and was hitting him and uh”, Isak stopped to clear his throat, reliving the panic he had felt in the moment just slightly, “The house of the kid whose party it was? Hid dad had like, this replica Viking seax knife right? Thank God it wasn't sharpened. “”, Isak stopped his story again, laughing despite remembering how serious the situation actually was, “So, I put it to the back of the guy's neck and told him to stop unless he wanted me to turn him into a paraplegic.” Even's eyes widened significantly as the car rolled to a stop at a red light. He turned to Isak.

“Holy fuck Isak! You were a little gangster! In the words of Billy Madison, That's assault brothah!”” Isak looked confusedly at Even, clearly not understand the reference. Even sighed.

“C'mon Isak, Billy Madison? Adam Sandler?” The second name jogged the younger’s memory.

“Oh wait yeah. He was on Saturday Night Live right?” Even hummed in confirmation.

“Yeah, my uncle likes him a lot.”, Isak informed Even. “He's also in his fifties, just, ya know, fyi.”
Even made a show of scoffing and shoving his student, but his playful smile showed through it all.

“Anyways”, Isak said, returning to the story, “The guys backed off and when Elias heard it about, he thought it was badass so he started calling me little viking. Hence the nickname.” Even whistled, showing his appreciation of Isak's tale from his earlier youth, although he did notice a problem.

“Wait, you said when Elias heard about it. Where the fuck was he?”

“Hooking up with someone's sister upstairs I think.” Even released a surprised scoff.

“Jesus, I hope he was a better drug dealer than he was a friend!” This caused Isak to chuckle, but Even's comment also brought forth some unwanted thoughts.

*He was a special kind of friend. Isn’t that right little viking?*

As Isak had concluded the story, Even had pulled up outside of and parked in front of UiO's mental health services building, turning to smile at his fighter and friend.

“That's a fucking great story Isak. You'll have to tell it when you get on the [JRE podcast.](https://www.jrepodcast.com)” Isak rolled his eyes, but something told him his coach believed what he was saying. He exited the vehicle and thanked Even for the ride. The black belt smiled and nodded.

“All the time man. It's no trouble at all.”

The coach and student said farewell to one another, and Isak ventured into the mental health building, looking forward to seeing Sana, but also nervous about possibly seeing Tobias.

*You've been trying to talk to him all week dude, now's your chance!*

Isak nodded at his own internal dialogue and opened the door of the office, looking for Tobi's familiar, handsome face and highlighted hair. It was time to clear the air.

11:51

Sana and Isak had been having a productive session. They’d discussed Isak reconciling with his parents, his newly acquired job, and how he’d finally gotten a sponsorship deal thanks to Even’s ties between Bred Akse and his own role in the ad campaign. A part of Isak was a little miffed though. He could see how someone might think his newly attained deal only came by way of his grappling coach. The young man's steadily healing right hand and still visibly bruised face spoke of the truth though. Isak had earned this. And Sana made sure Isak was aware of that. The conversation had switched now, however, to what the sports psych undergrad’s future role would be.

“Well, here’s the thing Isak. As a sports psychologist, I’m focused on performance. On getting an athlete into the correct mental space to achieve the performance they want, or at least as close to it as possible. People in my line of work don’t really do….”, she moved her head side to side, racking her brain for a respectful, but effective word for the kind of therapy she was trying to describe, “Maintenance therapy.”

Isak gave her an inquisitive look. “Maintenance therapy?”
Sana hummed and nodded.

“Forget the pun, considering my profession, but a sports psychologist is usually goal oriented in their approach. Maintenance therapy is usually weekly and more about sustaining a certain state of mind. Does that make sense?”

Isak breathed a small laugh, but nodded in response to the question. It wasn’t necessarily the answer he wanted, but it made sense. Still he decided to protest further.

“I totally get that. And it makes a lot of sense. I just feel like…well, I can talk to you really easily Sana. I mean, don’t get me wrong, everyone at the gym is great, but I can’t discuss things with them like I can with you. I understand that you do your best work with an athlete when they’re preparing for competition, but I think I could actually benefit from some regular, non mma related therapy. It's up to you though obviously.”

Sana sighed and leaned back, nodding her head and pursing her lips, while putting her clasped hands together.

“I get that Isak, I do. But in case you haven’t noticed, you’re a fighter. Your mental state will always affect how you fight. Maybe you're one of those guys that can just turn everything off and become a machine, but from the time I’ve spent with you, I don’t think that’s the case. I can’t say I'd feel comfortable proceeding with out of competition treatment, but if you want to do so, I have a number of colleagues who would love to work with you.”

Isak considered the offer. He knew his performance had improved in part due to Sana's mental coaching. And his confidence had been raised slightly as well. Of course, his recent win was due to more than just his mental state, but it would be disingenuous to act like that wasn’t a part of it. Maybe Sana had a point. Isak felt more confident in this fight because of the work he and the undergrad had done while he was training. Perhaps it didn't make sense to apply that algorithm outside of his preparation for a match.

“Actually”, Isak said, “I think you’re right Sana-sol. Maybe in the future we could switch it up, but why change a good thing right?” Sana smiled widely and nodded her agreement.

“Those are my thoughts exactly Isabell. Now, if you’ll excuse me, my husband has sent me an adorable video of his dance class performing to a Moroccan hip hop song and I intend to watch it on my lunch break.”

Isak giggled at the nickname, but was glad he had changed his mind about switching up his therapy style. What he had with Sana was working great right now and it didn’t make sense to change that. The blonde still had his concerns considering Tobi’s apparent ghosting though. One of Sana’s rules during her sessions was that her clients put their phone’s on silent and sit them display side down, somewhere out of sight. So when the young man and woman had wished each other a happy New Year and parted ways, Isak was both excited and significantly nervous as he opened messages on his phone. Tobias's stand out right away, but Isak hesitated for a moment. What if he doesn't wanna hang out anymore? What if I got it all wrong and this is just-

“Dude!”, a loud, clearly annoyed, voice ripped Isak from his thoughts. “Do you really need to stand right in front of the door to the reception desk?” The blonde looked down, putting his phone in his jacket pocket and realizing he was blocking the agitated students access to behind the desk. He muttered a sorry and started to walk away before a thought struck him.

*Wait a minute, Tobias should be working today.*
The featherweight turned back around, taking in the punk rock appearance of the student who was apparently filling in for Tobias. She had a buzz cut with a small anarchy symbol shaved into the side of her head, half inch, gauged earrings in teal, full sleeve tattoos, a black Thrasher zip up and what Isak could just make out as a The Pogues shirt underneath. The blonde approached the desk and cleared his throat. The receptionist manners completely changed now. She smiled brightly at Isak and asked how she could help him.

“Um, do you happen to know Tobias? He usually works this time on Wednesdays?”

The student inhaled sharply, a gleeful excitement on her face. She motioned Isak in closer.

“Bro, are you the fighter he's been banging?” Isak blushed, completely flustered and unable to respond.

“Oh dude, you so are! The fucked up hand and black eye gave it away man. No offense. You know, Tobias has always been into to super masc guys and I gotta say man…”, the receptionist paused as she leaned back in her chair, hands behind her closely shaven head, “I thought you’d be bigger.”

Isak had no idea how to reply. Who the fuck is this punk chick and why is she concerned about who Tobi is hooking up with!?

“Oh how rude of me!”, she said, offering a tattooed hand for Isak to shake. The martial artist grasped it tentatively. “I’m Tank. You know it's too bad that Tobi's gay as fuck. Always had a weird crush on that dude. But anyways, yeah man, “ her tone changed, becoming more serious, “He’s kind of been taking a couple personal days. I’d hit him up if I were you. Hell, he probably feels like shit about ghosting your fine ass anyway. I know I would.”

Isak just chuckled nervously, thanking who he was praying to the God he didn’t believe in wasn't Tobias roommate and finally opening his text thread. Tank, as she had introduced herself, had been right. As the young fighter walked into the cold of midday Oslo in January, he read through the younger boy's texts.

**Tobias:** Hey, sorry I ditched you like that, something came up.

I’ll get back to you as soon as I can

Promise I’m not ignoring you

Isak sighed, relieved yet also worried about why the boy had to leave Bjorn's so abruptly. As he was walking down the street to the tram stop, his phone buzzed again. It was a message from Tobias.

**Tobias:** Tank just texted me. Sorry if she freaked you out by the way.

She can be….a lot lol

Think you can come by later today?
I need to talk to you.

Isak's pulse kicked up a few notches. Fuck. He knew he shouldn't be so overly concerned. It wasn’t like the fighter had a plethora of relationship experience to draw on, but he knew enough to know what the preamble to a breakup sounded like. *Relax dude. You guys are barely together right now.* Isak's inner voice had a point. He texted his reply.

**Isak:** It’s ok. Thanks for letting me know.

Hahah, yeah she was certainly charming.

Sure, I can come by. Does sometime around 19:00 work?

**Tobias:** Works great! I’ll see you then babe.

The use of the pet name did assuage Isak's worries to a degree. The pair had only jokingly referred to each other as such before, but even through the technological barrier of a text, this one felt different for the blonde. He responded that he was looking forward to it and subsequently received the address from Tobias. As Isak was getting onto the tram, he changed his mind about heading back home. As he sat down, he got his phone out of his jacket pocket, scrolling through his contacts and stopping at the one he knew was best suited to advise him on this situation. Even if he didn’t want to admit. He pressed call, put the phone to his ear. A male's happy voice answered the call.

“If it isn't my favorite little viking! What can guru Eskild do for you today?” Isak sighed. The ‘guru’ comment was one he’d never be allowed to live down. Although it had been proven true on a couple occasions.

“Do you think we can talk? I uh, kind of have a problem I’m not comfortable talking about with anyone else.”

“Of course we can talk Isak! Wait a problem? Oh no! Isak, did you get an STD? Did you get outed or something? Wait a minute…”, Eskild held a long unnecessary pause before lowering his voice, “Isak, did you get something stuck up your-“

“Oh my god Eskild! No, no, and definitely fucking not. I just need to talk to you!” Eskild’s voice switched back to it's normal, upbeat pleasantness.

“Well of course we can talk sweetie! I’ll start making the tea and cookies pronto!” Isak rolled his eyes, but a short smile was evident on his face.

“Ok. I’ll be at your place in a few.” Isak slid his phone back into his jacket, avoiding the clearly upset eyes of an elderly couple across from him, no doubt appalled by his outburst. He sighed to himself and sat back into his seat. This was going to be an interesting conversation to say the least.
Stuff for the fic

1. Isaks new workplace

2. Even's 2007 Audi RS 4

3. A seax knife. In this particular context I'm talking about the style of knife rather than it's historical origins. Seaxes were prized by blacksmiths of their time because they had a clipped point which was often easier to form than a curved point. They were also used utilitarianly as well as for battle.

4. Billy Madison was a slapstick/romcom that came out in 1995. Y'all mofos know who Adam Sandler is so I won't put any links for this one haha.

5. The JRE or Joe Rogan Experience podcast is a podcast hosted by stand up comedian and long time UFC color commentator Joe Rogan. Apart from being one of my idols in martial arts, he's also a pretty interesting guy. He regularly has on fighter's, coaches, and trainer's, but also has people from physicists to doctors to artists on as guests. It's an interesting podcast and I really think there's a little something for everyone.

6. The Moroccan Hip Hop song Sana is watching Yousef's students dance to. I do have to say though, it doesn't appear to be a kid's song lol.

Chapter End Notes

I hope y'all are liking the story! I really am sorry about posting this late, but it's longer than my usual chapters so I hope that can make up for it. In the coming weeks updates might be a bit slower since I'll be spending time with family for Christmas, but I'm still gonna try and update week to week when I can. I hope all of you are having a great holiday season and get everything you want from that bearded dude in the north pole. I'll plan on updating next Saturday so hopefully I'll see you then and be back on my regular schedule. Oh! I've also made some artwork for the fic. It's nothing fancy, just the Bred Akse logo, but I can't for the life of me figure out how to post it. So if you know how comment or message me! Also drop a comment or kudo if you wish, they're always appreciated!
Are you planning on butt stuff?

Chapter Summary

Isak gets some advice from Eskild. Tobias and Isak talk. Among others things.

Chapter Notes

Aw shit! Christmas came early for you sexy bitches! Y’all are getting the first smut I've ever written and I gotta say, I think it's pretty good. This chapter earns the explicit rating in regards to the sex. For those of you that are not interested in said sexy times, please skip the text between the lines "I really wanna get you off" and pick up again around "The boys found themselves breathing heavily". Isak finally popped his cherry! Kind of. Onward to quasi sappy smut!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

12:33

Eskild had tried to respect his younger friend's awkwardness, he really had. And he realized that while they're sexualities might be the same, their personalities were very different. But even though he was respectful and considerate of that fact, he couldn't use his patented guru skills if Isak didn’t tell him anything.

“Ok baby gay, you're all about your privacy, which I totally get!” he paused to sigh heavily and take a sip of the chamomile tea he’d brewed just before the younger man arrived, “But, if you want my opinion, I have to know what I’m giving it on.”

Isak responded with a sigh of his own, his eyebrows drawing together as he leaned back and considered how to employ his friend's often over the top yet also apt advice. He was cut off just as he opened his mouth to speak, Eskild not noticing this.

“Isak, c’mon! You gotta give me something here sweetie! Are you worried he's gonna break up with you? Think he’s gonna ask for sex or something? How do you feel about that? Are you planning on butt stuff? What’s up?” This got the blonde's attention quickly.

“What!”?, he asked, surprised, but also mildly appalled and confused, “I have no clue what he wants! That's why I’m here! I don’t know if he wants to break up or blow me! And I don’t know what to do regarding either!”

Eskild smiled and let hit eyes close slowly while nodding his head.

“Yes Isak, this is the info your guru needs. So”, he clapped his hands together, jolting the fighter and keeping his attention, “Let’s say, worst case, scenario, he definitely doesn't want to blow you and breaks up with you, what do you do?” Isak put hid hands palm up, shrugging. Eskild snorted,
taking another sip of his tea. “You get over him Isak! Just like a straight boy does. It’ll suck, no doubt. Especially if there’s no parting blowjob.” Isak rolled his eyes, but listened to his friend continue.

“And I’ll always be here for you. Whenever your heart gets broken, you guru will be here to help you nurse it back to health. Now, the second scenario. If this guy wants to….” The redhead paused, struggling for a word, “Participate in sexy fun times with you, you do it because you want to Isak, not him. And that goes for anything. If you guys just want to chill and watch that series on Netflix where Jason Momoa is a hot, fur trading daddy in the seventeen hundreds, that's cool too. The fact that you could literally choke the life from this kid if he tries some shit helps too.”

The advice was a bit odd, and Isak didn’t need to know anymore about Eskild’s already legendary crush on Jason Momoa, but it was good and at his core Isak knew his friend had his best interests in mind. He was still confused on a few things though. He sighed and nodded before questioning Eskild further.

“Ok, but like, what if I do want to um…..you know.” Eskild cooed at the other man as Isak huffed and crossed his arms. “C'mon dude. We can’t all be god's of gay sex like you Eskild. What should I do if he…..you know….wants that?” Eskild, looked thoughtful. He interlocked his fingers under his chin, scrunching his face in concentration. “Well, you should be clear with him. Let him know you’ve never done this with another boy-“, “Not like I’ve done it with a girl either…..”, Isak said under his breath, interrupting the Norske Fighting Championship’s matchmaker. This surprised Eskild.

“Seriously? Not even when you were like, super drunk at a Nissen party or something?” Isak sighed, somewhat frustrated at having to admit his own inexperience, even if it was an experience he would’ve avoided voluntarily. Eskild seems to considering something before he responded. “Well, to be honest little viking, your guru isn’t up for delivering his trademark crash course in giving mind blowing head today. So all I'll say is relax. Go slow. Do what you want and don’t do what you don’t want. Remember Isak you can alwa-“

“Yeah Eskild, enthusiastic consent, stand up for myself, I get all that. But I’m a twenty one year old cage fighter, not a sixteen year old girl. So, let's say…”, Isak paused to gulp slowly, “Let’s say….I….do, perform…um, orally on Tobias. I mean, I’ve seen porn should I just-“ Eskild interrupted his friend with a flap of his lips and a slap on the table.

“Please, Isak, promise me you won’t try and throw some porn moves on your man. No, no, no. If you decide to suck what I’m sure is a beautiful dick, just follow this okay?” Isak tried to appear disapproving, but his apprehensive attentiveness gave him away. “Don’t even attempt to deepthroat him. Even if you think you can, don’t. Also, use your hands. Blowing a guy well isn’t all mouth work baby gay. And mind your teeth too. Finally, if you're just overwhelmed by your own budding gayness”, if Isak had rolled his eyes any harder he would've fallen from his chair, ”Stick to the head and use lots of tongue. Pretend you're a cat eating peanut butter.”

Isak fixed his friend with a slightly horrified look. Eskild scoffed, rolling his own eyes. “Or a dog or whatever animal makes you suitably uncomfortable. But don’t overdo it either. If you need a break, tell him. I know I haven’t met him, but Tobias seems like a fine young man Isak. And I for one think he’ll be a great first experience in fellatio for you.”

“Ok, well first of all, I am thoroughly traumatized and will likely not be coming to you for impromptu sex advice in the future and second…..”, a bashful look broke across Isak's face as he produced a malformed but earnest smile for his friend, “Thank you for doing this. You could've just…. been too cool for school and told me to fuck off, but you didn’t and I actually do appreciate
“And miss seeing how close to crimson I can get that cute face? Isak, of course I’m here to help you. I knew someday I’d be giving you advice about blowing hot boys. Ugh, excuse me, I’m getting a little verklempt!”, Eskild said, giving his best Linda Richman impression. The fighter pursed his lips, shaking his head as the ginger looked at him imploringly. Eskild groaned, titling his head back.

“Damn you millennials! What’re they even teaching in school these days! How do you not know a Coffee Talk reference when you hear one!?” Isak released his own groan and leaned back in his chair. “You know, Even gave me shit for not knowing who Billy Madison was earlier today, so I’m not surprised I don’t know what ‘coffee talk’ is.”

“Apart from being one of the greatest sketches in the history of Saturday Night Live, Isak, it also featured the queen mother of pop herself on one occasion.”

“Lady Gaga?”, Isak questioned, feeling as if he had been transported to the gayest episode of Jeopardy possible.

“No”, Eskild replied, “But good guess. I’m talking about Madonna my feisty gay child. Before she developed that weird British accent. But!”, The elder said, clapping his hands together and startling his younger friend yet again, “I have a date of my own to prepare for tonight and you need to spend the rest of the time worrying about what to wear and say to Tobias anyways. So, I am afraid I must bid you adieu Mr. Valtersen.”

Isak chortled shortly and nodded. He and Eskild gathered at the older man’s front door, the fighter putting his winter layers back on. The matchmaker sighed, pulling Isak into a hug which he was surprised to find returned rather enthusiastically. Isak pulled back and smiled at his friend.

“Thanks again, for today. I know breaking all this stuff down for a…well… a virgin probably isn’t fun, but I do appreciate it. Even if you might be a bit inappropriate at times.” Eskild chuckled, nodding and gasping at Isak. “Oh come now Isak. We both know you love my inappropriateness. And you’re very welcome of course. I know I might be a….wait, what was it you called me?”

“Jesus, I’ll never hear the end of it.” Isak said, more to himself than anyone else. “Ah!”, the russet haired man exclaimed, “A god of gay sex. Yes baby gay I am what you have called me, but I am humble and willing to impart my knowledge whenever you decide yourself worthy to receive it.” Isak’s snort turned into a laugh, saying his final goodbye to his friend and trotting down to enter the wintery world of January in Oslo again. Ok. You got this Isak. Just relax.

18:18

Isak had exhausted his list of activities. After talking to Eskild, he had grabbed some lunch and gone back go the gym. He, Even, and Elias had discussed the campaign and Isak's sponsorship a bit further. Isak had officially signed his sponsorship contract and given Even another hug. And its not like anyone needed to know it might be an excuse to get closer to the older blonde. He had worked through some combination drills, all without throwing his injured right hand, and helped some of the other gym member's in their respective workouts. Isak did a bit of endurance training, using the narrow, indoor, granulated polyurethane track that ran along the outside of Bred Akse.

He had gone out with a couple of his students who were there of their own accord for some ice
cream. They'd made small talk and Isak answered some questions about various techniques and positions. To anyone peering in on the young blonde's life, it would appear to be a pretty boring and normal afternoon for an injured fighter. However, the whole time Isak was conversing with Even, Elias, and his friends and teammates, he couldn't get Tobias out of his mind. Well, not Tobias himself per se, but what the brunette was going to say when they inevitably met up. Isak had written two texts and deleted them both, berating himself for even considering flaking on the younger boy. He heaved a heavy sigh. Chris had apparently gone out to dinner with his newly found hot Danish couple. He'd told Isak they were only here for another few days, so when the featherweight got back to his apartment to shower and change he wasn’t surprised to see he was gone.

The young fighter had showered quickly, but thoroughly, being sure not to soak his splinted hand. He didn’t know what Tobias would want to do, if anything, so he paid extra close attention to his genitals and ass. A blush formed on Isak's face as he lightly stroked over his wet hole. His only real foray into anything related to pleasure in regards to his own ass had been back when he still lived with Eskild. Isak had goaded the older man into a conversation about the practicality of anal sex and although he made sure to look as uncomfortable as possible, to say he didn’t glean anything from the discussion would be a lie. With a hitch in his breath and his cock starting to take notice, Isak slowly penetrated himself up to his first knuckle. He’d applied a bit of soap to his finger and slowly and gently swirled it around, cleaning himself inside a bit. He shivered as he removed the digit and scrubbed himself down once more for good measure.

By the time Isak had dried off and finally settled on an outfit (he’d gone with a pair of matte black skinnies that Eskild had told him on more than one occasion, ‘made his ass look like a whole goddamn meal’, one of Chris’s old but super comfortable Hayabusa hoodies with a white undershirt underneath, his own blue Fjällräven jacket and a pair of cool grey, Adidas Supras with wool socks) a quick glance at his phone told him the time had almost come. The young man gave himself one last cursory look over in the full length mirror Chris had hung on the back of their front door for this exact reason and nodded to himself. C’mon Isak. Get it together. The irony that the mixed martial artist had ridiculed Chris for the purchase and it's intended use didn’t slip by him, but currently he had more pressing matters to address. Like sucking some bomb ass dick, am I right? Isak shivered, shaking the thoughts, which disturbingly sounded like a combination of Eskild and Chris’s voice, out of his mind. He boarded the tram and chose a seat close to the door. Pulling out his phone, he opened his and Tobi’s thread.

Isak: Hey, got the address, on my way now

He chose to forgo the smile face emoji and gave a short nod to himself, approving of his own decision. Not more than a minute later, Isak received a response.

Tobias: Awesome! Just text me when you get here

Isak swallowed down his nervousness. He got comfortable and settled in for the short ride to the abode of the young man he was beginning to think of more and more as his boyfriend. The word sounded nice in his head so he said it silently to himself, his head titled down. He felt the movement his mouth made and hoped that this time with Tobias would be just the beginning of his
lips being introduced to the shape of the word. *Isak Valtersen has a boyfriend……and he's fucking hot.*

19:03

On his was up to Tobias's apartment, Isak had decided that he’d psyched himself up enough on the tram ride and short walk up to the university student's dwelling that he'd forgo a final, internal pep talk. He'd texted the younger boy who’d buzzed to let him in and was now opening the apartment door. The blonde's eyes shifted from the turning doorknob to the other boy's eyes, a kind tiredness showing in them. Isak gave Tobias a discreet once over as he was welcomed inside, admiring the teal and white baseball tee and black gym shorts the brunette was sporting. Tobias's apartment opened into a front room with a long, black vinyl sectional seated in the center of the room; the bedrooms and bathrooms off to the left along a short hallway and the kitchen behind the common room. Isak noticed the girl, Tank as she'd introduced herself, and another woman playing a game of Fifa. But the other woman looked oddly familiar to Isak.

It wasn’t until he heard her loudly sigh and say, “C'mon you Argentinian fuck!”, that Isak recognized the voice as Linn Larsen Hansen, the lead Event Technician and organizer for all of NFC’s fight cards since the promotions inception. Turning his head and locking eyes with the woman, Isak smiled.

“Linn?”, he asked. The freckled blonde turned in the direction of the voice, returning Isak's smile when she saw it.

"Oh, hello Isak. I didn’t know you and Tobi knew each other.” Tobias grinned, seizing the opportunity and wrapping an arm around Isak's middle as he nodded at Linn's statement.

“I actually met Isak when I was working. We've been hanging out a bit recently.'", Tobias replied. He could hear Tank mutter, “Pfftt, more like banging it out”, under her breath affectionately, but didn't bring any attention to it. Linn congratulated Isak on his recent victory over Agmir and the younger thanked her before Tobias informed the women they’d be heading to his room. Tank called out something about, “Not jizzing all over the sheets Tobi, I gotta wash that shit every month bro!”, but neither boy paid her much attention. Isak looked around Tobias's room. It was a decent size, maybe ten by eight feet. There were posters for local punk shows as well as nineties hip hop album covers tacked along the walls. A small lamp on a desk adjacent to the twin sized bed cast a yellowing glow on the room. Isak sat down on the foot of the bed, clearing his throat.

“So”, he said, eyes settling back on Tobias, “I see Tank's not the only punk rocker in the household?” Tobias chuckled, flashing Isak his nearly perfectly straight teeth and pulling a smile from the fighter.

“No, she certainly isn't. But I’m not quite the frontline fan that she is.”, He told Isak as he sat down beside him.

“What kind of a name is ‘Tank’ by the way? Are her mom and dad like a…”, Isak stopped himself, making a split decision to execute his stupid joke before he could stop himself, “Fighter jet and an antiaircraft gun?” Tobias attempted to stifle his laughter, but ended up letting loose a slightly high pitched giggle as Isak did the same. “Oh man”, Tobi said, “I’ve heard a few good ones but that might be my favorite.” The boys laughter fizzled out as Tobias went on to explain Tank's real name.
“Her actual name is Theinkesia, but when she was a little kid she could only say ‘Tinkesa’ and by the time she found punk rock around thirteen it had changed to Tank.” Isak nodded his head, but still had a couple questions. “Was she born in Norway?” “Mhmm.”, Tobias replied, leaning over to reach into a mini fridge on the opposite side of his bed and retrieve two cans of beer, “I think she's like, technically third generation or something. Her mom is part Sami and her dad is Samoan.” “Cool”, Isak responded, nodding his head and popping the tab on his beer can. Taking a long sip from the aluminum cylinder, he looked across the small bed to see Tobias staring back at him as he brought the can away from his lips.

The mixed martial artist twitched his lips up in a smile as he said, “Guess we're just boring white boys.” He snorted at the remark, reaching for Isak's can and setting the mostly still full beverages on top the mini fridge. A slow smirk revealed itself on Tobias's lips as he leaned in closer to Isak. “Well, I don’t know about boring.” Isak felt his eyes slowly shut as he released a puff of air intended to be a chuckle. He felt Tobi's smooth, soft lips press over his own as they each pressed into the other. It started slow, the boy's mouths pressed into one another like heated wax, molding and melding together. Tobias broke the kiss briefly, swinging his right leg over Isak's waist to straddle the other male and gently pressing him back onto the bed. As soon as the blonde's back made contact with the bed, the two started kissing again, this time a little more fervent, aroused energy crackling through the air. Isak's hands had been by his side up until this point.

He lifted them slowly, tentatively, before settling them on Tobias's shoulders. As the couple's pace increased slightly, Isak moved his hands down further, now resting high on the younger man's waist. Isak was entirely in sync with his partner now, moving his head every so often to gain better access to the other's mouth. He felt his breath jump in his lungs as a wet, probing tongue pushed along the seem of his lips. He opened his mouth slowly, his own tongue tangling with Tobi's and making Isak pull in a long breath through his nose. After several seconds of their tongues dancing in each other's mouth’s Tobias broke free, prompting Isak to attempt to form a question. The question was lost, however, when the brown haired boy began kissing wetly along Isak's jaw, up to his ear, nipping the lobe and coming back down to leave light bites and kisses. He began slowly grinding his hips down into the other boy's as well, pressing his clothed erection into Isak's hip. His breath sped up significantly now. He'd never experienced anything like this before. It was also at this time that the fighter realized how hard he was in his own pants. It felt as if the button could simply snap off at any moment. Isak found his hands wandering of their own accord, smoothing over Tobias's back and shoulders before teasing along the hem of his baseball tee. Breathing out a chuckle, Tobias leaned back atop Isak, crossing his arms and grasping the bottom edge of his shirt before grinning teasingly at the other male. “Want this off?”, he asked. Isak could only nod, his nerves firing on all cylinders as he began to follow the end of the shirt as it ascended it's way up Tobias's body until it was flung to the side of the bed with a theatrical forefinger and thumb pinch. Pulling his own hoodie and undershirt off was a bit more difficult than Isak had anticipated, particularly with a very distracting and gorgeous boy kissing at his neck. Once both young men were shirtless, Tobias rolled the pair onto their sides, pushing his lips back onto Isak's. They made out for several more seconds before the brunette broke the embrace and looked at Isak, his pupils blown wide and eyelids hanging low. He brushed his palm up and down Isak's chest, lips glued to his neck and pushing his mouth close to his ear.

“I really, really wanna get you off.”, Tobias said, his hurried breath rolling over the right side of Isak's face. The older boy released a long, labored breath through his nose, his eyes closed as the sensations on his skin informed him of all he needed to know. He nodded slowly, lazily opening his eyes to see a similar look of longing and lust. A teasing smile worked it’s way onto Tobi's mouth. “Say it, Isak.”, he said, an aroused confidence in his voice. Isak knew what his lover wanted to hear. He starred into the dirty hazel eyes mere centimeters away and said, “Make me cum, Tobias.” The smile slowly fell from the other’s face as he quickly popped the fly of Isak's pants.
pants, the blonde helping to remove them along with his boxer briefs. As soon as his cock met the temperate air of the room, Isak inhaled sharply, looking up from his own erection to notice Tobias had hastily stripped himself as well. The pair shared a smile and Tobias pulled the groan Isak made when his warm hand wrapped around the fighter's dick into his mouth.

He started with slow, rhythmic strokes of the other male's heavily engorged appendage. Beads of precum were spread over the head by Tobi's skilled thumb and massaged into the shaft of Isak's cock. The brunette broke their locked lips once again, this time to nibble and worry along Isak's neck, leaving small, pink blooms of passion. Isak felt a stutter in his breathing. This was incredible. It was just a handjob, but it felt so right. As Tobias increased his pace, his partner's breath increased as well, evening out into a shallow rapidness. Isak wanted to warn the younger man, to give him a notice of his impending orgasm, but his body knew it needed this, that it had for a long time. And Isak's dick wasn't about to let his brain get in the way of that. When he came, a long, shuddering groan broke free from the older boy's lungs. He was quiet but intense, his cock letting loose long, arcing ribbons of hot whiteness all across and down Tobias's right hand as well as some drops and speckles being flung onto Isak's stomach and shortly trimmed pubic hair.

The boys found themselves breathing heavily into one another's mouth, their eyes locked in a deep gaze. Tobias broke their lock of eyes first, peering down briefly to look at the considerable aftermath of Isak's orgasm. A laugh worked it's way from his lips as he looked back up at the other young man. “Damn, dude”, he said, his tone an odd yet sexy mix of impressed reverence and pure lust, “You came a lot!” It was now Isak's turn to huff a laugh, his brain still swimming in post orgasmic bliss. “I don’t think it's fair to put all the blame on me. Considering who did the job.” This made Tobias laugh into his companion’s neck, saying he would take that as a compliment and Isak confirming to him that it certainly was meant as one. The pair cleaned up, each putting their underwear back on before snuggling under the covers and into one another. It struck Isak that he hadn’t done anything for Tobias though, and the young mixed martial artist knew it would annoy him to no end if he didn’t address this fact. Isak gulped before he spoke.

“Um….so, did you want me to…Like, I mean, I could get you off too or-“, Isak was cut off as Tobias kissed him softly, his lips moving with the blonde's in unhurried appreciation. He broke the kiss and smiled wide at Isak before shaking his head. “It’s ok, Isak. I know this is all pretty new for you. And to be honest, I’m pretty tired right now anyway.” This made Isak's brows draw up, but he nodded anyway, promising to return the favor in the near future. They kissed for a few more minutes, both of their lips having trouble meeting the other's as the two drifted off into sleep. Isak couldn't help but feel that they hadn't talked about what he'd originally intended though. It’s not like the handjob wasn't awesome and somewhat unexpected, but he still had questions for the other male. Questions he wasn’t entirely sure hadn't just been usurped by his own desire. Honestly though, these were things he could confront in the morning and so Isak let himself fall into dreamland, now finding it harder and harder to look at Tobi and not think one word: Boyfriend.

Stuff for the fic

1. The show Eskild is referring to is a Netflix show entitled Frontier and I would encourage all of you to check it out. Jason Momoa is bad ass mofo in it.
2. By now you guys may have noticed I'm a pretty big 90's/early 00's SNL fan, and Eskild and Even are at the age to be as well in this. I'm pretty sure I've broken down 'Coffee Talk' before so if you're interested, just check it out on YouTube.

3. In mma, a matchmaker is an individual who actually puts matches together. They're responsible for creating what will be a good challenge for each fighter as well as creating a fun and exciting fight for the fans. They often have an eye for style matchups and have a good rapport/personal relationship with fighters. A matchmaker doesn't necessarily have to have martial arts training themselves, but they do need to be able to put together good fights from a stylistic, fan, and financial perspective. In this story, Eskild doubles as the announcer as well as the matchmaker since the promotion Isak is fighting in is a regional one. Employees of regional mma promotions often hold other positions within the promotion itself. In the UFC, two men named Sean Shelby and Mick Maynard are the primary matchmakers.

4. The Sami people are the indigenous settlers of Norway. They share DNA with ethnic Siberians as well as other indigenous peoples of the arctic circle and some Northern European ethnicities as well and are commonly referred to by westerners as Laplanders. They're known for being excellent craftsmen/women, making great seafaring vessels, and, at least as far as I know in Norway, are the only people who are allowed to legally raise, herd, and slaughter reindeer for their meat, hyde, antlers, etc. Because they have a fairly wide variety of DNA in their ethnic group, Sami individuals can range from being blonde haired and blue eyed to having much more Inuit or Native Arctic features. When Tobias says "She's technically third generation", he's discussing Tank's Samoan ancestry. Meaning she is the third generation in her family to have lived in Norway, i.e., her grandparents were the first.

Chapter End Notes

I hoped the sex scene was to everyone's liking! I don't know if you guys have picked up on it through my writing/an's (I imagine if would be difficult to do so), but I do happen to be one of the rare male fan fiction writers and as a bisexual male it was kind of weird writing about two characters, that I do have a degree of physical attraction to, engaging in a form of sex yet not being aroused while I'm writing it. Anyways, you all don't want to hear what makes me all hot and bothered so I'll cut that thought there. Having said that I hope everyone is having a fantastic holiday and I look forward to posting a new chapter next week. Drop a comment or kudo if you want. I love reading everyone's ideas, constructive criticisms, etc. I'll see y'all next week! Remember to love each other and yourselves!
Even breaks down his plan for the ad campaign. Isak learns more about Tobias past and family and receives some good news. Noora and William offer Isak a hard to refuse opportunity.
“This is Feliciana Corderon. She’s a thirty seven year old half Norwegian half, half Brazilian Muay Thai fighter. She also holds a degree in International Human Rights affairs and has worked for a number of NGO's all over the world. She's married to a micro-loan manager who works with rural tribes in the Amazon and has two kids.” Brenna switched the presentation, a smiling, dark skinned young man replacing Ana's closed lip grin. Even flashed at quick smile of his own to his temporary assistant. She gave one back, albeit nervously.

“Meet Mahdi Disi. He's a first generation Ethiopian whose parents fled from military conflict in the nineteen eighties and have established a successful trio of restaurants that serve traditional Norwegian cuisine with an Ethiopian twist. He’s also the Nordic Jiu-Jitsu open champion three years running now in his age range and, before a recent injury, was the primary jiu-jitsu coach for….”, Even held out the o in the word, waiting until the intern had completed the quick transition to the other photo. The bruised yet playfully smirking face of Isak Valtersen reflected in the employees eyes.

“Isak Valtersen.”, Even said energetically, “A twenty one year old featherweight, that's sixty six kilos, who is signed to Norske Fighting Championships, the premier regional mma promotion in Norway. He just defeated a two time Nordic Muay Thai champion in a dominant unanimous decision. He's ranked number six in his division even though I personally think he’s ready for a title shot.” The creative director paused briefly, a wide smile endearing himself to the rest of the room. “Of course, as his current grappling coach, I do have a bit of a bias.” This brought a small round of chuckles from the gathered employees. Even strode over to the heavy vinyl projection screen, rapping it gently with the knuckles on his left hand.

“These, everyone, are our representatives for this campaign. We'll have photos and videos of other martial artists in Oslo gyms of course, but these are our profiles.” Even shrugged, his shoulders, holding them as he asked a rhetorical question. “Ok, but Even, you might ask, why do I need to know this? I just have to do my job and the campaign will work itself out right?” He nodded to himself, turning to the conference table and leaning on it, meeting the eyes of the employees seated there. “Yeah, it'll probably do fine. But guess what; fighting? It’s personal. And I don’t mean two opponent’s disliking each other by the way. I mean it's personal to the fighter. Everyone fights for different reasons and the same reasons. And when you do fight someone” he paused momentarily, leaning back to look at the room, “whether it be on the mat, in the cage, or the ring. If it’s Wrestling, MMA, Boxing, Jiu-jitsu, Muay Thai, Kickboxing, whatever combat sport it is…..”

Even stopped again, leaning back from the table and taking his place at the head of the room again, “You go through an experience with another human being that is incomparable to anything else. You sweat with them and on them. Bleed with them, on them even. Test your skill against someone else with a level of variables you don’t have any direct control over. You can only control yourself. And when that experience is over, you’ve formed a bond with that person. A connection with them that’s not like any other you can have with a person....” The jiu-jitsuka looked thoughtful as he walked back and forth in front of the small conference room.

“Physical combat is like a conversation in a debate. And martial arts are like a language. The more languages you can learn and master, the better conversationalist and debater you will become. Our goal, is to show our customers that we understand this. That we want them to become polyglots of martial arts. And that they can use our products to help achieve that.”, Even stepped back, a wide smile across his face, “That, is why we make this campaign personal. We don’t just sell to combat sports athletes everyone,” he shrugged again, emphasizing his point, “We make them realize we understand them and want them to become better. And we sell because of that.” As he finished the presentation, the blonde looked to the clock. “Alright guys, thank you for listening to me, now let’s go do this shit!” The employees, now thoroughly inspired, gave collective ‘woops' and claps as they exited the conference room, prepared to make the best marketing campaign for combat
A slow, rolling awareness spread through Isak. He and Tobias had slept for a few hours the previous night before waking and sharing a joint. The two then had a meal and made some amiable conversation, followed by a couple rounds of Fifa. Linn and Tank had thankfully left the apartment, so the boys didn’t have to face any intrusive yet well meaning questioning from Tobias’ roommate. The last Fifa match quickly dissolved into a slow make out session on the couch, which itself led the two back into Tobi’s bed for a cuddly and warm night of sleep. Isak pushed himself up, noticing he was still in his boxer briefs and shirt from the night prior. He checked then other side of the bed to find it empty. Getting up slowly, he slipped on his pants and walked out into the hall to the common room to find Tank making breakfast and Tobias fiddling with a record player. The tell tale, underlying scratchiness of a thoroughly played record surrounded the apartment. A stuttering sound blared out of the player's speakers followed by a funky, electronic beat and accented lyrics.

*It’s always the same*

*Always ashamed storytelling*

*“When can I come in”*

*To a hopeless troglodyte*

*But one more time my answer stands*

*I swear I mean no offense*

*But you better learn to read*

*It’s all ‘bout membership*

Isak smiled as Tobi began dancing away from the record player. Out of his peripheral the blonde noticed Tank dancing while she was making what appeared to be pancakes. Isak leaned against the kitchen counter facing the den and giggling as Tobias rocked his hips and body in time with the beat. He motioned for the other male to join him, but Isak merely grinned, shaking his head to politely decline. Upon seeing this Tank looked at Isak, a smirk apparent on her face. “You’re telling me you got an ass like that and never shake it?” The two boys laughed at the question as Tank started serving the pancakes up on the roommate’s dining room table, setting butter and syrup out along with blueberries and diced strawberries. The trio sat down and dug in, Isak reveling in the fluffy sweetness of the breakfast, the song on the record player making the meal more enjoyable for some reason.

During training camp, Chris kept him on a pretty strict, high protein, high carbohydrate, low sugar diet so he could make weight as well as conserve energy and getting to abandon that between training camps to chow down on whatever he liked had been invaluable to Isak. The featherweight
had a decently high metabolism and hovered around one hundred and seventy pounds between training camps and weight cuts, so his drop to one hundred and forty five was never too bad as long as he followed a good plan and rehydrated well. The quality of Tank's pancakes were reflected in the sounds of forks scraping against plates and an easy silence settling amongst everyone, save for the record still play in the background. The shorn haired university student excused herself from the table after she was done, vanishing into her room to prepare for an afternoon class.

“So”, Isak said after finishing off his fourth pancake, “What's up with the record player? Am I dating a hot, pretentious vinyl nerd?” Tobias laughed softly, but shook his head, his mouth full of pancake and strawberries.

“No um, it's”, he paused, a sudden look of sadness appearing on his face for the briefest of moments, “It was my older brother's. He gave it to me as a birthday gift before he passed away.” Isak couldn’t have felt more awkward or guilty if he tried.

“Oh, shit, Tobi. Fuck man, um…” Tobias smiled at his boyfriend, placing a soothing hand over Isak's.

“It’s ok. You had no way of knowing Isak. And my brother would’ve loved you by the way.”

Isak was glad to know he hadn’t offended the younger male, but wished he had known about the record player earlier so he didn’t stick his foot in his mouth. Clearing his throat, Tobias sat his utensils down on his plate, appearing to be finished with his breakfast. He turned to Isak before speaking.

“I uh, I never told you why I ditched you at Bjorn's last week.”

“Oh, Tobi, you didn’t ditch me. I mean-“, the brown haired boy huffed a laugh and interrupted Isak.

“Isak, I made a promise to you that I was going to be somewhere to hang out with you. I got there, then left without telling you and then contacted you two days later. I ditched you.”

“Well, I’m sure you had a good reason. And it's not like I tried to contact you at first either.”

Tobi sighed, shrugging at Isak's statement, but ultimately nodding his head in agreement.

“Regardless of all that, the reason I had to leave so soon was that um…”, Tobias cleared his throat again, sitting back in his chair and crossing his arms, “I had to pick my mom up from the police station. She was drunk and crying and yelling at a bar near her house. She shouldn’t have been drinking anyways but…..”, the university trailed off, clearly upset at having to leave Bjorn's to collect his mother from the police. To Isak, it felt like this wasn’t a one time occurrence either. In a slow, cautious tone he asked his new boyfriend, “Your mom…..she does this a lot…?" Tobi sighed. “Not a lot, but enough to be a nuisance. After my brother died when I was eleven she uh, she kind of hasn’t been the same. Her and my dad split a few years after, but if you ask me, it should’ve happened before that. They were so focused on staying together that it’s like they didn’t realize how toxic they were for each other.” The younger man stopped, looking up from the table to match eyes with Isak, the sympathy behind them not going unnoticed. He smiled at the blonde, leaning in and giving him a short peck on the lips before clearing his own plate and silverware off the table.

“But you don’t need to worry about any of that Isak.”, he told the fighter while depositing his dirty kitchenware into the sink. “Just know that I’m not going to let my family's problems come between us ok?” Isak was a bit surprised at how forthcoming his new boyfriend had been, but figured it was
far better than him being secretive about his families past as well as his own. You mean like you are? Before his torturous inner monologue could make him anymore uncomfortable, Tank entered the room again, dressed in a pair of ripped black jeans, a red beanie, and sporting a fluffy wool sweater with a black leather coat and knitted scarf. She had a backpack that held the shape of a laptop slung across her shoulders, opening the fridge and retrieving a bottle of water. She turned around, a wistful smile on her ruby lips.

“Couldn’t help overhear Tobi breaking down the Sverdiensen family history to you Isak.” Tobias and Tank's eyes met briefly before both pairs settled back onto their guest. Isak didn’t know what to say. Before he could come up with a response, Tobias jumped in. “Yep, it’s certainly an entertaining one. Good luck on your test by the way T.” Taking that as her cue to leave, Tank said goodbye to both boys before leaving the apartment, Isak now picking up his own dishes and laying them in the sink as well after hitting them with a short blast of hot water. The two stood opposite each other, both looking into the other’s eyes. Tobias smiled. “C'mere.” Isak obeyed happily, walking into the other boy's outstretched arms and leaning down for a short series of kisses. The boys were taken out of their late morning make out session by Isak's phone incessantly buzzing. The blonde sighed and took the device from his jeans pocket. His demeanor changed as he looked at the number. It wasn’t one he recognized but, he answered anyways.

“Hello?” Tobi latched himself to the older boy's side, softly kissing at his neck. Isak chuckled in a half hearted attempt to get away.

“Is this Isak Valtersen?”, a slightly nasal, feminine voice inquired.

“It is.”

“Hi Isak, my name is Yasmin. I’m an employee of PurKonchus and we're putting together some fighter profiles for our new campaign. Even would've been the one to tell you, but he's working right now, so I’m calling to inform you that you, along with two of your fellow teammates, have been chosen as the representatives of our new ad campaign. Now you don’t need to make a decision right now, but we would like you to get back to us within a week's time. Think you can do that?”

Isak was overwhelmed in the best possible way. This year really was shaping up to be huge for him.

“Um yes. Yes absolutely!”, he replied enthusiastically.

The employee on the phone gave Isak a few more details before saying she would look forward to hearing from him and ending the call. Tobi looked at him expectantly, waiting on an explanation.

“So uh, I just recently got a sponsorship and now, they uh, they want me to be a representative for their new ad campaign.” Isak's boyfriend's eyebrows rose up as he smiled at the other male.

“Babe, that's fucking great!”

He threw his arms around Isak as the other boy laughed and returned the hug. The pair separated again and smiled at one another. Tobi sighed a bit.

“Listen, Isak…”, the shorter male began, stirring up just a bit of nervousness is his new boyfriend, “I know we haven’t known each other that long and we’ve only been dating for like a couple weeks now but…I’m really glad I met you.” Tobias finished the statement with an affirming nod, more to himself than Isak.
Isak didn’t say anything, just gazed intently into the eyes of the other young man before closing his own and slotting their lips together in a long, deep kiss. *I’m glad I met you too.*

**Lørdag**

**Januar 5th, 2019**

**7:44**

William awoke to a light piercing through his and Noora's bedroom followed by a wet, gagging noise. As his awareness increased, so did his concern for his wife. Noora had had off and on morning sickness for several weeks now, but thankfully it seemed as if was easing off as she entered into her second trimester. The NFC co-owner kneeled beside his wife as he entered their en-suite bathroom, wetting a washcloth and smoothing it over her head. Noora sighed, spitting into the bowl a few times before reaching for a cup of water and gargling the foul taste from her mouth. William gave his partner a sympathetic look as she smiled back at him.

“Did it wake you up again?”, he asked. The soon to be mother shook her head, clearing her throat before answering her husband.

“Not this time. It was actually your phone.”, she sighed, “Wish you would turn it to alarm only.” William shrugged, not knowing what to say to his wife. He didn’t *want* to disturb her, but in the fight business it was better to get information sooner than later.

“I’m sorry it woke you up baby. I’ll set it to alarm only from now on, ok?” Noora looked up at her man and smiled small, a quiet “Thank you”, slipping from her lips.

“Anything I can do for you?”, William inquired.

“Oddly enough, I feel like I could eat a cow right now.” Noora said. It had been a staple of her pregnancy so far; morning sickness followed shortly by near ravenous hunger. Noora's husband nodded, informing her he’d start breakfast as they were both up now. He kissed her on the forehead and left the bathroom for the kitchen, retrieving the items he’d need for his and his wife's breakfast. As he was pouring a splash of milk into his and his co-owner’s not yet cooked omelets, a thought occurred to William and he pulled out his phone scrolling to the missed call and dialing the number. He was met with a rather gruff sounding voice.

“Yes?”, it implored him.

“Um, I received a call from this number?”. There was a short pause as the man on the other line seemed to be thinking.

“Oh yes the fight promoter fellow.”

“Well, I’m also a co-owner along with-”

“Nevermind all that. You’re Sven Ulinger's boss yes?” William was a little miffed at the other man's dismissal but responded that he was.

“Well, he won’t be fighting anytime soon. Poor kid tore his MCL.” The promoter cursed to himself. Sven was the number two NFC featherweight contender and had been set up to set off the
promotion's first card of twenty nineteen. It had been a fight months in the making and William had already had to change the opponent once before, hence why it was the champion facing the second contender in the division and not the first. It was looking like he'd have to do it again if he wanted to save the headliner for the card.

“How bad is it? I mean are we talking a few micro-tears he can rehab in a month or…..?”

“Mmm, I’m afraid not Mr. Magnusson. Sven’s suffered a partial ligament separation from the bone,” William’s face scrunched up in an involuntary show of sympathy.

“Damn, think he’ll make it back by the end of the year?”

“I wouldn’t count on it. Sven will need to undergo surgery as soon as possible. The ligament will have to be reattached, the incision sewn up, then the leg will need to remain mostly immobile for six weeks. After this then he can start physical therapy to strengthen and remobilize the tissue. All in all we're looking at Mr. Ulinger being out at least six months if not more. “

“Fuck….. I mean, shit…..”, William didn’t have much to say. This was completely unexpected. Ulinger had never had an injury before, let alone one so devastating. He huffed heavily as he reengaged his employee's doctor.

“Well look, Tony Ferguson healed a full MCL to bone separation and rehabbed it in less than six months! He was cleared to fight and ended up getting an awesome finish!”

“I am well aware of Mr. Ferguson's rather miraculous healing and subsequent victory Mr. Magnusson. And I am also well aware, as I presume you yourself to be, that Sven Ulinger and Tony Ferguson are two different people.”

William rolled his eyes at the doctor's sarcastic response, but his message didn’t go unappreciated.

“Yeah, you're right about that one doctor…..”, William paused, realizing this whole time he didn’t even know this man’s name.

“Doctor Reitman.”

“Well, I appreciate it Dr. Reitman. Oh, and let Sven know I’ll be contacting him and making sure he gets the best care we can provide him ok?”

“I’ll let him know Mr. Magnusson.”

William thanked the medical professional, sighing to himself as he turned on the burners for his and Noora's omelets. The bob cut blonde, almost as if on cue, entered into the couple's kitchen with an empathetic frown on her face.

“Couldn’t help overhearing that.”

William looked up at his wife, noticing the glow that seemed to have emanated from her since he'd learned of her pregnancy. He nodded his head, pressing a hand over and across his face.

“Yep. It’s looking like this year's first card might be a dud.”

Noora scoffed, shuffling over to her husband and gently moving him out of the way while she selected a few spices from the pair's seasoning rack.

“Featherweight is our second largest division. We'll find someone else. In fact”, Noora looked up
at her business partner, “I might already have someone in mind.” It didn’t take William long to figure out who she was talking about. He looked at her with an heir of skepticism.

“Noora”, he said, “I like Isak too ok? A lot honestly. But just cause the kid stayed on our couch for a few day’s a couple years ago doesn’t mean we should give him preferential treatment. Isak's talented and he’s developed a nice little draw in Oslo, but this is our first card in Stavanger. Sven was our only top ten contender who we could count on as a local draw.”

Noora smiled at her husband, stepping in between his legs as she looked up at him.

“William, I know that Isak wasn’t our first choice for this fight. I know he wasn’t even our second choice. But right now? He’s our best choice. And he’s got a nice little chunk of fans in Stavanger as well. It’s not like word didn’t get around about Even being a new coach for him. And Even still has a slew of supporters out west anyways.”

She took William’s phone from the counter and pushed it into his hands.

“Ask him. The worst he can say is no.”

William knew his wife was right and took the device from her. In Isak’s amateur and professional career he had never turned down a fight and had stepped in on short notice twice. It wasn’t a habit the promotional owner wished to develop; asking a fighter to substitute on short notice, but it was something he could count on Isak to say yes too. He’d have to reschedule the fight to allow time for the featherweight’s hand to finish healing, but that was a small price to pay for saving a card, especially one that was a promotional debut. He scrolled to Isak's contact in his phone and pressed the call button. It rang a total of seven times before a soft “Hello?” came through over the speaker.

“Isak, it’s William Magnusson…”, the man paused, looking over at Noora, a goofy smile plastering itself on his face as he continued, “You know, your boss.” Noora breathed a laugh and shook her head at her husband. “Anyways, I hope I didn’t wake you, but I’ve got an opportunity for you. Is it cool if I put you on speaker phone? Noora's here too.” A few short seconds later Isak responded that he could and Noora and William shared a smile.

“So Isak, Sven Gulinger is hurt and out of his title fight…..”

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Stuff for the fic

1. Tobias' song

2. Weight cutting in mixed martial arts is very similar to high school and college level wrestling. A fighter might, in Isak's case, compete at 145 pounds, but may naturally be around 170. Most fighter’s start their weight cut before their training camp so it will go smoother, but some fighter’s are also called “true” featherweights, bantamweights, heavyweights, etc., indicating that they cut, usually, 15 or less pounds to make their weight class. A fighter is usually only at their goal weight for the weigh ins and then rehydrates for their actual match. A fighter might only be at their actual weight class for a period of under 24 hours. One example of a fighter who cuts down pretty
significantly for their weight class would be the UFC’s current featherweight champion Max Holloway who has cut down from 180 pounds before.

3. Sven’s injury is actually based off one of my favorite Lightweight UFC fighter's injury’s named Tony Ferguson. He rehabbed his ligament tear, which had been torn entirely off the bone, within 5 months and had a competitive match that he ended up winning by referee stoppage against a very skilled opponent. For this type of injury, this recovery time and level of performance is entirely unheard of, particularly at the high level of skill that Tony competes. He’s a bizarre an often very humorous guy and a very fun fighter to watch.

Chapter End Notes

Hahah, I love implied endings to chapters. Most the time. Also if I got anything wrong about the pregnancy/morning sickness let me know. I've got 2 niece's and a nephew with another one on the way, but an OBGYN I am not. Also, this isn't really a note but if you guys haven't checked out the two fics this one was inspired by I would definitely suggest bookmarking it. The sequel to Checking From Behind is phenomenal as well. Hope you're all liking the fic and I look forward to updating by Sunday! Have a great rest of the week everyone!
Chapter Summary

Isak tells Chris and Feliciana about his title shot. Feliciana has a fight.

Chapter Notes

Hope everyone had a good weekend! I was gonna get this out last night, but I ended up binging some Marvelous Mrs. Maisel and fell asleep before I could post hahah. I've been trying to get back onto my Saturday update schedule, so hopefully I will within the next few chapters. I'm enjoying writing this a lot and I hope y'all are enjoying it as well! Leave me some comments and kudos if you want! I love getting feedback from you guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Copenhagen, Denmark

Lørdag

Januar 5th, 2019

8:03

Isak was silent. A fucking title shot!? He was thrilled! He threw on some sweats and left his room at the bed and breakfast he was staying at with Chris and Feliciana. He cleared his throat to evict the inevitable roughness he’d have from having just woken up.

“So, what happened to Sven?”, Isak asked. He’d only met the other fighter a few times, but they’d had some good sparring sessions together and the guy seemed nice enough.

“I won’t go into the details, but he’s gonna be out for some time. I know you broke your hand in your last fight though, so I was thinking we could reschedule from the twenty sixth to the sixteenth. Think that’ll work for you?”

“Um….”, Isak wasn't sure what to say really, “I mean, you'd be moving the whole card for me…”. It was said as statement, but William could hear the question in his voice. He let out a small laugh.

“You should make it a good fight then I suppose.”

The younger man's eyes widened as he let out a breathy chuckle, nervous excitement over taking him.

“I'll be sure to!”
“I know you will Isak, you always do. We'll get you into the office to go over everything when you're back is Oslo ok?”

“Fuck yeah dude!”, Isak blushed at his sudden outburst, “Uh, I mean yes that…that's awesome.”

William laughed at the fighter's enthusiasm, saying he looked forward to it and letting Isak celebrate to himself momentarily. This could be a big opportunity for the young mixed martial artist and he was determined to capitalize on it. He ran back to his room, sliding on a shirt with Bred Akse's logo and a grey zip up hoodie. He searched for his shoes, rejoicing when he found them and sliding a copper brown beanie over his head. He rushed downstairs, ready to tell his coach and teammate the good news. He stopped at their table, interrupting the conversation the two were having by simply standing there, crossing his arms and feigning a smug smile. Well, kind of feigning. Feliciana cut herself off and looked at her friend curiously.

“Yes Isak? It would appear you have something to tell us?”

He shrugged, looking down at his fingernails as if he was bored.

“I just thought you guys should know…..”

Chris locked eyes with his fighter and smiled. He had an idea of what Isak was going to say, but allowed him to continue anyways; raising his eyebrows and nodding for the younger man to continue.

“You're looking at the future featherweight Norske Fighting Championships title holder.”

The two others looked at each other in surprise before breaking out into huge smiles and abandoning their morning coffee. They embraced the blonde on each side, making a celebratory Isak sandwich. The youngest of the trio broke down how he'd come into the title fight, but Chris cautioned him not to rush into anything. He still had three weeks for his hand to recover and would need to protect it even after the splint was removed. Isak's enthusiasm always made his striking coach happy, but Chris had seen one too many fighters reinjure themselves and lose big opportunities. He motioned for Isak to sit beside him, slinging an arm around the boy and grinning wide.

“We'll get you into the gym as soon as we get back ok Isak? I know not being able use your right hand sucks, but I can guarantee you you’re gonna get better from southpaw.”

“Small price to pay for a title shot.”, Isak said while digging into his breakfast. Chris snatched the kringle his fighter was about stuff into his mouth from his hand, taking a bite out of it and winking at him. Isak was appalled.

“Dude! What the fuck!?”, Chris said, mouth full of the scrumptious treat, “Yuh whah thah fuh.”, he swallowed, “You still have to make weight.” Isak couldn't believe he'd forgotten that key aspect of the sport. He groaned and laid his head down on the table. Feliciana sighed, reaching over the table and patting his head. “There there young one, it sucks for all of us.” Chris scoffed, crumbs falling from his mouth. “Not when you're retired! But seriously guys, finish up here, we gotta be at the qualifier by eleven.”

The two gym mates empathized with one another about weight cutting while they enjoyed their breakfasts. Isak ended up having roast salmon with a cucumber and chili dressing along with a side of gherkins. The fight was scheduled for the week of Valentine’s, which was just under six weeks
away. He hadn’t gone completely back up to his natural weight, which usually stayed between seventy six and seventy seven kilos although he’d gotten as high as eighty before. Currently the featherweight was hovering right around seventy three kilograms, not significantly more than what he weighed on fight night. He couldn’t get rid of this feeling that things were going to keep going well for him and for once in Isak’s life, he didn’t want to, other shoe dropping be damned.

SIAM Athlete Nation Gym
Copenhagen, Denmark
11:06

The gym was small, but Isak was impressed. The qualifying bracket fights had been going on since ten o’clock, a steady stream of Muay Thai enthusiasts, fans, friends, and family members strolling into the gym. Two rings were set up, one in the back right corner and one in the back left. The sounds of fights, leather crashing into and onto bone, coaches calling out commands and codes in a host of different languages, although mostly in Danish and Dutch. Isak sighed happily. He was a long way from Bred Akse, but still felt at home. Feliciana’s husband walked up to her and her two coaches, having gotten to the gym earlier to enjoy some of the preliminary matches. He smiled at his wife, hugging her and giving her a short kiss. Isak could see his teammates children off to the side of the gym, one of the fighter’s smiling and laughing with them while showing them proper technique on a heavybag. Isak liked the atmosphere. The gym wasn’t undermining the seriousness of what was happening, but it wasn’t taking itself too serious either.

Once some small talk with her husband and a few other fellow Norwegian competitors had been finished, Feliciana followed her two coaches back into the locker room. The locker rooms seemed to be coed, an uncommon occurrence in combat sports, with both male and female fighters stripping down to their underwear and putting on their fighting attire. Isak and Chris sat down on one of the benches as their friend and fighter dressed herself. Isak and Tobias, cryptically telling him he had even more good news to share when he returned to Oslo. He brought his gaze away from his phone noticing Chris' appreciatively looking at the fighters in the locker room. Isak snorted shaking his head and getting his coach's attention. Chris smiled.

“What? It’s not like I’m catcalling anyone Isak. I’m not even leering! We both know what would happen if I tried anything with one of these ladies or gentlemen.” Isak chuckled.

“You’d be respectfully turned down.”

“We'll go with that.”, was the older man's laughing reply. Chris looked up to see his fighter was ready to have her hands wrapped. He smiled, moving over so she could sit down. Chris took what he needed from the army green backpack he’d brought, going about wrapping Feliciana’s hands with a care and precision that spoke of how much time he’d dedicated to being a good coach. Isak’s eyes wandered to the clock on the right wall of the locker room. There were around five minutes left until eleven thirty, the time of Ana’s preliminary bout. If she won today, she’d go onto the finals on Sunday. Isak wasn’t thrilled with the prospect of his friend fighting twice in a weekend, but knowing what was at stake for her he couldn’t really council her against it. Especially not when he’d just accepted a short notice title shot himself. Once Chris was done, Isak helped the other man put their fighter's gloves on, lacing them up tightly, but making sure they weren’t uncomfortable. Feliciana Corderon was ready for battle.
Her opponent had completed her Wai Khru dance moments before, Feliciana now taking the center stage. She went through the customary ring blessing before entering, bringing her gloves apart and together four times with a bowed head, saying a small prayer to herself before entering the ring. She bowed to all four sides before beginning her own dance. She got down on her knees, extending one leg forward while balancing her other behind herself on the ball of her foot. She mimed drawing spears from her back and throwing them at her opponent’s corner before switching sides and repeating this action, standing up before continuing. She then brought her front leg up, angling it to the side and making her knee and elbow meet before doing the same to the other side, bringing her elbows up out in front of her, facing her opponent, then bringing them down and bowing. The woman she’d be fighting bowed back as Feliciana completed her dance. The ring announcer stepped into the center of the squared circle, beginning his introduction. It may have been in Danish, but Isak and Chris could understand most of it.

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the two-thousand-eighteen Nordic Muay Thai championship. This event and fight is sponsored and promoted in cooperation with the International Federation of Muaythai Amateur and Siam Athlete Nation Gym.” The announcer paused, putting on a more dramatic tone for the crowd. “And now, for our fifth preliminary match of the day. This bout in the Super Bantamweight division.” Breaking once more, the announcer looked to Feliciana before starting up again. “Fighting out of the red corner! This woman is a Muay Thai kickboxer who stands one point seven meters tall and weighed in at fifty four point five kilos. She has an amateur Muay Thai record of ten wins with two defeats and a pristine professional Kickboxing record of nine wins and no defeats, fighting out of Oslo, Norway by way of Bred Akse Mixed Martial Arts, let’s hear it for Feliciana ‘A Louco Mamãe’ Corderon!”

A small, but loud smattering of friends and family erupted, showing their support for the fighter. Isak and Chris made sure they were heard from the corner, the announcer letting them finish cheering their fighter before moving onto Ana’s opponent.

“And her opponent, fighting out of the blue corner! This woman is also a Muay Thai kickboxer boasting and amateur record of thirteen wins and just one defeat. She stands one point seventy five meters tall and also weighed in at fifty four point five kilos. Fighting out of Copenhagen, Denmark by way of the very gym we are standing in, let’s hear some love for Ellinor Olsen-Koch!” The response to Feliciana's opponent was considerably more than what she'd received, but as she was the hometown fighter, it was to be expected. The announcer introduced the referee as he smiled to the crowd. He brought the women to the center of the ring, giving final instructions before the two touched gloves and returned to their corners. Feliciana Corderon was officially in preliminary contest for the two thousand eighteen Nordic Muay Thai championship.

**Round 1**

Elinor came out the gate with a stiff jab; Feliciana ducked it, swiftly moving her head down and back, firing out a lead straight left that just glanced off her adversary's brow as she moved as well. The Danish fighter repositioned quickly, firing off a front kick that partially landed as Ana turned her body away from the strike, circling to her left and landing a jab straight down the pipe. It
backed Ellinor up, but she was able to successfully check the hard leg kick that was thrown afterwards. As her opponent placed her leg back down, Feliciana pivoted off her now reset right leg, catching the inside calf of the leg Ellinor had just sat back town onto the canvas. The strike reverberated throughout the relatively quiet gym. With her left leg now inside the stance of her opponent, the Norwegian twirled her body to the right, raising her right elbow in an attempt to land it on the other women's head. Ellinor saw the set up coming and was able to move away from the strike, her right hand still held to her face defensively. What she wasn’t able to move away from was her fellow competitor’s follow up kick.

It was a technique she’d practiced thousands of time over, but remained very effective. Using the leftover momentum from her failed spinning elbow, Feliciana quickly raised her right leg, making her opponent believe she was going for another leg kick. She instead turned her hips over, lengthening herself as she turned her knee to the right, kicking out and tagging Ellinor with a front leg side kick to the face. She was moving away, and the headgear probably helped, but it would still score Ana some points with the judges. Not to mention it was just a badass kick. The Dane was stunned from the technique momentarily, but still had her wits about her. As her opponent came in to setup a right hook to the body, she rushed Feliciana, clenching her hard and limiting her movement. The women stood in a deadlock, each throwing knees in an attempt land yet only really being able to use the inside of the knee, thus limiting the damage. After several long seconds of this, the ref called a brief stop to the action, separating the fighter’s before allowing them to continue.

Feliciana may have been the slightly shorter woman, but she knew she was stronger, could feel it when they clenched. Ellinor was being more cautious now, knowing if they ended up clenching again she’d be facing an opponent with superior strength. A pair of alternating kicks to the thigh were both successfully blocked by the Bred Akse fighter, but she got nailed with a straight left as she leaned her to the right after blocking the second strike. A follow up right hand caught her to the body, glancing off, but still resonating with the judges. As Ellinor prepared to land a left hook to her opponent’s head, Ana was able to duck and circle out. She landed another hard kick to the inside of the Danish fighter's left calf before bringing the fight back to the center of the ring. Ellinor tried a jab, doubling up before timing an overhand right that caught the Norwegian on the end of the nose. She hadn't moved her head enough when employing the strike however, and Feliciana was able to land a diagonal uppercut with her lead left, moving to her left to allow a heavy kick to catch Ellinor in the gut. As the other fighter prepared to return fire, the brunette covered up, skillfully dodging a short volley of straight punches before timing her competitor and rushing into the clinch.

Ellinor drove Feliciana backwards, the Norwegian fighter's back bouncing against the ropes of the ring. She was digging for underhooks, trying to setup an elbow from the break. Ana could feel this and moved her head off the center line to the right, as she circled the other fighter off the ropes. Ellinor tried for a knee, but Feliciana moved her hips out of the way, standing side long and allowing her left leg to be placed behind her opponent's own, with a heavy push and move to her left, Ellinor was left without a leg to stand on, crashing to the floor and catching herself. Isak and Chris let out a pair of loud, congratulatory cheers for their fighter and friend. The referee paused the action, allowing the Dane to get back to her feet. The remaining several seconds of the round consisted of Feliciana coasting, landing a few jabs and leg kicks, confident that the trip had won her the round. As the time was called for the end of the round, the Bred Akse fighter casually walked back to her corner, electing to stand while her opponent sat on the stool her corner provided. Chris and Isak were both pleased, their smiles broad across their faces.

“Great job that round Ana!”, Chris said, his arms held over the ropes, “We're winning in the clinch every time ok? And she’s gonna try and set up that knee again this round. When she throws it, I want you to slip, counter with that lead elbow, right hand combo, just like we worked in the gym
“K coach”, she responded, barely breathing hard. Chris chuckled at Isak's confused silence. “Now you talk.”, he said. Isak let out a short "Oh" of surprise before giving his advice to his friend. “You’ve got a right hand to the body after that elbow as well Ana. On the break she’s not protecting herself. Throw a jab just to make sure, but it's there. That switch kick is as well, she's underestimating you’re kicking range.” Isak poured some water into his fighter's mouth as the bell rang to signify the start of the second round.

**Round 2**

Ellinor came out of her corner with a tactical wildness about her. Her first strike was an attempted flying knee that Ana was able to time and move away from easily, however she wasn’t lucky enough to dodge the powerful *teep kick* to the abdomen that followed, backing her up as her opponent tried for a follow up roundhouse kick to the head. Feliciana was able to move away from the shot, blocking at the same time. She moved forward, scoring with a jab cross combo that caught Ellinor cleanly. This prompted the blonde fighter to initiate a clench, justifiably weary of the power behind her opponent’s punches. A short battle for dominance ended with the Danish competitor pressed against the ropes, Feliciana's arms trapped under her’s as they were secured around the other women's back. Ellinor's only recourse was to throw a few oblique knees, the significantly weaker strikes catching the Norwegian in the side. Attempting to move her opponent off the ropes, Feliciana threw knees of her own, but to much the same effect. After a few prolonged seconds of stalemate between the two, the blonde fighter's arms began to tire. She released Ana's arms, which would prove to be a mistake as the other fighter immediately tried to implement a lead elbow on the break.

She missed by just an inch, but was able to dodge Ellinor's return uppercut moving away from her fellow fighter and landing a glancing right straight in the process. Ana noticed that a small, thin trickle of blood had started to run from her opponent's nose. It would make a suitable target. As the two separated, Ellinor pressed forward, causing Feliciana to circle to her left. Each fighter threw straight lead hands, both only catching air. It was Ellinor who scored in the exchange however, delivering a step in knee with her lead leg as the brunette backed straight up. She was able to brush Ana with a lead hook afterwards, but it landed rather ineffectively as she bobbed her head out of the way. The elder fighter was able to land a well timed kick to the outside thigh of Ellinor before popping in a short lead straight for good measure. In her attempt to follow up with a heavy right overhand punch, the blonde was able to duck under and implement the clench again. Each woman was fighting for control, but the position ended with Ana on the ropes this time.

Ellinor was able to get and arm free, striking over the top with a short, hard elbow that caught the headgear of her oppoent. She attempted a short right hook after this, but was pulled back in by Feliciana, nullifying the strike. The blonde competitor now tried for a knee, but Ana turned her hips away from the ropes slipping away from the strike and trying for a elbow of her own. It glanced across the brow of the other woman, her upper arm catching her on the nose and reddening it even more. As Ellinor moved away from her opponent she was caught with a hard, arcing shot to the body. As she brought her hands to her face in anticipation of another attack, Ana threw out a jab, setting up a more devastating strike. Ellinor took the bait, moving her head to the right on both of the fighter's range finder's. A flash of Feliciana's hips turning was all the blonde saw before a hard, lead left *switch kick* slammed into her head, knocking her off balance and disorienting her. A follow up volley of punches landed cleanly, the referee trying to give the Dane time to defend
herself. The fourth unanswered shot sealed the deal as the official slipped in between the women, effectively ending the fight before Ellinor could take anymore damage. She protested for a short amount of time before accepting the stoppage, knowing, but not wanting to admit that had the ref not stepped in, she would've just taken more unnecessary punishment. Feliciana walked away from her opponent for a short Ali-esque celebration before reuniting with her, congratulating her on a well fought fight, each fighter putting their gloves together at chest level and bowing.

The fighter's went over to one’s another's corners, bowing to their opponent’s coaches in a sign of respect as each praised the fighter's for their performance. Once their protective headgear had been removed and the ringside doctor had passed each on the post fight concussion protocol, the dueling ladies came to the center of the ring, their respective corners sitting off to the side. The announcer entered the fighting space to proclaim the winner. Feliciana was a bit awestruck, she couldn’t even remember how she’d actually won at the moment. A loud, but short microphone whine echoed throughout the gym.

“Ladies and Gentlemen referee Fredrik Foss has called a stop to this match at one minute and twelve seconds into the second round.”, he spoke, adding a flare to his voice and holding out the vowels in round, “For your winner, by TKO……….Feliciana ‘A Louco Mamãe’ Corderon!” A respectful smattering of cheers and whoops could be heard in the gym as the victorious fighter made her exit from the ring. Isak and Chris embraced her as the three headed back to the locker room so she could get dressed. She’d need to rest up for her title fight tomorrow.

“I just don’t see how she got a concussion, she barely got hit!”, Chris said, confused that his fighter had sustained the concussion. Once they returned to the bed and breakfast, Feliciana had showered, but then complained of feeling ill. Her husband had come to Chris’ room after she'd vomited and he’d rushed to his fighter's aid. She’d asked the lights in the room to be dimmed or turned off, the photosensitive response a tell tale sign of a concussion. Chris had abandoned any ideation of his fighting going on to compete and Isak had contacted a local doctor to be sure. The man sounded annoyed over the phone, but agreed to check out the concussed fighter. He’d made his displeasure at the way Ana had received the concussion known, stating that a woman ‘shouldn’t be involved in something brutish like fighting in the first place.’ His acceptance was made with a complaint of ‘Not having many patients recently anyways.’ The comments didn’t go unnoticed by Chris. The doctor was an oblong shaped man; tall and balding with a red face and somewhat bulbous nose. “Well I’m sorry Mr. Schistad, but she’s in no shape to compete.” Chris didn’t appreciate the tone in the medical professional's voice. He narrowed his eyes moving closer to the doctor. “I understand that, and had no intention of attempting to make her. I know you may think I’m some brute who makes money off of violence Dr.…”, he paused, realizing Isak had been the one to call the doctor while he and Feliciana's husband kept her awake, “Whatever your name is, but I’m not. I care about my fighter's. Their health, safety, and longevity is more important to me than any title or championship could ever be. Maybe you’d be a more popular doctor if you treated your patients that way.”

The doctor was left slack jawed and gob smacked as Chris returned to the room where Isak was currently waiting. He opened the door, gently closing it behind himself as sat down on the younger man’s bed and laid back, sighing and shaking his head. “We didn’t spar hard for this fight or anything. Hell, she barely spared at all! It just sucks man. Ana’s been working towards this title for a while now.” Isak looked upon his friend and coach with sympathy. It sucked, but Chris'
fighter's health came first, Nordic Muay Thai Championship be damned.

“Well…”, Isak spoke tentatively, “I don’t mean to be that guy, but Feliciana is going on thirty eight years old dude. And she’s been in a few wars, especially earlier in her career.” Chris turned his head to look at his friend who was currently sat in a small chair in the corner of the room. He sighed again, nodding in agreement with the young fighter. “You've got a point. She did take some damage in her earlier fights.” Flapping his lips, the coach sat up, deciding the change the subject to Isak's current upswing in life lately. “So….. You're life is going pretty awesome lately I hear.” Isak chuckled, saying “Can’t complain.”

“Pffttt. I’ll say. Sponsorship deal, ad campaign representative, title shot coming up, and a fine ass boyfriend?”, Chris exclaimed, holding out word fine comically. He smiled at Isak. “You didn’t say he wasn’t your boyfriend this time.” A quizzical pair of eyes met the blonde's as he shrugged, attempting to suppress a smile and blush as he looked at his lap. “Well, uh, that's because he is……….my boyfriend, I mean.” Chris’ eyes widened as he smiled, playfully tapping Isak with the back of his hand and remarking “Dude!”, in a proud tone. He fixed the blonde's gaze with his own, his proud smile now turning mischievous.

“So…”, Chris began, Isak preparing himself for a jokingly crude comment, “You plowing this guy out?” Isak's face broke into an odd mix of laughter and cringe as he shook his head. “Jesus Christ Chris! We’ve only been dating like three weeks!” As the two looked at each other again they devolved into a short fit of giggles, each sighing contentedly at the end. The striking coach stood up, stretching with a groan before addressing Isak. “Well, speaking of plowing people, since we're in Denmark I’m gonna try and hook up with that couple again. I’m thinking Thindr is my best bet since I didn’t really exchange any info with them.”

“What the fuck is Thindr?”, Isak asked. Chris shrugged, nonchalant.

“Tindr and Grindr for threesomes.” Isak scoffed with a laugh.

“Of course it is. Look luck with that.”

Chris smiled goofily at his fighter.

“You just keep your hands off those goddamn delicious breakfast pastries, ok?”

Isak continued to smile, flipping off his coach as he left the featherweight’s room. The blonde laid back in his bed and sighed happily. He closed his eyes, trusting his stomach to wake him before dinner time. Isak drifted off to sleep, images of auburn highlighted hair and deep cinnamon eyes in his head. He wasn’t conscious enough to realize it, but the laugh of his imagined dream boy sounded suspiciously close to that of a certain tall and wiry jiu-jitsu instructor. Isak would be none the wiser.

Stuff for the fic

I feel like I went a bit overboard on this one, but you can always skip it if you wish lol.
Considering the amount of info to take in here, I would completely understand. If not however, enjoy, and let me know if any of you have questions, I'll do my best to answer them!

1. A kringle is a Nordic pastry that is the equivalent of a pretzel. They can be sweet or salty and have a variety of fillings. Their shapes range from pretzel like to circular.

2. Gherkins are small pickles that are made from picking the cucumbers when they are 1-3 inches long

3. 76 kgs - 167.5 lbs
   77 kgs - 169.7 lbs
   80 kgs - 180 lbs
   73 kgs - 160.93

4. SIAM Athlete Nation Gym is a martial arts school in Northern Copenhagen.

5. For the sake of the plot, the 2018 Nordic Muay Thai championship is being held in early 2019. This particular championship is usually held in the summer months, but due to the story's timeline this one is being "caught up" in January so the 2019 one can be held in summer like usual.

6. A Wai Khru dance is a ritual dance done in Muay Thai before a match. The dance pays homage and respect to the fighter's teachers, school, family and any deities they may worship. Wai Khru's can range from very simple and short to complex and even humorous, although most stay under two minutes so as not to hold up other matches. Mimed instances of using weapons associated with ancient warfare, bow and arrow, swords, spears, etc, are not uncommon.

6. The International Federation of Muaythai Amateur is the highest presiding body for amateur Muay Thai.

7. Super Bantamweight: 118 - 122 lbs
   1.7 m : 5' 5"
   1.75 m : 5' 7"
   54.5 kgs : 120 lbs

8. Amateur Muay Thai consists of 3 classes, C,B, and A. Each class allows for more variation in striking and less protective gear. Feliciana is fighting under A class rules, which employs headgear and elbow padding, but allows all strikes legal in a professional fight. In most amateur bouts, the specifics of the rules to be followed are agreed upon by both fighters before the match. Depending on the governing body, typical class rules may not be enforced if the fighter's have previously agreed upon certain stipulations of the class rules.

9. The main difference in Muay Thai and Kickboxing as combat sports are the use of elbows, knees, and clinch implementation. Sport kickboxing is focused, as it's name implies, on primarily kicking and punching combinations and techniques. Sport Muay Thai uses the "8 limbs" approach, which implements techniques using fists, elbows, shins, and knees. Differing from Karate or Tae Kwon Do, Muay Thai focuses on striking with the shin, whereas most East Asian striking arts have an emphasis on using the tops and bottoms of the feet in regards to kicking, although this is subject
to change depending on different styles.

10. A Louco Mamâe - Portugeuse, meaning "The Mad Mommy"

11. A Teep or Push Kick is a strike used in combat sports that permit kicking. It can be used to push an opponent away, knock them off balance, set up further kicks, or just as a "scoring" strike, i.e. a strike to win points on the judges score cards.

12. A Switch Kick is a kick set up by throwing or appearing to throw a kick with the opposite leg, then actually throwing the kick with the other leg. It's a very popular strike among combat sports that employ kicking. The gif I linked is an example of a flying switch kick by a woman's flyweight UFC fighter named Paige Van Zant, although the fight the gif is from was when she was in the strawweight division (115 lbs). It's a very effective technique with a high percentage of landing when done by a high level fighter. Since the setup itself is what the strike is actually named for, a variety of kicks can be used for the technique.

13. I don't know if any of you have ever had a concussion or know someone who has, but they can be pretty weird sometimes. I'm basing Feliciana's off a kickboxer named Joseph Valtellini (heheh, sounds like Valtersen a bit) who sustained a concussion in his title fight for the Glory Kickboxing welterweight championship a few years back. He won the fight, but received a bad concussion as a result of a knee in the 2nd round. Feliciana's case is a little different as it wasn't immediate like Joe's was. People's susceptibility to concussions can vary wildly, and are based on a variety of factors, many of which are genetic. Someone may not even show signs of a concussion until a few hours after their match. Concussions also become more common as a fighter ages and their ability to take damage lessens and are typically more likely to happen to men due to power differences. Having said that, there are a number of female fighter's across different combat sports who have some pretty heavy hands and could probably knockout or tko most men.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry again for the day late update. I don't know if any of you all have been watching the Marvelous Mrs. Maisel on Amazon, but I would highly recommend it, particularly if you're a fan of standup comedy and have an interest in the history behind it. Or history in general for that matter. Anyways, drop a comment or kudo if you want! I look forward to updating by next weekend! Love yourselves and each other!
Isak signs the contract for his title fight. Isak continues training. Even confronts an uncomfortable truth.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone! I'm back with a new update and also back to my regular posting schedule! The next several chapters, we're gonna be delving into Even's back story, starting with what went down in Stavanger. I'm also gonna be writing more from Even's perspective as well so you all get an idea for what he's feeling and thinking. I hope you're all liking the fic, enjoy!

Isak had started at Java on Monday, mainly learning the ropes in regards to cleaning, stocking, and being taught how to make a few orders. His supervisor assured him it would get easier as time went on. His eyes were on the clock; he’d scheduled his meeting with Noora and William for ten after fifteen, which was rapidly approaching. The blonde would’ve asked to get off his shift early, but thought it might look bad asking to leave early not even a week into his new job. Instead his eyes kept making furtive glances to the combination analogue and digital clock on the back wall of the shop. He was wiping down the counter and coffee maker when he heard a voice call his name.

“Isak?” The fighter looked up, finding the wide smile of Magnus Fossbakken staring back at him.

“Mags, hey man.”, replied the featherweight. He’d been missing Magnus and Mahdi at the gym since their Christmas break was over. Due to it's location, Bred Akse had a sizeable clientele of university students, including a number of Isak's friends.

“You getting off work soon?” Isak nodded back.

“Yeah, just give me like fifteen minutes ok?” Magnus agreed, going back to sit down with who the other blonde now realized was Vilde. Isak had always been kind of perplexed by her and Magnus’ relationship. They’d been together since they were second years, but still acted like teenagers. Although Isak did have to give them each credit; their kissing wasn’t nearly as weird or awkward
anymore. Since his eye had healed, the young fighter’s manager had put him in the front of the shop. Apparently Isak had a ‘gentle masculinity about him that both women and men appreciated.’ He didn’t really understand what his manager meant by that, but being in the front of the shop did pay a bit more, even if Isak’s small talk could at times leave something to be desired. He filled a few more coffee orders, serving up some pastries and bagels as well before clocking out and telling the other employees goodbye. Isak walked over to the table Vilde and Magnus were sat at, pulling his coat on and letting them know he was ready.

“We're going to have walk fast though. I’ve got to meet William and Noora at ten after.”, Isak informed Magnus. A light seemed to go off in the other boy's head as he pulled his friend into a hug, lifting him off the ground slightly. Isak laughed, gently pushing Magnus away and saying “Down boy, down!” “We heard about your title shot buddy! I'm so happy for you!” Isak smiled. “I appreciate it Mags, but if I don’t get going I might not have it anymore.”

“Oh”, Vilde interjected, “We can take you.” Isak looked skeptical until she held up the keys to an old Volvo. A few minutes later Isak was clutching his seat as Vilde weaved through the mid afternoon Grünerløkka traffic at a less than comfortable speed. Magnus looked back to his friend. “Vilde just got her license last month!”, he said excitedly. Isak gave a small, uncertain smile back as he nodded. “I can tell.” “You know you really should get your license Isak! It just provides you so much more freedom.”, Vilde said, hanging a sharp turn as they exited to the highway. “I think I’ll stick with the tram for now.”, the young man said. Vilde merely smiled, meeting Isak's eyes briefly in the rearview before shrugging. Once they were on the highway, Vilde seemed to drive a bit smoother. Isak's fingers let go of the cloth upholstery and he sighed in relief.

“So, you've uh……been spending some time with Sana's secretary I hear?”, Vilde said in a haphazard attempt at small talk. Isak's eyed widened a bit as he shrugged, trying to appear casual. “Yeah, he’s a good dude. Don’t know if he’d appreciate bring called Sana's secretary but……” Magnus chuckled, indicating to his girlfriend with his thumb. “This one put’s her foot in her mouth sometimes.” “Nah, no worries Vilde. Tobias is a pretty cool guy. I’m hoping to get him in the gym soon. Help him fulfill some new year's resolutions.”, Isak informed his friends. “That's the guy that returned your wallet right?” Magnus friend responded with a short affirmative grunt before taking a sip of his coffee, the drink finally cool enough to enjoy without scalding his mouth. “You know he really is very handsome Isak. I’m sure he’d be a hit with the girls in Bred Akse.” Isak thinned his lips, trying not laugh at Vilde's unknowingly clueless statement. “Yeah, I mean, I don’t know that those girls would be his uh…type….necessarily, but he is certainly a good looking guy.” Isak smiled to himself. The next several minutes of the ride were spent in relative silence, Magnus or Vilde talking amongst each other over the top forty on the radio. Isak felt a vibration in his pocket, reminding him he’d need to silence his phone in his meeting with the NFC co-owners. He saw a text from Tobias.

**Tobias**: Chris told me about your title shot!

So proud of you baby!

Here's a little motivation 😊
Isak wondered what his boyfriend was talking about, his face drawing in a bit. He didn’t have to wait long. A few seconds later, a picture message arrived, quickly painting a blush on the boy's face. It was a rather…suggestive picture of Tobi. He was lying on his bed, face not entirely in the picture, but his confident, sexy smirk and body were. Not to mention what Isak could only assume was the beginning of a dick imprint in some low riding sweats. He swallowed, looking up nervously, making sure Magnus and Vilde were still talking to one another. The couple were discussing the pros and cons of pet owning, so Isak knew he had some time. Gathering himself and employing all of his digital charm, he replied.

**Isak:** Keep giving me that kind of motivation and I’ll be a UFC champ in no time.

**Tobias:** lol, I’ll be sure to

Isak smiled at the other youth's response.

**Isak:** It's good to know we've reached sexting levels

**Tobias:** I mean, we were sexting before hahah

**Isak:** True, the pictures are a new and appreciated addition though

**Tobias:** Oh? Is there something I should look forward to?

**Isak:** You’ll just have to wait

Tobias sent a **gif** back, a disappointed looking kid shaking his head. Isak made a weird noise in his throat, attempting to not laugh.

**Isak:** Given the context of this conversation that gif is so inappropriate

Also, I’m trying hard not to laugh
Tobias: That’s what boyfriend’s who sext incorrectly get

Well, I was aiming to get you all hot and bothered but…..

I’ll settle for humor

Isak: Maybe you can have both later on

Tobias: Don’t make promises you can't keep

Isak: Oh I intend to keep them. I’m like Oathkeeper in this bitch.

Tobias:

Isak: Game of Thrones references don’t do it for you?

Tobias: Afraid not. I don’t watch it

Isak: Well, I guess we’re breaking up

It was good while it lasted

Tobias: Damn, knew it was too good to be true

Isak smiled at his boyfriend's playful response.

Isak: lol, so can I come by tonight?

Tobias: You're not leaving me for Jon Snow?
Isak: Nah, more a Robb Stark kind of boy anyway

Tobias: Mmm, those curls am I right?

Isak: Thought you said you didn’t watch?

Tobias: A guy can appreciate without watching.

Isak: True. Can I come over around 22:00?

Tobias: Works for me! ♥

Isak: ♥

“Isak?”

Vilde's questioning inflection brought the fighter out of his texting reverie. He looked out of the car window, noticing they’d arrived at the office Noora and William used for all their NFC related business.

“Oh, well thank you guys. I really appreciate the ride.”, he said as he exited the car.

“It’s no problem Isak! And it's great driving experience for Vilde.”

She nodded and smiled at Isak.

“It really is. Good luck with everything Isak! I’ll be rooting for you!”

Isak thanked the couple, and Vilde in particular, again before stepping onto the sidewalk. Sure, Isak may have feared for his life for a handful of seconds, but Vilde would get better. She always excelled at whatever she put her mind to. And if the featherweight was honest with himself, that’s one of the reasons he liked Magnus and Vilde as a couple; they complimented one another in a strange, but effective way. He paused momentarily, taking in the sounds and sights of the Bjørvika district before walking into the office building, ready to sign his contract.
Even looked at the time on his phone again, sighing gently as he looked from Chris Berg to Elias to William to Noora and then back to Elias.

“Kind of weird for him to be this late isn’t it? Maybe someone should call him?”, the grappling coach suggested. Right Even, it’s not that you just want to hear the sound of his voice. Right on cue, Isak entered the small office.

“No need! I’m right here. Vilde and Mags gave me a ride. Vilde drove.”

Elias whistled.

“Lucky you got hear at all, bro.”

Chris scoffed, smacking the gym owner on his arm to scold him. Noora rolled her eyes, but kept a smile on her face. “Shall we get started?” Everyone sat down, Isak's contract was put in front of him, Chris informing him she'd already read over it, stating the pay, benefits, and decision making power he’d be getting was very fair. The blonde's eyes scanned the singular sheet of paper, his attention immediately being grabbed by the figures listed within the contract, even if they were surrounded by lawyer jargon.

The language within this contractual document assures the Norske Fighting Championships employee ______________________

He stopped for a second, printing his name with a pen Chris provided him with before continuing.

Isak Valtersen shall receive no less than 50,000kr for competing in a title match against Joakim Oglinovsky in the division of featherweight on the date of Saturday, February 16th, 2019. In the instance of a victory before the end of the regulation time, the employee will receive no less than 10,000kr. This contract is legally binding, and the employee may pursue litigious action if they receive less than the agree upon sum from the promotional organization. If the employee violates any of the following rules, the promotion has the choice to withhold the employees payment for a period of no longer than one month or thirty days and to subtract no more than 30% of his purse.

Isak looked up from the contract, his eyes bright and wide, in contrast with the skepticism on his face. He cleared his throat, looking at his smiling manager before turning to speak to Noora and
William.

“The uh….the money is um….you're aware there are four zeros…”, he looked between the husband and wife, “In both figures?” The couple smiled at Isak.

“We are aware Isak.”, William said, “It’s actually sort of the point.” Noora nodded along with her husband. “We’re not the biggest promotion in Northern Europe as far as our roster goes, but we’re the most professional.” William looked at Isak, giving a shrug and pulling his lips in. “We’re also the richest Isak. I don’t mean to brag, but one of the reasons we pay our fighter’s more is because we can afford to and because they deserve it.” The contender now had an unhindered smile on his face as he nodded. He read through the rest of the contract, which was actually pretty simple. It reiterated the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts and listed them, as well as the amount of time a competitor had to recover from an accidental groin strike or eye poke. All in all, it was like the contracts Isak had been signing since he was nineteen, this one just had considerably more money attached to it. He looked over to Noora.

“Ok, what are the,” Isak looked back down at the document, “Championship clauses and rules?”

“So they’re basically the rules you need to follow to keep your belt if you win it.”

“When he wins it.”, Even said to Noora, giving a short, adorably bad wink in Isak's direction. The fighter grinned back as his employer broke the rules down.

“First things first, barring an injury or your retirement, if you want to keep the title, you’ll need to defend it at least once every twelve months. It doesn't have to be a traditional January to December year, but it does have to be within twelve months of when you won the title. Second, you will be expected to represent NFC as a champion. This means no getting arrested, no sexist, homophobic, racist, or xenophobic posts on social media, and carrying yourself and acting in a way that is consistent with our values.”

Isak smacked his lips together, faking disappointment.

“I was just gonna get drunk, start fights and be an asshole after I got the title but….”

The challenger was pleased to hear a round of chuckles from his friends.

“We know that’s not gonna be a problem with you Isak. Or any of our fighters for that matter.”, William told Isak. “That does bring us to the third set of stipulations though”, he continued, “Which is our secondary promotional offer clause. Essentially if within the first year of holding the championship you're offered employment from another promotion, you can vacate the belt without any penalty and without having to defend it. I do want to be clear though, this is only if another promotion offers you a contract Isak. Not that you ever would, but if you were to give us fabricated information that resulted in the false implementation of this clause, it would be grounds for immediate title stripping and expulsion from the promotion. Oh and there's another bit of leverage
you’ve got here. You can choose either a single, double, or triple fight extension on your contract regardless of whether you win or lose.”

Isak had heard and understood everything, but it all still felt surreal. He turned to his manager for assurance. “You trust all this? I mean, I know you guys are good people,”, Isak said, motioning to his dual bosses, “But it’s all legit? All above ground?” Chris broke into a smile, clearly happy for her friend and client. “As I said Isak, it is a very fair contract. We’d be making a mistake if we tried to get something better.” Isak returned the smile, nodding before signing the contract and turning it over to Noora. He stood, shaking the couples hands individually as Elias smacked hid hands together in a singular, loud clap.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you're looking forward to watching my best fighter take that belt!”, the boxing coach exclaimed proudly, giving a squeeze to his fighter's shoulder. “Also, don’t tell anyone else at the gym I said that, they ‘ll definitively get jealous.”

The friends all enjoyed a laugh at Elias joking remark before slowly separating and going their own ways. Even waited for Isak, making some small talk with William and Noora about their impending roles as parents while the title challenger finished up speaking with Chris. The client and manager shared a short hug in celebration before both filed out of the office. Even was quick to saddle up beside Isak.

“Congrats man! I'm so proud of you!”

Isak grinned back.

“Well I think you deserve some of the credit. You're a part of the reason I’m here to begin with.”

Even smiled back, lifting his shoulders.

“I mean, I didn’t like Tonya Harding Sven's knee if that’s what you're implying.”

Isak let out a genuine laugh as his coach gave an eye crinkling smile back.

“Ah! You’re laughing! You finally understood one of my outdated references.”

“I do, but it’s not cause I’m cool or anything. I just saw that movie.”

Even sighed, “I’ll take what I can get. I’m heading over to the gym now. You want a ride?”

“Even, you don’t need to be my personal chauffeur.”
“I don’t mind. Besides, this way you have more time to train.”

Isak couldn’t, or rather didn’t want to argue with the older man’s logic. It did make a lot of sense after all. The two got into Even’s car, and eerie, industrial guitar riff disrupted the silence in the cabin of the vehicle as soon as the taller man turned the ignition. Isak looked at his coach with a smirk as he began lightly head banging. After a minute or so of driving the car soon rolled to a halt at a stoplight.

“Oh!”, Even said excitedly, “It’s the breakdown! You go drums I’ll go guitar.” The older man then proceeded to play air guitar vigorously, attempting to keep up with the song. Isak laughed uproariously, but started air drumming, trying to keep any semblance of a beat. The light turned green and Even peeled off, going back to his slow, controlled head banging. “What is this Even?”, Isak asked, confused enjoyment in his voice. “**Babymetal** Isak. One of the cutest and most badass thing’s Japan's ever produced. It’s three Japanese girls belting out some of the heaviest and most technical metal you’re ever going hear.” “Dude, this is like…..I don't even like metal that much but…” “But you like Babymetal.”, Even said, making a statement rather than a question. Isak chuckled, nodding as he shrugged. “I do. I like Babymetal.” The other man’s eyes strayed to Isak’s for a second, his heart warming at the carefree joy he saw there. It was nice to know Isak felt that. *Taking solace in other's good feelings doesn't eliminate the bad one's you have.* Looking back to the road, the black belt turned the music up, focusing on driving and reminding himself that he could be happy for Isak all he wanted, but that he shouldn’t be so selfish as to use that happiness to make himself feel better. It wouldn’t matter in the end anyways. It never did……

Even had suggested some light grappling training to Isak after he and Chris had worked on his southpaw stance. Elias had been busy getting Olmieve ready for his first title defense, and with Isak’s splint still not quite ready to come off, they mostly worked kicks, trips, elbows, and knees. Even was currently tied up with Isak against the cage, giving him instructions as they worked. The coach and student were clenching one another, Isak’s uninjured left hand wrapped securely around Even's neck while the other one was on the taller man’s left hip. They were working on setting up take downs and trips off an opponent throwing knees. “That’s good Isak. You have that arm there, you can gauge when I’m going to throw the knee. Feel for the shift in my hips, then you react ok?” Isak confirmed the instruction with a soft “Hmm” through his mouthguard. Even tightened his grip around his students neck, miming pulling his head into the strike. He could feel Isak's resistance and shook his head. “No. You need to be more relaxed Isak. The whole point of this drill is so you trick him okay? Relax your neck. When I go for the knee? That’s when you relax, slip and set up your takedown. Let’s try again.” The pair reset into the same position. This time, when Even pulled Isak's head down to imply the strike, the shorter man was able to easily slip out to his left and catch the strike under his coach's thigh, his left arm securely pulling the leg close to his body and putting his head into the center of Even’s chest. “That’s awesome Isak! Now from here, you're going to use that other leg to trap or sweep. It’s all momentum after that. Put it all together this time ok?” The featherweight breathed out a short “Ok” before repeating the drill.

This time, when he caught Even's right leg, nullifying the knee strike, he pressed himself tight to the other man forcing them both away from the cage. As Isak pulled Even’s leg to him he placed his right behind the instructor's left, pulling it into him as he pushed forward, the two tumbling down to the canvas. **Isak ended up in half guard, his left leg in between Even’s. The jiu-jitsuka then**
swiftly bridged his hips up, pushing Isak forward and then twisting his hips and body off to the side. This allowed Even to triangle the smaller man's legs together, moving to his back as he did this, quickly readjusting so the triangle was now locked around Isak's body and the two were hand fighting. A few seconds of this and Isak let out a loud groan. “Ok Even now you're just showing off!” The coach laughed into the side of Isak's head, untangling himself and sitting back, bracing himself on his outstretched arms. “I don’t know if you know this, but Joakim Oglinovsky isn't a…. …”, Even leaned closer to Isak cradling his own face between his palms and nodding for Isak to continue, “A fucking….ninja monkey!” “Ooh, ninja monkey! I like it.” “Viking ninja monkey, dude.”, Chris proposed from where was outside observing the two work. “Ah, sorry Isak, viking ninja monkey is just way cooler.” The fighter rolled his eyes as he stood up, undoing his gloves and pulling the velcro from his hand wraps apart. “Aw, don’t be all sour man!”, Chris said to Isak as he unlocked the cage and drained down the rest of his water bottle, “Even's got you on experience by like, almost two decades. Plus he's almost old enough to be your dad.” “Hey!”, the other coach protested, despite the open mouth smile that shown on his face.

Isak had collected his gear and was going to head into the shower until he saw a disgruntled and still sweaty Olmeive shaking his head. The exhausted fighter sighed. “Hot water's on the fritz again man. Better wait till you get home.” Isak nodded begrudgingly, but decided he'd take his teammate’s advice. Even had walked up beside the shorter blonde, putting an arm around him, the warm weight of his sweat damp rash guard making Isak inhale sharply. “I don’t suppose you need one more ride Isak?”, Even inquired. With the man this close, Isak could see the moisture still lingering is his hair and on his face. He could also see the little freckles and tiny moles that were scattered around his face. He really is very handsome Isak.

Upon hearing Vilde's voice inside his head, Isak responded. “Actually if you could drop me off at my boyfriend's that would be pretty cool.” The black belt’s eyes widened just slightly, accompanied by a tiny nod and a “Sure thing man.” It was a small gesture, but Isak was thankful to Even for not making a big deal out of it. Just saying those words out loud, so casually, was a big step for Isak. But damn if it didn’t feel good to say. And not just to say it, but to not have anyone care. He’d said it loud enough for the remaining few people in the gym to hear, and no one had even brought it up. It felt good. It felt…..normal.

21:51

The two had gathered their belongings and said goodbye to the other gym members, Isak receiving multiple praises for his title shot. Even had changed the music when they'd gotten into his car, saying he needed something to “Cool down to.” He noticed the younger man unconsciously bobbing his head while he texted, smiling or chuckling every so often. Even couldn’t deny it, Isak looked cute as hell. While he’s probably texting his boyfriend! Step off Bech Naesheim! The coach cleared his throat, hoping to clear away certain thoughts as well. He spoke up once he noticed the younger had put his phone back into his jacket pocket. “You like the music?”', Even asked, throwing a subtle nod to aux cable connected to his car's speaker's. “Mhmm, I feel like I’ve heard it before.” “You probably have. It’s Nas. He’s an pretty incredible rapper. One of the best ever in my opinion.” Isak only made a small sound in recognition, the two staying silent for the next few minutes.

Even knew the answer to the question in his head, but he needed to hear Isak say it. Needed to hear that there was no chance with him. “You and Tobias are official then?”, Even asked, keeping his tone as neutral as possible.
Isak turned to him, a small, but authentic smile showed across his lips.

“We are. I’m not like, waving a rainbow flag behind me or anything, but I’m not going to lie about it anymore. If someone asks I’ll tell them. I think I’m just starting to be ok with not being in control of how other people react to things, you know?”

Even, nodded smiling back politely.

“I know exactly what you mean. It took me a while to get to that point too, but it’s pretty freeing when you do.” A noticeable tension filled the air. Not an uncomfortable one, but certainly an identifiable one. Even decided to dissolve it with another question.

“How does Tobias feel about dating a fighter?”

Isak shrugged.

“He's cool with it. I’d like to get him in the gym so he can see what we actually do. Right now I think he’s trying to get past the whole ‘fit dudes rolling on top of each other’ thing.”

Even chuckled, smiling at Isak's observation.

“Yeah getting into Jujutsu when I was just starting to realize I liked boys too was certainly an interesting experience. Set and setting I guess.”

Isak hummed in agreement, each going silent again. A few minutes more of driving and they’d reached Tobias’ apartment complex. The fighter unbuckled himself turning to his coach.

“Thanks for driving me around today man. You know you really didn't have to.”

Even pursed his lips as he shrugged.

“It’s no problem. Besides, I like talking to you.”

Isak gathered his belongings, turning to Even.

“Yeah, I like talking with you too, dude. I do need to get going though. Boyfriend and everything.”

“Oh right, of course you do.” Even unlocked the doors so his fighter could get out of the vehicle. Yeah Even. Boyfriend and everything.
“See you tomorrow coach!”, the title contender called to the older man as he began walking away from the car. _He’s never called me coach before….fuck! Was I too forward? Did I say something inappropriate?_

“Ok Isak, get some rest!”, Even shouted after his student. Once Isak had entered the building, the grappling coach’s head fell back onto the seat cushion as he let out a long, labored sigh, followed by a muttered “Fuck.” He knew he needed to talk to someone, but there were only so many people he could tell about this without getting an earful about ‘repeating the same patterns’ and ‘remembering what happened last time.’ He pulled out his phone, speed dialing someone he knew wouldn’t judge. A few short rings later, the comforting, mild baritone voice of Mikael Øverlie Boukhal greeted Even's auditory senses. 

“Hey Mikki……I think I have a problem….”

“What's up dude?”, Mikael asked. Even looked down at his lap, sighing from his nose.

“I think I'm falling for someone.”

“Well, wait, Even that's great! You know your psychiatrist said romantic feelings were a good sign. Plus it’s officially been over two years since your last episode, so this is actually a good bit of progress and I think-“

“You didn't let me finish Mikael. They um…”, Even pushed more air from his lungs, “He......he already has a boyfriend.”

Mikael could hear the pain and disappointment in his friend's tone.

“Damn. That's rough man. I could get some pizza and beer if you want? Throw on _John Wick_? Have ourselves a miniature boy's night?”

“Rain check on the beer, but the rest of that sounds amazing. Seriously Mikki, I really appreciate it.”

“It’s what friend's are for Even. I’ll see you when you get home.”

“See you soon.”

Even put his phone in the center console before cranking his music and heading home, disheartened and rapidly intellectualizing to himself why not pursuing Isak's affections earlier was the right choice. But Even knew himself, knew what he felt. This was no passing crush or small infatuation. No. Even Bech Naesheim was in the smothering quicksand of unrequited love, and he
wasn't even up to his ankles yet. Whatever he did, he knew it couldn’t be like last time. He couldn't afford it to be. Not if he wanted to be happy again in the future. Not if he wanted to keep the friends he'd made at Bred Akse over the last several months. And especially not if he wanted to be in his daughter's life again. Even was just going to have to grit his teeth and get through this.

Stuff for the fic

1. **Vilde's Volvo**

2. **Oathkeeper** is the name of Brienne's sword in Game of Thrones/ASOIF.

3. Bjørvika is a neighborhood within the Sentrum borough in Oslo. As a port city, it has historically been a business center in much the same way Grünerløkka is considered an arts district.

4. **BABYMETAL - Karate**

5. **Nas - Nas Is Like**

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I always appreciate any feedback and opinions, questions, or ideas you all have so give me a comment if you want! I'm writing the next chapter right now so I'll be back next Friday or Saturday with a new update. Oh, and I've also updated the Spotify playlist if anyone is interested. Have a great weekend everyone! I'll see y'all next week! Remember to love yourselves and each other!
Chapter Summary

Even speaks to his psychiatrist. Isak has his last training session before his title match. Even, Isak and friends head to Stavanger.

Chapter Notes

So right off the bat, let me apologize for getting this out a week late. I've honestly been a bit burnt out on writing lately and don't want to give a subpar update for you guys. Having said that, I also need to apologize for some dishonesty concerning my martial arts background. I started training in traditional martial arts when I was 13 and began mma training a few years after this. I don't really know why I wasn't honest about it, I guess it's my own weird insecurities, but that's not an excuse to not be honest with you all. Anyways, I hope everyone is doing well and that y'all enjoy the chapter! I'll be getting into Even's point of view and back story more and more over the next few chapters so expect some angst! Oh, and Isak's title fight will be in the chapter after next. Hope everyone's enjoying the story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

4 weeks later

Torsdag

Februar 14th, 2019

16:04

Even had left work promptly, making sure to get to his appointment on time. He’d need to be at the gym by eighteen to help Isak in his last training session though. The young man in question was actually part of the reason he was currently in his psychiatrist’s office. The mental health professional had been with Even since he was in his early twenties, her advice and experience helping him on numerous occasions. She more than just someone who prescribed medication for Even; she was someone who provided him with ways to maximize the satisfaction and happiness he had in his own life. The soft click of a door closing clued the man in to his doctor's arrival. She was an older woman, maybe in her late fifties, she had greying hair done up in a small bun. Wire frame glasses rested high on the bridge of her aquiline nose. She wore a tightly fitted, but professional blue grey blazer and knee high skirt, finishing the outfit with a pair of short, flat soled heels. She sat in the chair across from Even to the side of her desk, smiling at him.

“Sorry about the wait, I had to reschedule with another client. Speaking of rescheduling, we usually meet at the end of the month, so what's up?”
Her tone was more conversational than professional, one of the things Even liked about her. He didn’t really know how to explain his situation, so he just blurted it out.

“I’m falling in love with a guy who already has a boyfriend and I don’t know what to do.”

The woman sighed then nodded, casting a wistfully empathetic gaze at Even.

“Well I’m certainly sorry to hear that Even. I know you’ve dealt with unrequited feelings before. But, fortunately, that’s just it. You have dealt with this before. Would I be correct in guessing you’re afraid of having an episode like you did back in Stavanger a few years ago?”

The blue eyed man could only nod.

“Ok, well let’s get some more information. I know it might be hard to judge this way, but on a scale of one to ten, how strong would you say your feelings for this guy are Even.”

He sighed, shrugging and shaking his head.

“Maybe like, six right now, but it’s just going to get worse.”

“And you don’t have the option to not have contact with him?”

“Not really. He's a fighter that I train. A really good one too. I don’t want to let a stupid little crush ruin our relationship as coach and student.”

“Ok, but let’s be honest about the situation. You’re sitting in my office, so it’s obviously not just a crush.”

“Minimizing the situation.”, Even said robotically.

“That’s what the fuddy duddy’s would say, yes. How uncomfortable would you say you are around this man Even? Do your feelings make interacting with him awkward?”

“No. I mean, he doesn’t know how I feel so, I don’t see how they would.”

“Would you say you’re concerned about him finding out? About how that could effect your relationships with other people at the gym?”

“I hate to say it, but yes. Is-, this young man is one of the best fighter’s in the whole gym. In the whole of Norway in my opinion. Plus I’ve made a lot of friends there, and I still teach my kid’s jiu-jitsu class there so yes. It would complicate a lot of things.”

The psychiatrist nodded in understanding.

“You haven’t been losing sleep over this? Still focused at work and everything?”, she asked.

“Yes. Really focused at work actually. The campaign has been going great. It’s release is actually a couple months ahead of schedule.”

“That’s great Even! And how is your family life?”

The tall blonde knew when his doctor said those words she meant his relationship with his daughter, Iben, and his parents. For a change though, he actually had somewhat good news about that as well.

“Not too bad actually. Iben has dropped the damages case against me, on Julian's request I’m
almost sure. Oh, and if everything goes as planned I’ll be seeing my parents and Lillian Saturday at the fight in Stavanger.”

Even’s psychiatrist’s eyes widened at the new information.

“That’s really good! I’m glad you’re getting to see her, even if it’s not quite on your terms yet. Can I suggest something though?”

Even nodded.

“Are you familiar with geographic memory triggers Even?”

“No, but I think I can get the gist of it from the name alone.”

The woman hummed and nodded at him.

“It would make some sense. You’ve had three major bipolar episodes in your life up to this point. Two of them took place in Stavanger. If you don’t mind me asking, where does the opponent that your fighter will be competing against train?”

Even swallowed, breaking down the logic the professional was using and finding it difficult to ignore.

“StavMAC.,” he said quietly.

“So, it wouldn’t be unreasonable to say that some of this apprehension in regards to the man you’re having feelings for could be stemming from going back there.”

Even was silent for a few seconds.

“I’m not trying to put words in your mouth here Even,”, she said, “I’m just trying to give some alternative reasons for why you might be feeling uneasy.”

“I’ve had those feelings in the past, but……”, He sighed deeply, “It really isn’t that. It’s just, the feeling I got before everything went down a few years ago. Before I…..before we ruined everything…..” The woman smiled at Even.

“It’s nice to hear you not putting all that fault on yourself Even, I must say. Remember, your realities aren’t always a direct line to your actions and your actions alone.”

Even quirked a small smile at his doctor.

“I wish I had realized that when I was seventeen.”

The psychiatrist shrugged.

“Live and learn. I interrupted you though. What were you going to say?”

“Oh, well just that this does feel different. I get having bad memories about a place, but that’s not what this is. It’s not an infatuation either. I can’t really describe it….it just…..it feels real.”

“Real or not, if it's one-sided like you say, you’re only hurting yourself thinking about it this much. Believe me Even, I wish there was a pill I could prescribe you to get rid of that feeling, but there’s not. The best advice I can give you is to monitor it, which I know can be a hard thing to do. The minute it starts to feel like you’re obsessing about this man, or anything or anyone else for that matter, I want you call me ok?”
“Ok.”, Even responded.

“And in my professional opinion, I don’t think you're at the beginning of an episode right now
Even. I think you have some unreturned feelings for someone you’ve gotten close to over the last few months and it hurts.”, she reassured him, shrugging her shoulders and nodding.

Even nodded in agreement as well. The rest of the time was spent with Even talking about his work and family. Any undue stress he'd been putting on himself, how his medication was working for him, any changes in his living situation, all pretty normal subjects between a psychiatrist and their patient. A the session drew to a close, he thanked his doctor, telling her he’d be sure to keep her informed of any new feelings or changes in his life. She stopped him as he was starting to walk out the door.

“Oh, and Even?”

He turned toward her, an inquisitive shine in his eyes.

“I really do think you should get yourself back out there. Having a few dates would be good for you. Maybe even get your mind off some things?”

He smiled back.

“I’ll definitely think about it. Thanks again Mrs. Heidt. I’ll see you in March.”

The patient and professional bid one another adieu, and safe travels in Even's case. Maybe she was right. Maybe Even did need to go on some dates. It’d take his mind off Isak for a bit if nothing else. With that thought in mind, Even fired off a text to Sonja.

**Even:** Hey, do you still have the number of that girl you used to work with?

**Sonja:** I think so, she may have a boyfriend though so tread lightly

Even snorted as he replied.

**Even:** Thanks for the heads up.

He returned his phone to his pocket, bracing himself against the cold, wet weather of the late Oslo winter. *Maybe a couple relaxed dates are just what I need.*

21:42

Perspiration was pouring from every pore in his body. His rash guard had been long discarded, if
this was going to be his last training session before leaving for Stavanger, Isak wanted it to be as close to the real thing as possible. He’d been training since eighteen, taking a half hour to eat dinner before getting back into it. His weight cut had gone easier than expected, but Isak chalked it up to still being in shape from his last fight. He was presently on the sixth and final round of his last training session. Chris had gotten a fresh training partner for Isak for each round, the last one being Olmeive. The fight would only be five rounds, but the featherweight’s coaches wanted him to be prepared. Isak's opponent was known for his endurance.

The two were currently circling one another, a couple of minutes left on the clock. Isak's body was tired, but his mind was only getting sharper in each round. As Olmeive snapped out a judging jab, Isak slipped it, going to one knee before attempting to swipe Olm’s lead leg by pulling his ankle towards him. When the larger fighter pulled hid leg back to defend, Isak took his shot, transitioning from the ankle pick position to a far side single leg; abandoning Olmeive’s left leg and shooting in to secure his right. Isak rose up quickly, changing the hand position on his training partner's leg to rewrap his arms around his upper thigh, lifting the stockier man and moving him away from the fence, closer to the center of the cage. Once Olmeive was on his way back down to the mat however, he threw his left leg over Isak's shoulder, off balancing the other fighter. Seeing a few steps ahead into his friend's game, Isak brought his arms close to his body, being sure not to let Olmeive snatch anything up. After he'd shucked the other man off himself, Isak stood back, breathing hard. He settled his hands to his hips, catching his breath while he snapped a few lazy kicks to the outside of Olm’s thighs. Upon seeing him set up for another kick, the lightweight champion dexterously shifted his hips, moving off his back and catching Isak's kick midway. He secured it underneath his left arm, Isak's knee being caught up just behind his partner's armpit. As Olmeive stood to his knees, Isak attempted to sprawl, but he wasn’t quick enough. The lightweight fighter snatched Isak's left leg, pulling it close into the other one he already had a hold of, stripping the boy's base. Olmeive then pulled forward, stranding briefly to drive his shoulder into Isak's gut as he pushed the title challenger back onto the mat.

Olm had been so focused on getting Isak back down however, he didn’t realize that the featherweight had slipped his right leg over his head. As the duo landed back onto the canvas, Isak swiftly took a hold of his training partner's right wrist, keeping the appendage glued to the mat of the cage as he twisted his hips up. While he was doing this, Olmeive moved his body forward, attempting to press his friend back to the floor of the octagon. This played right into Isak's plan however as he now turned his hips fully so they were facing the mat. He'd pulled Olm's right arm out along with him, kicking his hips and legs out to secure the submission. It only took a few seconds of being caught in the belly down armbar for the lightweight champ to quickly tap; Isak rolling off to the side and releasing a huge breath right as the buzzer went off to indicate the round was over.

Olmeive repositioned himself into a cross legged position, smiling at his friend and training partner. “You fight like that on Saturday and that belt's yours man.” Isak laughed, his breath coming out in long, harsh waves. The blonde looked over, seeing Tobi and Emma talking to each other, smiling and laughing. Isak caught his boyfriend's eyes, the pair smiling at one another across the gym. “Yo!” The featherweight’s attention was pulled to Elias who had been observing the training session. “Go shower and get home to bed Isak. We gotta be up early tomorrow to make it to the afternoon weigh ins.” The blonde nodded at his coach, scooping up his gym bag that contained his street clothes and heading to the shower. He stripped down quickly, turning the hot water on full blast and sighing happily as the hot rivulets washed away the sweat and grime from the training session. As the title challenger's muscles began to relax he heard the high pitched whine of a creaking door, followed by a short wolf whistle.

Isak smiled to himself as he looked back over his shoulder, meeting his boyfriend's appreciative
gaze. He laughed breathily saying “It’s nothing you haven’t seen before.” Tobias grinned back, shrugging and telling the older boy, “It's like looking at a really……cool painting. I love seeing it, but I notice something new every time.” Isak laughed as he scrubbed his hands through his hair. He rinsed the shampoo from his scalp before cutting off the flow of water and turning to his boyfriend with a small smirk.

“I’m being relegated to just ‘cool’ now Tobi?” he said while securing a towel around his waist.

The brunette smiled back and shook his head.

“Not at all, I just thought your sexiness went without saying.”

As the two were talking they had walked closer to one another, now only a few inches from each other. Isak’s smile faltered as he went in for a kiss, the other young man meeting him halfway as the pair shared a short, but intense lock of lips.

“Let me get dressed then we’ll head back to your place ok?”, the blonde informed his significant other. Tobi smiled small and nodded, giving a whispered “Ok”, before diving back in for another kiss. Isak giggled into it, but humored the younger man for several more seconds before gently pushing at his shoulders. “I’ll be out in a minute ok?” Tobias hummed in acknowledgement, reluctantly backing away from the blonde. Isak smiled back at him until he left the locker room, sighing happily to himself as he dressed for the chilly streets of Oslo in February. After getting his gear together, he pushed open the locker room door, noticing his boyfriend waiting for him off to the side.

“You ready?”, Tobias asked.

Isak hummed his response as he chugged a bit of water from his bottle, noticing Olmeive and Emma talking to each other and leaning against the platform that held the cage. The lightweight champion seemed to have said something to make the brown haired girl laugh as she leaned toward him, lightly running a hand over his rash guard. Isak smiled to himself, looking over to Tobi.

“When did that start?”, he inquired of his boyfriend, nodding in the direction of his friend's. Tobi shrugged his shoulders.

“After she realized you were gay I guess.” Isak nodded back, telling his boyfriend it made sense. Unbeknownst to anyone but Isak, he knew Olm had actually had a bit of a crush on Emma for a while. And it would appear that the other youth had similar feelings. The couple pulled on their winter coats before telling their friend's goodbye. Chris stopped the featherweight as he and his boyfriend were about to walk out the door.

“So there’s been a little bit of a change in plans for tomorrow.”

“Ok.”, Isak said, nodding for his coach to continue.

“Even’s car is actually in the shop so you, Tobi, Magnus and Even are gonna be riding with Vilde. That cool with you guys?”

“Sure!”, Tobias said before Isak could answer, “I love Vilde!”

The blonde snorted.

“Well that makes one of us.”

“I heard that Isak!”, Magnus said from halfway across the gym, currently scrubbing down the
mats. The friends smiled at one another as Tobias confirmed the change in plans. The two said their final rounds of goodbyes before walking out of the gym into the cold night air. There was an uncomfortable silence between them as they walked to the tram stop down the street from Bred Akse. Tobias cleared his throat.

“Babe?”

“Hmm?”, Isak replied.

“You don’t like….have a problem riding with Vilde do you? Cause you know we can always catch a ride with Chris and Elias. Or if not them then we could catch the train. If I get the tickets right n-“, Isak silenced his boyfriend with a long peck on the lips, pulling back before darting his eyes around. He wasn’t proud of the reaction, but a few months ago he wouldn’t have even had the courage to kiss another guy in public, much less one he was actually dating.

“It’s cool Tobi. I don’t mind riding with Vilde. I’ll probably be sleeping most of the time anyway so….”, he gave a short lift of his shoulders, indicating he had no problem with the change in car pooling. As the two waited for the tram, Isak sighed to himself, considering an issue he’d kept in the back of his mind, but hadn’t addressed aloud.

“I just hope Even's not uncomfortable or anything. This will be his first time back in Stavanger since everything happened.”

Tobias turned to his boyfriend, asking what he was talking about exactly. Isak sighed.

“I don't know the details or anything, but apparently Even had a pretty bad falling out with the people who run Stavanger Martial Arts Center. I’ve never really asked him about it though. Just seems like it would be rude you know?”, Isak told the shorter boy. Tobias nodded in agreement.

“As long as he’s there for you on fight night, none of that matters to me.”

Isak turned to his boyfriend, a confident smile across his face.

“He will be. Even's a good guy.”

As the two were finishing they’re conversation, the tram arrived. The young men boarded it, their cheeks turned crimson by the winter weather. The couple sat down, their arms and thighs nestled next to one another, and enjoyed looking out at the city pass by on their way back to Tobias' apartment.

Fredag
Frebruar 15th, 2019
6:43

Even had been up since six, easily going through two cups of coffee. He'd also already relieved himself, hoping that he wouldn’t be the cause of any delays the group might experience on their way to the event. His discussion with his psychiatrist had been productive in reassuring Even that he could do this. It was actually pretty easy to put aside the unpleasant history he associated with the city if he just remembered all the good times and experiences he’d had there. Not to mention
the fact that he’d be getting to see Lillian, even if it was just for a handful of hours and under the supervision of Julian and Iben. It was still worth it. As a rumpled looking Mikael sauntered into the kitchen, Even smiled, pointing him in the direction of the half full carafe of coffee as the younger man groggily poured himself a cup, allowing the drink to warm his hands. He sat down with his friend, gently sipping at the still too hot beverage.

“So, you ready?”, Mikael said, his voice still gravelly from sleep.

Even smiled sarcastically at the other man.

“Ready to spend seven hours in a car with the guy I have a crush on and his boyfriend?”

Mikael rolled his eyes, but maintained a semblance of a grin.

“I meant do you have everything ready for the trip, but I suppose that’s your main concern eh?”

“It’s not”, Even sighed, “It’s not a concern really just……a regret I guess.”

“A regret?”, the tall blonde's friend asked.

“Yeah. Listen, I like Tobias and I really think he's good for Isak. In fact, I know he is. I guess I just….”, the grappling coach shrugged, shaking his head while searched for his answer, “I wish I at least had the chance for him to realize that we weren't going to work out you know?”

The ebony haired man pushed a sigh through his pursed lips.

“Can I be honest Even?”

“I'd prefer if you were, yes.”

“You've gotta get over this man. I mean, you’re in mourning for a relationship that never even happened dude. I’m not saying what you feel for Isak isn't real, but I think it's also possible you're idealizing what your relationship would've been.”

Mikael took another sip of his coffee, this one longer since the drink had cooled down. As Even was considering what his friend had said, his phone vibrated on the table. He glanced down at his lock screen, seeing a text from Vilde that said they were at his apartment complex. He walked back into his bedroom, gathering up his overnight bag and slinging it across his back. He'd already bundled up for the cool weather out on the western coast so he was ready when he came back out to the kitchen. Mikael had moved from the table to the counter, leaning against it while loudly slurping down his coffee. He looked to Even with a pair of sympathetic eyes.

“I didn't mean to be so harsh, Even. I just hate seeing you upset.”, he said, pushing himself away from the counter and enveloping his friend in a tight hug. “You’ve got this buddy. Ok?”, he leaned back from the taller man, glad to see him smiling. “Give Lilli a hug for me man!”, Mikael exclaimed, walking back to his room to get dressed and prepared for the day. “I will!”, Even replied, scooping his thermos up from the table and walking through the small hallway adjacent to the kitchen that lead to the front door. He moved down the stairs quickly, opening the complex’s double doors to be met with Vilde's Volvo, the exhaust pooling around the back of the vehicle before quickly dissipating in the frigid early morning air. Noticing that the passenger's seat was the only one left open, the coach opened the door, the hinges protesting with a low toned creak, and settled himself into the car, dropping his overnight bag at his feet. He turned to see Magnus awake and smiling brightly, craning his head further he noticed Isak in the middle seat, fast asleep against his boyfriend who was also currently in dreamland. The couple were pressed together, their heads turned toward one another resting back against the seats, mouths open slightly as their soft breaths
and light snores mingled.

“Aw…”, Even said, looking at Magnus and Vilde, “Are they not just the cutest?”

The awake couple giggled, all three sharing smiles. Vilde turned back onto the road, ready to start the journey to Stavanger. Even peered out the window, watching as Oslo began to wake up; a sparse smattering of people and cars heading to work and school. The black belt leaned his seat back, making sure to not disturb Tobias and Isak. He closed his eyes, drifting into sleep steadily while continually reminding himself that he'd be getting to see Lillian for the first time in several months. Just that thought alone was enough for Even's concerns over returning to the city to be put to rest. And truthfully, if it meant his daughter would be safe and happy, he'd go through all of it again.

Highway E39

11:32

Sleep laden eyes slowly blinked open as Even returned to consciousness. As he came to he could hear his friend's talking, their voices like white noise underwater. They sounded like they were arguing over a song.

“- Not saying it's bad, like objectively.”

Even could discern Isak's voice, followed by Vilde's.

“I know Isak. I just think it's so catchy!”

The tall blonde caught his student shrugging and smiling as he looked in the rearview mirror.

“Don’t get me wrong, it's very catchy. Like, I’m not going to change the station or whatever, but I’m also not gonna search for it on YouTube or something.”

“Morning Even.”, Tobias said, smiling at Even's reflection. Even gave one back.

“Morning Tobi! Perhaps you could enlighten me as to what the children are arguing over?”

“Hey!”, Magnus interrupted, “He's the youngest one!” Turning to the other boy, he mumbled a soft “No offense.”, to which Tobias responded with a short laugh, informing Magnus no offense was taken.

“Maybe Even could help us out though. Get an objective pair of ears?”

The black belt nodded amiably.

“Sure what are we listening to?”

Vilde turned to him, an excited grin stretched across her face.

“Fy Faen.”

The beat blared out into the cabin of the car, a reverberating bass line bouncing back and forth before the lyrics began.
For vi lever for å dø
Til vi smelter bort som snø
Og de ser etter feil
Men jeg flipper finger'n
For jeg lager min vei
Når alle ber deg stoppe opp
Glem det og fokuser og jobb
For sjalusien, den brenner
Skjønt at mange broer må brenne
Så alle e'kke venner

Once the chorus kicked in Even began dancing is his seat, mouthing the lyrics while he bobbed his head. The rest of the cars occupants were smiling, Isak meeting Even's eyes in the mirror and giggling when he attempted to make his eyebrows move along with the beat. The grappling coach shrugged as he looked over his shoulder at the fighter.

“I gotta go with Vilde on this one Isak. This shit’s a bop!”

Isak smiled, laughing along with his friend's as they all started singing along to the song, Even grinning from ear to ear at the boy's in the back seat, turning around just in time to sing the chorus, everyone reaching an odd yet pleasing harmony.

Fy faen, fy, fy faen
Mange av gutta mine har begynt å hustle om da'n
Fy faen, fy, fy faen
Slanger kommer og går som en boomerang
Fy faen, fy, fy faen
Skal vise alle sammen, for jeg sitter på en plan
Fy faen, fy, fy faen Dette her er budskapet gjennom min sang

Even looked into the rearview one more time, seeing Isak and Tobi taking turns talking quietly into one another's ears and then laughing. For the first time in several weeks, he was able to push down the twinge of jealousy that had seemed to be nagging him every time he saw the two boys being affectionate with one another. He allowed himself a small smile, feeling good about the
achievement, minor as it may have been. As the car passed a sign indicating that Stavanger was less than thirty kilometers away, Even finally allowed himself to relax. He had a lot of negative experiences in Stavanger, but those were behind him and he wasn’t the same person he was when they happened either. For the first time since he’d been informed of the trip, Even felt relaxed, confident, and happy.

Stuff for the fic

1. Hkeem - Fy Faen
2. TPBCMV Playlist

Chapter End Notes

The plot is really going to start picking up here in the next few chapters and I'm pretty excited about it! I couldn't go this whole fic without putting an OG Skam song in here, but there will likely be more! Particularly a certain club anthem hahah. The Spotify playlist has also been updated again, so I put the link in the stuff for the fic section for you guys, but I'll also put it here in case the link doesn't work for some reason. Leave me a comment or kudo if you want, I'll plan on updating this weekend so I hope everyone has a great week! Remember to love yourselves and one another!

TPBCMV playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7IoHsLLQyDCOhULA3xrZHH
Lillian

Chapter Summary

Isak weighs in and scores an interview with a well respected journalist. Even learns something about Iben.

Chapter Notes

Welcome back everyone! I hope you're all doing well and enjoying the story so far. This chapter we're beginning to get into Even's recent past and I will warn you it is going to get a bit dark. I won't go into details, but be forewarned, Even's back story does get fairly sad at times. Having said that, I hope you all enjoy the chapter and look forward to posting Isak's title fight next week! Check out the stuff for the fic section for links if the ones in the story text aren't a working correctly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stavanger Sports Arena

14:47

Isak had gotten to the arena around an hour ago, planning to go to the hotel he'd be staying at after the weigh ins. They made pretty good time, the featherweight settling into the locker room as he waited for his name to be called. It should be soon, or at least he hoped it was, he was getting pretty hungry. A couple minutes later, a middle aged man dressed in a polo and dress slacks relayed to Isak that he was next. The contender gathered his phone and other items, knowing that since this was the ceremonial weigh ins, his actually weight had already been recorded and he had been rehydrating for close to a day now. He walked through the hall to the arena atrium with a confident stride, feeling good about his training camp, short as it may have been. When they reached the bottom of the stage that had been erected for the event, Isak waited a few moments for the two fighters ahead of him to finish their stare down, shake hands and part way. The blonde walked up the stairs as Eskild motioned him up. He was greeted with more enthusiasm then he thought he would be as the crowd broke into a short round of cheers. Isak moved onto the scale, Eskild announcing his name and weight to the audience.

"The challenger weighs in at sixty five point seven kilograms! Ladies and gentlemen, Isak Valtersen!"

At the fighter's name, another cheer was brought out of the crowd; a sign of Isak's popularity no doubt. Tomorrow night it would be up to him to show it was justified and the blonde had no intentions of not getting that belt. He was able to see Joakim Oglinovsky as he walked up the stairs as well, his eyes immediately catching Isak's. He walked slowly to the scale, the crowd reaching a previously unheard level of excitement as the featherweight champion removed his shirt and
waved his arms at his side, encouraging the audience in their excitement. Eskild now introduced him.

“And your current NFC, featherweight champion of the world……ladies and gentlemen, Joakim Oglinovsky!”

William stepped in between the two fighters, shaking each of their hands before allowing the men to square up to one another, a small collection of mma journalists and photographers documenting the stare down in front of them. Joakim looked at Isak with the kind of eye's the younger fighter expected, although they were more intense up close. His facial expression appeared bored; his eyes tired, mouth drawn into a flat frown and brows pitched up slightly. The look was a naturally occurring mask however, because Isak knew the title holder's appearance was like this due to the Zen like state of focus he was currently in. It's part of what had made him champion in the first place. The two men shook hands at William's prompting turning to the crowd to allow a few more pictures before the pair would walk off stage. The co-owner placed a hand along Isak's back, speaking into the microphone as addressed Isak and the crowd.

“Isak, you took this fight on short notice, you saved the main event, what can we expect from you tomorrow?”

A confident, easy smirk worked it’s way over the young fighter’s face as he shrugged causally and replied.

“I did take this fight on short notice, and I’m planning on it being a short fight as well.”

A response of ‘oohs' rang out from the crowd, the audience responding favorably to Isak's mild trash talk. William then approached Joakim, now with his shirt back on.

“So Joakim, you’ve been training for almost eight weeks for this fight, how do you feel about the change in opponent, and how do you feel about what Isak just said?”

The same tiredness appeared in the older man's eyes, but Isak could see the barely there twitch of a smile as he considered his answer.

“Isak…..he is a good fighter….but it will take as long as it takes.”

Once he'd given his stoically cryptic message, the champion flashed a small, sportsman like smile to the challenger before moving off stage. Isak gathered up his water bottle, Chris and Elias following him down the steps on the opposite side of the stage. He could hear William talking to the crowd, taking a few questions from the journalists and writers. As the blonde was walking with his coaches, he heard his name being called, he looked around to find a somewhat portly man similar in height to himself. He had a well kempt goatee that was beginning to grey a bit. Any other person may have simply ignored the man, but Isak knew at one glance who he was, and if this man wanted to talk to him there would no ignoring him. An involuntary smile broke across his face.

“Dude!”, Isak said excitedly, “You're Tarjei Nymark Mørkve!”

The man released a hardy chuckle as he nodded.

“I am. And you are Isak Valtersen. I’m not sure if you’ve noticed, but you’ve had a pretty meteoric rise over the last few years kid. I was hoping we could do a short interview if you have the time? Maybe discuss how training with Bech Naesheim has been?”

Isak looked to his coaches, not unlike a child asking for permission. The older men just laughed, nodding and letting their fighter know they’d see him back at the hotel. Isak’s smile widened as he
exited the arena with the man, each bundling back up to stave off the lingering cold. The featherweight title challenger had just scored an interview with the biggest mma journalist in Norway and didn’t plan to squander the opportunity.

Bech Naesheim House
Kvalaberg Neighborhood
Stavanger
15:03

Even had chosen to forgo the weigh ins. Isak assured him he didn’t mind, telling Even he knew he wanted to spend as much time with his family as he could. The tall black belt had knocked on the door of his parents house and was waiting for an answer. He smiled widely as he heard the door being opened, his eyes immediately falling upon a woman who by now had to be in her seventies. She looked upon Even with the fondness of a mother who’d not seen her child in quite some time. Pulling the man into a tight hug she rejoiced at his presence.

“Oh Even!”, the woman exclaimed, “It’s so good to see you sweetie! My Lord it feels like it’s been years! Come on in honey! You know your mother and father told me you’d be coming by, but I swear I almost forgot.”

Even released a short chuckle as he assuaged his family's long time maid and caregiver.

“It’s no worry Silje. And yes it has been a long time. Too long I would say.”

The woman hummed her agreement, informing Even she'd go and tell his parents he had arrived. As Silje was gone, the black belt took some time to look around, he’d walked into the living room that was adjacent to the kitchen, pictures of himself, cousins, friends and other extended family members catching his eye. One in particular stood out to him. It was a photograph of himself, Elias, Chris, Julian, Sana, and all their parents, with a few siblings thrown in the mix as well.

Even remembered that day well. That had just completed building the boxing ring the day before and gotten It checked out and approved by a recognized contractor. It was also a picture of the day before Bred Akse had opened, back when Even was still competing in jiu-jitsu tournaments around the world. Back when he and Julian and everyone else at StavMAC were still on good terms. When he thought he was over the shame and despair that his illness had brought him in the past.

Just as his throat started to tighten, his eyes started to mist, Even heard a shrill, high pitched voice say, “Daddy!”, with all the enthusiasm it could muster. Not a moment later, a girl, age eleven, with long, cross braided hair and bright, cactus green eyes threw her arms around her father. Even picked his daughter up, spinning her around as he laughed along with her. Setting her down he continued to cling to her for a few more seconds before releasing her, the daughter and father each sharing the same wide open, loving smile.

“I’m so happy to see you Lillian! I was going to see you tomorrow, but Grammy and Grandpa told me I could come by today!”

At their mention, Even’s parents greeted him with a dual hug, happy to see their son and granddaughter reunited.
“It’s awesome to see you guys.”, Even told his family, switching his gaze to his daughter, “I feel like you told me you were going to start calling me ‘dad’ last time I saw you though Lilli. Something about how only little girls said daddy?”, Even asked his daughter teasingly. The girl let out a playful scoff, crossing her arms as she answered him.

“Uh yeah, but not when I haven’t seen you in like a year. Don’t worry though, it’ll be back to ‘dad’ in a couple weeks.”

It was now Even's turn to jokingly scoff at his offspring’s statement. He looked at his father with a false pointedness.

“Well, it certainly sounds like someone's sarcasm is rubbing off on you.”

Even’s father tried, but failed to hide his grin, raising his hands in surrender.

“I confess, she does have her grandfather's wit. But that wasn’t my doing son.”

“Hmm, mine either if I’m honest.”, Even said. “Nope, I think she’s just a natural charmer like her old man.”

This brought out a short circle of laughs among the family, Even's mother suggesting they go into the kitchen.

“Even, we still have some leftovers from breakfast if you’re interested?”, his mother prompted him.

“That would be amazing Mom, thank you.”

As the grappling coach sat down at the small kitchen table, his daughter did as well, piercing him with her gaze. It was something Even had always noticed about her; how his child had a seemingly innate ability to assess a person's state of mind just by looking at them.

“So”, Lillian said, finishing up something on her phone before putting in her pocket, “This guy you're training, he's like, a pretty big deal right? A couple kids in my class follow him on Insta and stuff.” The father smiled, nodding as his mother prepared him a plate of breakfast leftovers. “He is a pretty big deal, yes. And he’ll be an even bigger deal if he wins this title.”

“Lilli, sweetie, did you tell Even about your…achievement?”

“An achievement?”, Even said, “What, like in Fortnite or something?”

He couldn’t resist teasing his little girl a bit, especially when it was becoming more and more clear that she wasn't so little anymore.

“Ew no, Dad. Only like, weird boys play Fortnite.”

He laughed at his daughter's bluntness.

“Well ok miss too cool for school. What if one of these Fortnite playing boys is really cute hmm?”

“I mean, he’d have to be pretty cute.”

“Hmm…”, Even leaned back, appearing to consider his daughter's answer.

“Are we talking like Harry Styles cute or Cole Sprouse cute?”

“Oh, definitely Harry. Look Cole is adorable and everything, but I feel like Harry is more mature.”
“Ooh yeah”, Even leaned back onto the table, “Don’t need to hear my eleven year old daughter talking about men's ‘maturity’.” The girl rolled her eyes at her father, a smile still adorning her face as she continued to talk to him.

“I'm nearly twelve in case you forgot! Anyways, what grandpa meant is that uh…”, suddenly appearing nervous, Even's gaze locked onto his father's for a brief second, the look in his eyes calming any of his worries, “I um…got my blue belt about a week ago.”

Even’s eyes widened, as he stretched his long arms across the table and awkwardly embraced his daughter.

“Lillian that is so incredible! When did you start going to class again?”

The girl shrugged, estimating in her head before replying.

“I’m not sure exactly. A little less than a year ago I guess. Iben and Julian actually kind of convinced me to start going again.”

The mention of the couple's names caused Even's smile to falter just slightly, but no one but himself was aware of it.

“Well I’ll certainly thank them for that when I see them tomorrow.”

As the pair finished their conversation, Even’s mother handed him the plate of leftovers, the tall blonde making his appreciation known before digging in and releasing a sigh through his nose, causing Lillian to smile and shake her head at her father. In that moment, Even was the happiest he had been in long time; not thinking about work or his as yet undecided move back into coaching, not thinking about Isak or his ever growing feelings for the young man, and not thinking about his daughter's current legal guardians and his impending fight for joint custody. For a singular, blissful moment, Even Bech Naesheim was a father and that's all he wanted to be.

Coffeeberry Coffee Shop

16:11

Isak found conversation with Tarjei easy. The fighter and journalist had been talking amicably for a little over an hour now, discussing several different topics from world politics to music to the history of martial arts. Isak was surprised at just how easy it was to talk to the older man was. Finishing up his last sips of coffee, the blonde noticed the other man fiddling with his phone.

“Oh, sorry, I didn’t mean to keep you so long.”, Isak said.

Tarjei smiled at him, shaking his head as he placed his phone back on the table between the two.

“It’s no problem Isak, I was actually just setting up the recorder on my phone.”

The featherweight was surprised.

“Oh, ok. I thought that’s what we were doing.”

The dark haired man smiled, but shook his head.
“Not quite. Just getting you comfortable. Also before we start I’ll need to get your verbal consent to publish this interview.”

Tarjei tapped a button on his phone, the device making a small *bwing* sound.

“I’m Isak Valtersen and I give my consent for this interview to be published.”

The journalist thanked the young fighter before getting the interview started officially.

“So Isak. You've got a healthy number of Instagram followers at just over two thousand and a good presence on Twitter as well. You lost your professional debut, but since then all but one of your fights has been a finish. Despite all this, you’ve remained somewhat of an enigma to the world of mma. Tell me a bit about yourself.”

The young man cleared his throat.

“Well, I’m twenty one years old. I fight for the Norske Fighting Championships promotion in the featherweight division and tomorrow I’ll be fighting for the title.”

Tarjei nodded, taking a few notes in a small legal pad before continuing.

“And what would you say got you into martial arts Isak?”

The blonde laughed.

“Honestly, realizing I had no clue how to fight. I’ve actually told this story to one of my coaches, but I was at a party with a friend when I was like sixteen, and he ended up getting ganged up on and so me and my friend tried to help him out, but he ended ditching us and we got our asses kicked. Eventually I uh….threatened one of them with a replica seax knife and they backed off. When our other friend heard about it, he started calling me little viking.”

“That answers one of my follow up questions.”, Tarjei said. “So what about your childhood Isak? I mean most children don’t dream of being world champion cage fighters.”

Isak huffed a short laugh before replying.

“You’re right and I didn’t either. I was actually a lot more into football when I was a kid. Sometimes my dad would watch American boxing, but that was about it. My parents are pretty normal people I guess. My mom worked until I was five and my dad started his own business as a local investment consultant around the same time.”

“And you didn’t practice any martial arts as a child?”

Then blonde shook his head before realizing he needed to speak to answer the question.

“Oh sorry, uh no I didn’t.”

Tarjei smiled at him again, writing in his notes as he asked another question.

“Now Isak in the time I’ve been following you, which has been your whole professional career by the way-“, Isak gave the other man a small fist bump, causing the journalist to release a short laugh, “For our listeners, Isak just gave me a fist bump of approval. I wanted to ask about the way you fight though. You seem to be strong everywhere and are able to quickly adapt your skill set to make your opponent uncomfortable. You're very young in your career, but you have the patience of a veteran mixed martial artist. What do you attribute this to?”
Isak pursed his lips and shrugged.

“Honestly, I think it’s a few things. Number one being my coaches. Chris Schistad, Elias Bakkoush, Mahdi Disi, and more recently Even Bech Naesheim. They’re instruction and teaching have been more valuable than I can even put into words. It also doesn’t hurt that combined they’ve got over fifty years experience in their disciplines and have all been training and coaching fighters for over a decade with the exception of Mahdi. The second reason, and this one is a little more simple, is that I just don’t like getting hit.”

The two shared a laugh as Tarjei nodded in agreement.

“I think that’s a very valid reason. You just mentioned that Even Bech Naesheim is one of your current coaches. Obviously Even is well known among Scandinavian mma fans and jiu-jitsu and grappling enthusiasts as well. Tell me what it’s been like to train with someone of that caliber and how, if at all, his falling out with StavMAC has effected you.”

Isak smiled warmly as he thought of his coach and friend.

“Even…… is not like anyone I’ve ever met. The way his mind works is so unique and nonlinear. And it definitely shows up in the way he teaches. His approach to fighting isn't cut and dry. It’s nuanced and weird, but in the best way. Even views martial arts a natural phenomenon, like lighting or the weather. It already exists, you just have to discover it and understand it. Your body is capable of doing all the things a high level mma fighter can do. You just have to understand and learn how to do them. He also has a healthy relationship with his students. His ego is more attached to helping a fighter progress and learn than it is to any of his own personal achievements, of which there are quite a few. Even is a true artist when it comes to grappling and in particular in regards to the way he teaches. I mean, the guy still instructs a seven through twelve year old jiu-jitsu class at my gym and honestly I think some of my ground game could be attributed to those kids.”

Tarjei broke into a hardy laugh as he smiled at his interviewee.

“As far as his time and eventual falling out with Stavanger Martial Arts Center, well…..”, Isak sighed, considering his words carefully, “I don’t really know enough details to give an opinion on that. The fact that it wasn’t front page news on every Norwegian and Scandinavian mma media outlet says a lot to me though. Even’s a very likeable guy, even though we didn't necessarily get along when we first met. It’s hard for me to imagine someone genuinely trying to hurt him or damage his reputation though, which is why I think the whole thing with StavMAC was largely kept out of the public eye. The coaches and management there didn’t want to embarrass Even. And I'm in agreement with them.”

Tarjei continued to jot down a few more notes, the interview taking a decidedly more serious turn. Glancing at the clock, Isak realized he had about thirty more minutes of his time to give before he was due back at the hotel to meet up with Chris and Elias. Over the next half hour, the fighter answered a few more questions, but the majority of the interview was simply a conversation between the two men. The pair discussed match ups they’d like to see, their favorite fighter’s; active and retired, and what changes to the rule set of the sport they’d like to see implemented. Isak felt more like he was talking to an old friend than having an interview with the most respected and well know mma journalist in all of Norway. And win lose or draw, the title challenger was happy he had done it.

Bech Naesheim House
Lillian and her father were sitting in front of her laptop, watching Gracie Breakdown videos and discussing technique. Every few minutes, Even would pause the video and ask his daughter a question, almost like an impromptu quiz for the girl.

“Wait”, she said, “So when I shift my hips back and open my guard”, the girl got into position so her father could visualize what she was saying, “When they go to throw a punch,” Even got in position now, sitting in the other’s guard and nodding, “Why can’t I just move my head?”

Even smiled at his daughter as he shrugged.

“Well for one, what if they’re way taller than you? Then they can just posture up and land shots”, while he was speaking, the paternal Bech Naesheim mimed a few punches, showing his daughter why her suggestion likely wouldn’t work. “If you move your hips though”, Lilli did as her father instructed, sucking her hips off to the right, and snatching her father’s right arm up from where it was posted on the couch. This combined with the turn of her hips caused the older jiu-jitsuka to go plummeting to the floor as his daughter kicked her legs out across his body, securing the technique and causing a momentary wince from her father before he tapped her leg, the newly christened blue belt releasing him and sitting back on the couch with a small smirk.

“Dad, c’mon, I didn’t go that hard.”

The father laughed at his daughter's rather accurate assessment, but gave a shrug anyway.

“Maybe not. But you have to remember Lilli, I’ve been doing this for a long time. My joints and ligaments have been getting yanked on for longer than you’ve even been alive.”

The girl smiled, rolling her eyes at her dad. As Even sat back up and placed himself on the couch again, the ringing of his parents doorbell brought his attention away from his daughter for a moment. Several seconds later, the familiar voices of Julian and Iben reached his ears. Lillian smiled at her dad.

“They’re here to pick me up.”

Even nodded, following his daughter out of the den and into the hallway where Even's parents had already greeted the couple. The black belt smiled cordially at Julian and Iben, the two giving him tight, but none the less genuine ones back.

“We didn’t know you’d be here Even. I mean, we knew you’d be in town, just not that you were stopping by your folks place.”, said Julian.

“Yeah”, the taller blonde replied, “Figured I’d drop in while I was in town, give this one a nice little surprise.” Even nudged his daughter with his arm, the girl shrking him off, but returning his smile.

“Did Lilli tell you she got her blue belt last week?”, Julian asked Even.

“She did. And I'm very proud of her.”

The grappling coach smiled down at his daughter, ruffling her hair a bit.

“Well”, Iben exclaimed, “I’m glad you two were able to catch up. Speaking of catching up, could I
speak to you in the kitchen for a moment Even?"

Even’s eyes cycled briefly from his parents to Julian to his daughter, before he stifled a sigh and nodded to his ex. The two walked through the small breakfast nook that was attached to the dining room, Iben being sure to close the door on her way. She turned around, facing the father of her child and crossing her arms.

“You should’ve told me you’d be stopping by today.”

Even sighed, thinning his lips.

“Why Iben? They already knew I’d be here. It was a surprise for Lilli. Did you want to warn my parents? Let them know their insane son was coming to visit his daughter? Your daughter? Even if you wanted nothing to do with her for the first eight years of her life.”

A cruel smile formed across Iben’s lips.

“Really Even? You want to do this right now? What are you going to tell Lillian when she realizes that the reason her mother and father don’t get along isn’t just because they had a bad breakup.”

Iben finished the statement with a pair of finger quotes puncturing the last two words.

“That the real reason her parents don’t quite jive is because her dad seduced her mother’s fiancé.”

“Oh right, because that’s how it happened. It had nothing to do with the fact that you turned into a robot for six months and were treating him like he was a difficult to get rid of rash. You know Iben, I accept my part in what happened between me and Julian. It was wrong and we both knew it was wrong. But I’m done putting more blame on myself than necessary. And before you try and use your father’s death as an excuse, a father who you’ve told me you had no love lost for by the way, maybe you should look at yourself. At how convenient it was that you became interested in your own daughter’s life and well being when your ex starts working at your gym and now everyone knows that you abandoned your own child.”

The woman was clenching her jaw. She swallowed harshly, pushing a sigh out of her nose. She shook her head, pulling two chairs out from the kitchen table and saying “Sit” to the man across from her. Even stalled a few seconds before complying, sitting in the chair and leaning back, an unimpressed look in his eyes. His ex had her elbows on the table, leaning forward slightly as she looked down, releasing another heavy sigh before looking up and meeting her ex boyfriend’s gaze.

“Ok Even. I’ll tell you why. Because you’re right. I loved my father, sure. But, he was a piece of shit. He was a deadbeat and I couldn’t have cared less about Lillian meeting him. A few months before you came to StavMAC, Julian and I…..we were talking about having a child. As much as I love Lilli, I couldn’t help but feel that I had failed her those first eight years. When you moved to Stavanger with her in twenty fifteen, I was happy. Happy I’d be getting to see her more often. And so that’s what I did. I made a more conscious effort to try and be in her life. Even if me and you were still not on the best terms.”

The woman crossed her arms, settling back into the chair and shrugging.

“A few months into twenty sixteen, I had another reason to continue to be in Lillian's life.”

Even’s eyebrows drew in, the new information making him curious. He noticed a fine layer of glossiness form over his ex girlfriend's eyes.

“Julian and myself were stable financially. The gym was thriving, not that it isn't now. It seemed
like the perfect time. So, we tried for a baby Even. And it took about a month, but in early April of twenty sixteen, I finally found out I was pregnant. Lillian was going to have a little brother or sister.”

“You didn’t tell me.”, Even said.

“No. I didn’t. Why would I have?”

Even struggled to find a reason before nodding, acquiescing to the other’s point.

“And I um….I didn’t tell you when I lost the baby either.”

Even could hear the tremble in her voice, the lingering pain that still effected her. She was right. He’d had no idea. It made so much sense now though. Why Iben had become obsessed with work and pushed Julian away. Why Julian had come to Even seeking comfort. Even’s guilt about the entire situation doubled now. Had he known the details of the situation, he would’ve been far more cautious in his feelings and interactions with the other man. Would’ve wrapped his heart in razor wire so as to protect all three of them.

“Jesus Iben…. I……fuck…..I had no idea.”

She sniffles, bringing a napkin to clear away the tears from her eyes.

“Of course you didn’t Even. I never told you. Never told anyone. And you’re right, by the way. You and Julian……it wasn’t just your fault or his.”

“I mean, sure, but Iben, I think you have to give yourself some leeway here. I had no clue about any of this. Look, we all should’ve been better concerning everything that happened, but now that I know why it happened?”

Even sighed, leaning back in his chair.

“It makes a lot more sense. I can’t say I wouldn’t have felt the same if I were in the same situation. Shit Iben….I’m so sorry.”

Even’s ex looked up at him as she swallowed harshly, breathing in a shuddered breath.

“We um, we did some grievance counselling. It did seem to help.”

Even hummed, nodding. Iben cleared her throat, standing up and pushing her chair in.

“I’m sorry to drop a bomb like that and leave, but….”

“Hey, no”, Even said, moving closer to her. “I should be apologizing. Some of the things I said…..Iben they weren’t ok. Regardless of the situation. So….I’m sorry. I'm sorry you and Julian had to go through that and I’m sorry about what I said. I understand if you don’t want to or can’t forgive me…”

She snorted at Even, rolling her eyes at him.

“Oh Even. I’ve already forgiven you. Losing the baby was rough yes, but it helped me realize something.”

“Yeah?”

Iben nodded.
“It made me realize that sometimes, what you're looking for is already right in front of you, you just don’t see it. Losing the baby made me appreciate Lillian more than I ever could've on my own. It made me realize how much I really do care for her. How much I love her. And if I had to choose between a new child of my own and being in our little girl's life, I’m choosing her every single time.”

The two stood a few feet apart from one another, their gazes resting upon the other. Neither person would say that they viewed the other as a friend now, but each had a different understanding about the other. A better understanding. And maybe that understanding was just what each of them needed to be the best parents they could be for their child. The creaking of the kitchen door alerted the two, each craning their head to find Julian with the door propped open on his foot. He smiled at Even before addressing his fiancé.

“Babe, we need to get going. My parents are expecting us for dinner by eighteen and we still need to head home and drop off the groceries.”

“Of course”, Iben said to her soon to be husband. She walked out of the kitchen along with Even while the other male held the door. Once the trio, along with Lillian, had said their farewells to Even's parents and Silje, they exited the house. Iben, Julian and Lilli approached Julian's car. Before he could step onto the side walk, the other man called out to Even.

“Hey! You want us to drop you off? It’d be on our way back anyways.”

Even shared a short look with Iben, his eyes darting back to Julian.

“I’m cool catching the tram. I appreciate the offer though.”

“No problem man.”, said Julian, a smirk now making it's way across his lips.

“And tell Isak I said good luck. He’s gonna need it!”

Even laughed, informing the man he'd relay his message as continued to walk to the tram stop, his mind and heart heavy with the information Iben had told him. His curiosity had been quenched, but the fire of renewed guilt now smoldered in the pit of his stomach. Even would be having another chat with his psychiatrist sooner than previously expected.

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**Stuff for the fic**

1. **The belt system in Jiu-Jitsu**: White, Blue, Purple, Brown, Black, Coral, or red and black/white, and Red. Some schools have a separate system for youth/under 16 practitioners, but for this fic I'll be sticking with the regular 5 original Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu belts; white through black.

2. **Tarjei Nymark Mørkve** is the foremost mma journalist in Norway and runs the site mma-norway.com
So, the bomb has been dropped! Partially anyway. As the story continues, we'll get more and more into the boys' history, how it relates to other characters, and it's effects on them in the present. I'm writing the fight right now and it's coming along pretty nicely, so I should be on track to get the next chapter out this coming weekend. Leave a kudo or comment if you're enjoying the story or have any constructive criticism for me. Have a great week everyone, and remember to love yourselves and one another!
Guard Pass to Back Mount

Chapter Summary

Isak "The Little Viking" Valtersen vs. Joakim "The Oracle" Oglinovsky.

Chapter Notes

It's going down everybody! Isak's title fight is here and I have to say I'm pretty happy with the result. This is a hefty chapter, clocking in at over 6700 words. I know compared to a lot of other fics that's nothing, but for me it's the longest chapter I've written so far haha. Oh and I've also updated the Spotify playlist, I'll put the link in the stuff for the fic section as well as in the endnotes. Anyways, I don't want to give any spoilers, so read on and enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stavanger Sports Arena
Lørdag
Frebruar 16th, 2019
23:08

Isak was on track to fight earlier than he thought. All but two fights out of the ten bout event had been finishes and the title challenger was looking to keep that trend going. His hands were wrapped and taped, his gloves had been secured. A few minutes earlier, the referee, along with a member of the Stavanger athletic commission, had gone over the rules with the featherweight. The official had informed Isak that the unified rules of the sport would be in play tonight as the athletic commission official watched him get his hands wrapped and signed the blue tape that adorned the wrists of Isak's gloves. One of the event tech’s opened the door, telling the fighter and his team he was ready for his walkout.

Isak's mindset was completely focused as he heard the opening beat of his walkout song. He had expected the walk to the cage to feel different this time, but it didn't. If anything he felt more relaxed than normal. The fighter walked up to the ref station, the official checking his nails, head, arms, and behind his head before allowing the cutman to apply vaseline to his face. Turning around, the fighter embraced his coaches individually, Even pulling him and whispering, “You got this Isak, ok? That belt's yours, now go out there and get it.” The blonde nodded to his coach then slowly walked into the combat area, putting his right hand up and making the crowd cheer as he lazily jogged around the cage, running his right hand along the fence. Once the contender was stationed in his own corner there was a few seconds pause, followed by the beginning of his opponent's walkout song. A blistering guitar riff echoed throughout the arena as Joakim Oglinovsky made his way to the decagon. The lyrics began just as the crowd noticed the champion and burst into a raucous applause
I'm a bag of dicks
Put me to your lips
I am sick
I will punch a baby bear in his shit
Give me lip
I'mma send you to the yard, get a stick, make a switch
I can end a conversation real quick

The featherweight champ took his time getting to the cage, extending his arms on either side of himself and touching hands with the fans. He mouthed the lyrics to the song, the chorus coming in just as he reached the referee check station

Nobody speak, nobody get choked, hey
Nobody speak, nobody get choked, hey
Nobody speak
Nobody speak

The referee completed his check, nodding to the cutman as the other came over and applied the petroleum product to Joakim’s cheeks, nose, and forehead. The champion hugged his coaches as well, each of the three giving him words of encouragement and clapping him on the back. The title holder's face was schooled into a fleshy stone, belieing no emotion. As he stepped into the cage, the arena of fans broke into a deafening cheer. Joakim looked across the cage to his opponent, his steely eyes locking onto Isak's as Eskild began the fighter introductions.

“I hope everyone has enjoyed the fights up to this point, but now, it is finally time for our main event of the evening. Stavanger, are you ready!?"

A resounding round of applause came from the crowd, the fans ready for the headlining fight.

“Fighting”, Eskild began enthusiastically, “Out of the blue corner. This man is a mixed martial artist with a professional record of three wins opposite one loss. He stands at one point eight meters tall and weighed in at sixty five point seven kilos. Fighting out of Oslo by way of Bred Akse mixed martial arts…….. Ladies and gentlemen, introducing……the challenger! Isak Little Viking Valtersen!”

The local crowd was more receptive than Isak would’ve thought, only a small smattering of boos
interspersed with the rest of the cheering crowd.

“And now, fighting out of the red corner”, Eskild said, “This man is a wrestler and Muay Thai fighter. He holds a professional record of eleven wins and two losses. He stands at one point seventy seven meters and weighed in at sixty five point five kilos. Fighting out of Stavanger by way of Stavanger Martial Arts Center……your NFC featherweight, champion of the world……”, Eskild let the tension build as he drew out the pause, “Joakim The Oracle Oglinovsky!”

The arena went wild for their champion, the noise drowning out any other sounds in the atrium for several seconds. Eskild brought the microphone back to his lips, introducing the referee officiating the contest.

“And your referee for this bout is Mr. Ognjen Topic.”

The contestants walked forward at the motioning of the ref, stopping with only a few inches and the referee between them.

“Ok gentlemen, this fight is for the featherweight championship”, the official informed them, “I’ve given you both the same instructions in the back. Keep it clean, and let’s have a good fight. Touch gloves if you wish and go back to your corners.”

The opposing fighter’s met one another’s gloves, nodding to each other as they retreated to their corners. Isak had promised to make it a short fight, now it was time to live up to that promise.

Round 1

Joakim was pacing himself, the fight was nearly at one minute into the first round and he’d yet to even throw a real strike yet, getting Isak to bite on a number of fakes and feints. His first actual strike landed right before the round crossed over the first minute mark, snapping out a quick teep kick to Isak's lower abdomen as the other timed a jab. Isak recovered quickly, faking a turn of his hips twice before slipping the other fighter's own jab and landing a hard kick to the inside of his front thigh. Joakim was unexpressive though, not even flinching as the blonde's shin ripped into the softer flesh on the inside of his leg. He skillfully circled away from his opponent, switching to a southpaw stance as he did so. Isak shot the man a small smirk, backing up a few feet and shrugging his shoulders, as if to ask his opponent “you think switching stances is going to help you?”. The Polish fighter kept the Norwegian on his toes however, doubling up on a stiff lead right jab before cutting and angle and blitzing a three punch combo at the challenger.

Isak was able to roll with two of the shots, catching them on his arms and shoulders as he moved away. The third one got through however, a stinging, angled uppercut cracking against the featherweight's jaw as he moved away from the champion. It may not have staggered Isak, but it definitely caught his attention. The blonde baited the other man in with a few jabs of his own, timing his opponents overhand left and charging in to initiate a clinch. Joakim was a few steps ahead of the contender though, nailing him in the solar plexus with a knee as he came in. Isak was able to shuck the other man off as he attempted to initiate his own clench, no doubt to land some follow up strikes. As he exited, Isak slid to his left, timing his man with a jab before stabbing a front kick with his back leg into his gut. A few seconds later, the blonde saw his shot. There couldn’t be any mistaking the slightly delayed wince of Joakim's face; he'd scored a liver shot on the champion.
Suddenly however, the younger fighter's game plan seemed to vanish, the thrill of an impending victory, no a championship, clouding his mind. He rushed in, winging hard, tight punches at his opponent. But the champion had been here before and initiated a clinch after dodging Isak's third shot. He was hanging onto the blonde with a death grip, his arms wrapped firmly around the blonde's upper back and underneath his arms. Isak distanced his hips from the other man, attempting to pull himself from the clinch as he'd done a few moments ago, but it was to no avail. As Joakim pushed the younger man back, Isak tried for an angle, attempting to turn his hips into his opponent and toss him. In doing so however, he exposed his back, allowing the other fighter to rapidly loosen then retighten his arms, this time glued securely around the challenger's hips. With the last bit of strength that hadn’t been zapped by Isak's kick to his liver, Joakim lifted his opponent into the air, leaning back and turning his hips in the same motion. This resulted in both fighters crashing to the mat.

A short scramble on the canvas ensued, the Pol ending up in half guard with Isak, his left leg between the other's. Joakim laid heavy on Isak, suppressing any offense he tried to produce. Isak kept his right knee high to his chest, preventing the other fighter from slipping past his guard and ending up in mount. The blonde could hear his coaches shouting instructions, Even yelling the letters “VNM!”, over and over. A few seconds later, the featherweight contender put together what his grappling instructor was saying, albeit somewhat in code. Whispering “Viking ninja monkey”, to himself, Isak sprung into action. He sat up, at the same time attempting to scoot his hips away from his opponent. This created just enough space for the title challenger to slip his left leg over Joakim's right as the other man tried to reposition himself. Now in full guard, Isak swiftly moved his legs down around the thighs of his fellow mixed martial artist. When the other man attempted to reposition himself again, Isak triangled his own legs together, compressing the champion's while at the same time taking away his base. This allowed Isak to moved his hips off to his left side, attempting to take the champ’s back.

Joakim knew what his competitor was up to however, turning into him quickly and landing a short, but hard elbow across Isak's cheek. The blonde fighter responded by pushing his face down into the other's chest, making successive strikes nigh impossible. He closed his eyes momentarily, his kinesthetic awareness heightening. He felt Joakim work his legs up along his back and rolled his head off to his right side, keeping his hips and thighs tight to the other man's. The Polish fighter had successively walked himself back to the cage now, beginning to try to get up. A battle for head position now began, Isak driving his hairline into and underneath the other man’s chin, getting him to move his own head side to side to avoid the pressure. Sliding his hips off to the right and trying to pull his own skull away from Isak's, Joakim was able to pop a leg over the other featherweight's own right leg. As Isak attempted a short hop on his knees to retake the leg, however the champion was able to move his hips even farther way, now getting both legs free and getting to his knees before quickly standing up lest Isak try to work in a knee strike.

The two combatants had now switched from grounded to standing grappling, arguably the most grueling part of the whole sport of mixed martial arts. Joakim's back was against the cage, his legs spread wide in case his opponent decided to try for a takedown. Each fighter was trying to find underhooks on the other, fighting for head position as well as dominance within the clinch. As Isak's eyes flitted to the clock, he felt relieved at seeing less than ninety seconds left in the round. The relief was short lived though, Joakim securing a tight Thai clench around the other's head, bridging his hips off the fence as he yanked Isak's head down hard, attempting to slam his right knee into the younger man's face. Isak had been here before in training camp though and reacted quickly, pushing his head to the side and breaking his competition’s grip as he wrapped his arms around his opponent’s leg, turning his hips to the right and driving his head into his chest. After a few backwards hops, the champion tried angling and throwing Isak off. This would prove to be a mistake however, as Isak timed the dark haired man's movement perfectly, shooting his own right
leg inside and behind the other's left, kicking his limb back as he drove his opponent off balance by shifting his hips to the right.

The fighters once again went crashing to the canvas, now one to one for takedowns. This time however, Joakim wasn’t running on pure survival instinct and was able to gain position over Isak, shifting his hips away from the taller fighter and sprawling on top of him. He used the blonde's head to brace himself as he stood back up, being sure to press as much weight as possible onto the title contender’s head. Once the pressure was gone, Isak sprang up to his feet, giving his opponent a sarcastic raise of his eyebrows and warped smile. “Didn’t know we were fighting like third graders.”, Isak told the champion, his voice somewhat muffled by the mouthpiece he wore. Joakim gave his own short, antagonistic smile back. “If this was playground rules I would've won when I took your ass the mat.” The Norwegian made a dismissive noise with his mouth, moving forward before throwing a loose, judging jab at his opponent.

Joakim timed the other man, slipping the punch and partially landing a lead left hook to Isak's ribs. Isak smiled at him, shaking his head to indicate the other fighter's punch had no effect on him, though he had felt it. As he was moving back into position, Isak snapped a hard leg kick to the inside of Joakim's left calf, moving gracefully out of the way of the other man’s counter right straight. The blonde closed the distance swiftly, following up with a jab of his own that caught the champion cleanly. He missed with his second shot, a right hook, but made up for it by popping in a tight left elbow to Joakim's nose as he pulled his head off the center line and slipped the featherweight champ's defensive right straight. As both men were resetting and preparing to strike again, the buzzer for the first round sounded. Isak had a feeling this fight was going to last longer than he previously thought.

The blonde strode over to and sat down on the stool Even provided him, all three of his coaches funneling into the fighter's corner quickly. As Chris held a water bottle to Isak's mouth, he threw his arms over the kickboxer's shoulders, accepting the rehydrating liquid as Even removed his mouthpiece.

“That was a close round Isak, but we got it. That two piece and the elbow at the end? Beautiful.”, Chris told his fighter.

Elias hummed in agreement before chiming in.

“You're using your fakes and feints well little viking. I want him guessing every shot you throw. You scored that liver kick because you set it up ok? So let’s keep it going. And calm down a bit alright? I know it’s a title fight, but we’ve got a possible twenty more minutes. Let’s cook him slow ok? Like mama Bakkoush' lamb chops.”

Isak snorted a laugh, nodding at his coaches advice.

“Your grappling is looking good Isak.”, Even told his fighter. “We're winning in the clench every time, but don’t get too defensive alright? Let’s mix it up in there. If you're against cage I wanna see elbows, knees, hooks. Short shots to the body. And like Elias said, be deceptive with it ok? That body shot is there for you, but he knows it is as well now.” Isak nodded as he stood back up, his corner men’s time to give him advice and instruction dwindling.

“Hey”, Chris said sternly, placing both his hands on the younger man's head and staring him in the eyes. “This belt is yours Isak Valtersen. You hear me? This shit is yours Isak. It’s been yours ever since you started fighting, now you go out there and you fucking take it, you understand me!?”. The striking coach asked his fighter, his voice gradually rising.

“Yes coach.”, Isak responded.
“Whose fucking belt is that Isak!?” Chris asked aggressively, now inches away from his student and friend’s face.

“My fucking belt coach!”

“Fuck yeah it is!”

At the behest of the referee, Isak’s cornermen left, Chris flashing a warm smile to his fighter, contradicting his own intensity. The title challenger knew it was just a way to hype him up, get his head in the game. It was actually the opposite of his coach’s usual laid back demeanor. But damn if it didn’t get the job done. The official looked to Isak after both fighter’s corners had exited the cage.

“Sir are you ready?”

Isak gave a stoic nod. The ref now turned to Joakim.

“Sir are you ready?”

The champion smiled, motioning his preparedness by signaling a “c’mon” with his lead left hand. The referee returned his gaze to the center.

“Round two, fight!”

Round 2

The fighter’s circled one another for the first thirty seconds, each man faking punches and hip turns. It was Isak who fired the first shot, feinting a jab with his lead left before trying for a right hand straight down the pipe. He’d dropped his lead hand however, catching a jab to the nose as he slightly clipped his opponent across the mouth as he moved his head. The blonde cut an angle to his right, slipping Joakim’s own right hand and landing another leg kick on him, a splotchy redness beginning to appear on the other’s left leg from the combined strikes. If Isak could limit his opponent’s movement, he could keep him in front of him and pick him apart. After getting caught with the strike, the champion threw a loose combination; lead left jab, right cross. There wasn’t much on the punches, but it was a ploy to get Isak to clench with him in the first place.

The featherweight contender was duped, bringing his arms in and wrestling with the other man as the two struggled for position. It wasn’t long before the pair ended up against the fence, Isak’s back pressed into the smooth, cool metal. Joakim tried for an elbow as both fighter’s broke away and just skimmed Isak as he ducked to avoid the strike. The Norwegian dug a short, hard uppercut to the Polish man’s body, the strike rippling through his midsection. He tried for a follow up elbow, but only struck air as Joakim dropped down for a single leg. Isak was quick though, he sprawled, pressing his weight down on top of the other fighter as he moved his hips to the right and off the cage. As the two broke for a second time, the challenger was able to catch his man with a rising right knee, the strike landing, but glancing off to the side. Isak threw a left hand over the top of the other fighter’s, both the men catching each other at the same time and backing one another up.

The shot didn’t wobble the taller fighter, but it did get his hands up. This time, the champ proved to be faster, dropping down and shooting in for the takedown all in one motion. Isak was on the mat before he knew it, his opponent resting himself heavily upon him. Joakim postured up, trying for a few punches, but Isak moved his hips and head, bouncing the strikes off his arms and forearms. As
the other fighter tried to slice a knee through the blonde's guard. Isak repositioned, rapidly moving his left leg up the other's back and reaching behind the raven haired man's head with his right hand to keep the champ from breaking free and trying to land shots again. Isak pushed his hips out to the left, trying to secure Joakim's right arm as he did, but the other featherweight knew what he was up to. The space created had allowed the title challenger to get to his knees though, smashing a few short, grounded knees to the other fighter's body before he turned into Isak, nullifying the strikes.

Isak turned with him though, swiftly grasping him in a side long stance on his knees before popping in a few quick right hands to his opponent's head. The champion kept his head to the mat, covering up as he turned further into Isak. This caused the younger fighter to move as well, switching to the shorter fighter's left side. Doing so allowed Joakim a quick roll however, pulling guard and looking at Isak expectantly, his legs raised in the air. Isak appreciated the other man's skill, but wasn’t naïve enough to tangle himself up with veteran mixed martial artist. Instead, he got to his feet, landing some kicks to the outside of the other's thighs. Isak settled his hands on his hips, looking to the referee and letting an exasperated sigh go. The official looked between the two men briefly, noticing Joakim's inactivity on the mat, he separated the fighters, motioning for the champ to stand back up. Once he was back on his feet, Ognjen stepped back from the duo, saying “fight!”.

The featherweight champ snapped a front kick to Isak's gut, the other fighter turning and dodging the strike before cracking his shin against his competition's back right inside calf. The kick nearly knocked the other fighter off balance, the taller martial artist attempting a heavy right overhand, but missing. This was followed by a left hook to the body, which just swipe at Joakim as he moved backwards. Isak had timed him though, tuning his hips laterally before turning his right arm over and catching the other man with a hard, down angled elbow. The crowd responded with a collective “oh!”, fueling Isak's advance. He came through with a step in right knee as the champion shot for a takedown, reminiscent of the one Joakim had landed on him in round one. Abandoning his attempt to wrestle his opponent, the shorter fighter winged a haymaker of a left hook at Isak's head, the blonde rolling with shot before pushing his opponent back, angling to his left and cracking his shin across the other's abs. It was a hard strike, but Joakim had taken it well.

Isak switched stances, covering the movement by snapping out yet another leg kick, this time nearly buckling the older fighter's lead left leg. Isak's handiwork was starting to pay dividends. He slipped the champ's jab, returning with the combination he'd landed at the end in round one, this time sans elbow. The second fighter responded in kind, popping out a loose jab before faking a turn of his left hip, creating distance and launching a right high kick at Isak's head. The blonde moved forward and to his right, the kick landing, but not at full power. Joakim’s foot had angled around Isak's head though, disrupting his equilibrium as it struck him just behind the ear. Isak had his wits about him, but his body was momentarily out of commission, and in a fight, one moment was all the other guy needed. Isak stumbled into a clench, regaining his bearings and sense of special awareness as he recovered from the kick. He forced Joakim into the cage, immediately battling for position.

Anticipating a takedown, the champion featherweight spread his legs along the length of the fence. Isak brought his hands down, acting as if he was attempting to secure a takedown on the other fighter. As he dug an underhook with his left hand Isak was able to shift his hips off to his own left, scoring with a short right elbow over the top that landed on Joakim's forehead and opened a small cut. Isak next tried for a left knee, forcing the other man to angle his own hips off the cage. This gave then younger fighter the chance to feint a jab with his right hand before slipping the champion's own left straight and landing and uppercut to the body of his own. He attempted to clench again, but Isak timed the attempt, dropping down to swipe at Joakim's left ankle. When the other man repositioned, Isak abandoned the ankle, moving in further and dropping to his right knee before clutching his arms around his fellow competitor's thigh and standing quickly.
The champion tried break free of the grasp, but this only allowed Isak closer, placing his left leg behind the other fighter's right, taking his stability away with a slicing backwards reap. As he drove the other man to the canvas the crowd again cheered, impressed with the display of martial skill Isak was showing. The blonde’s head was immediately yanked down to the other's chest to prevent him from posturing and launching any strikes. Isak dug his chin into his opponent's solar plexus, hoping to make him uncomfortable enough to move. Joakim did move after a few seconds, but mostly because he wanted to stand and strike with Isak again, considering he’d lost in most of their grappling exchanges so far. Keeping one hand firmly held around the challenger's head, he used his right hand to find the mat, then shifted his hips back, trying to drag himself to the fence. He was able to do so, but not without Isak landing two punches. The first caught Joakim across the jaw, the second glancing off his cheek and onto his forehead, tearing the cut open a bit more. Once he was finally against the cage, Joakim started to work his legs up Isak's back. Isak read his man easily however, rolling his hips to his left side, the challenger dug his elbow deep into the champion's groin, grinding down with all his weight at the space between his inner thigh an athletic cup.

Joakim's guard popped open, allowing Isak to swiftly step over his fellow fighter's legs. With the champion’s legs free though, he was able to stand back up. Now perpendicular to his opponent, Isak landed a crushing right knee, following his opponent's head as he rose to his feet again. The knee had rocked the champion, giving him bambi legs before the challenger scored a compact, piston like left hand to the other’s chin. The punch dropped him, Joakim falling to his back, but keeping his eyes on Isak as he once again pulled guard, motioning for Isak to come down to the canvas and grapple with him. Isak smiled at his opponent, shaking his head as the buzzer went off, indicating the end of the second round. The Norwegian fighter went back to his corner, refusing the stool as he still felt the high of his knockdown.

"Great knockdown little viking! I’m loving that left elbow Isak. We’re landing it every time man. Keep hiding it in your combos when you’re closing distance.", Elias advised his fighter.

Chris nodded in agreement.

“Our Muay Thai is looking great kid. Every knee you land is hurting him Isak, but don’t get lazy ok? Follow up, fake the single or double leg then score with your elbows and punches up top. Also, loving it when you go to the body on the cage, so keep it up. And don’t be afraid to angle those knees when you throw them. Naesheim, what we got?’”

Even smiled broadly at Isak.

“You're doing great Isak. We're schooling him in the grappling exchanges, and that trip was amazing. But don’t get too cocky ok? You dictate where he moves. I want you three steps ahead at all times Isak. Stop letting him get back up on the fence ok? Pass guard, triangle his legs, but don’t let him get up, he's exposed when he’s standing back up so he’s going to eventually time your strikes. The more top control we have in this fight the better.”

“Ok. Got it.”, Isak replied, his mind absorbing all the instruction and critique his cornermen had to give. The referee looked to the blonde's corner, making a circling motion with his index finger. The three coaches got the hint, giving their fighter a parting sip of water before exiting the decagon. Ognjen looked to each fighter separately, repeating his question from the beginning of round two and receiving the same confirming answers.

“Round three, fight!”
Round 3

Joakim was fighting with a renewed vigor, his skill and tactical style paying off for him as Isak launched a heavy jab, being countered by a quick shin to the inside of his own lead leg. The strike got a reaction from the contender; a hard right straight. The champ slipped the punch skillfully though, moving his head as he landed a stabbing left uppercut to Isak's body. He then threw a faux right hand, getting the blonde to react before essentially tackling him to the ground. It was as if the Pol had been saving all his energy before and was now letting it loose. He brought three hard, flush right elbows down onto Isak’s face, almost immediately giving the Bred Akse fighter a black left eye. Joakim hadn’t been very conscious of his hip position though, allowing Isak to turn his hips off to the left, feeling the wind from the champion's fourth elbow strike as it smashed into the floor of the decagon. Isak dragged his hips back, repositioning himself into a southpaw stance as stood back up.

Joakim shot out a few jabs, timing Isak with a right hand, but only landing it partially as the other man rolled with the shot. He ducked his head off and down to his left side, returning with a kick to the StavMAC fighter's lead leg. This time it did buckle him, the battered limb falling out from underneath him as Isak followed him down to the mat, attempting to land a flying punch, but catching an up kick to his stomach instead. The champion brought his feet to the inside of the challenger's hips, attempting to elevate him and sweep him. As he did so however, he made a critical error, turning his hips to his right and exposing his back. The other featherweight seized the opportunity, clinging to his opponent's back and digging his heels into the front of Joakim's stomach.

The featherweight champion tried to stand, but Isak thrust his legs downward, pushing the other fighter’s legs out from underneath him and flattening him onto the canvas. Isak now reigned down a series of hooks to the champ's head, getting him to move his upper body and cover up in an attempt to avoid and deflect the strikes. As he was doing so though, Isak was able to work in his left hand, securing it underneath his fellow fighter's neck lightning fast. Joakim tried to move to his knees, but even as he was able to do so, Isak only tightened his hold, now grasping his right bicep with his left hand and crossing his left leg underneath his right and squeezing his opponent like an anaconda. He drove his forehead into the back of the other fighter's skull, pushing him further into the choke. As the featherweight champion brought his hands up to peel Isak's arm away from his neck, Isak changed his grip, putting his palms together, driving his forehead into the back of his man’s own head all while squeezing with every last bit of strength left in him. The referee was inspecting the two closely, one knee on the ground as his face was only a foot or so away from the two athlete’s.

As soon as he saw Joakim's rapid tapping of Isak's left bicep, he placed both hands on the fighter's, loudly enunciating a “Stop!”, before Isak rolled off his defeated opponent, breathing heavily and closing his eyes. An echoing cheer broke out of the crowd, the fans going crazy over the younger fighter's dominant finish. As both teams were let into the decagon, Isak felt himself being scooped up off the floor, a stunning smile peering down at him as he allowed himself to be hoisted up above Even's shoulders, the coach giving him a few pats on his butt before setting him back down. The other two coaches crowded the pair, all four men embracing one another for some well earned post fight celebration. The yet to be crowned new champion noticed the ringside doctor coming over to him as he smiled at Isak, congratulating him. He pressed a hand gently to Isak's face inspecting his black eye.

“Anything feel loose or broken doc?”, The new champ asked.
The doctor smiled and shook his head.

“Nope. It’s one hell of a black eye, but you’ll be alright.”

The doctor followed up his routine, going through the concussion protocol before deeming Isak ok. By this time, William had entered the cage. Upon seeing the NFC owner, Isak launched himself at him, dragging him into a hug as the man laughed and smiled at his employee, returning the hug with one arm as his other held a microphone. Isak then made his way over to his defeated adversary, bowing to him respectfully before the two embraced, having just shared one of the most intense eleven minutes and twelve seconds of their lives with one another.

“That was amazing man. Really Isak. You are going to be great. I know this.”

Isak’s smile was involuntary as he thanked his opponent, raising the other man’s hand in his own, causing the crowd to cheer loudly at the sign of respect. Eskild smiled at both fighter’s, motioning them to the center of the decagon as the referee stood in between the two, taking a hold of both of their hands. Eskild cleared his throat before reading out the result.

“Ladies and gentlemen, referee Ognjen Topic has called a stop to this contest at one minute and twelve seconds into the third round, for your winner, due to a rear naked choke…..” The redhead kept the crowd in suspense, despite everyone already knowing the result, “Aaaand new, featherweight Norske Fighting Champion of the world……..Isak Little Viking Valtersen!” The fans again went wild, cheering for their newly minted champion as the NFC co-owner wrapped the championship title belt around Isak’s waist. William smiled brightly at the younger blonde as he started his post-fight interview with him.

“We’ll talk to Joakim in just a minute, but first, Isak Valtersen everyone!”

At William’s recognition of him, the fight fans again showed their appreciation, chants of “Valtersen!”, bouncing off the walls of the arena.

“Isak, congratulations, first of all, and what are you feeling right now?”, the NFC co-owner asked the new champion. Isak felt tears crowd into his eyes, wiping them away as he laughed and smiled.

“Um, honestly, I can’t really describe it. I’m just so happy right now. I’m so grateful to all my coaches, to my gym, Bred Akse, the best fucking gym in the world! And to my parents. You know, it wasn’t always easy for me growing up, but they love and support me in everything I do, and I don’t know if I’d be here without them. And of course, to all of you!”

Another round of claps and cheering brought another smile out of Isak. The champion placed a hand on the mic, leaning into it as he spoke.

“I’d also like to thank my opponent, Joakim Oglinovsky. He’s a true warrior guys, he really is. And um, there’s someone else I have to thank to. I won’t mention them by name, but you know who you are and um, I uh, I really, really like you and I’m glad we met one another.” Isak caught eyes with Tobias, who was sitting a few rows back on the floor, the boys sharing small, private smiles with each other. William smiled at Isak shaking his hand and exclaiming, “Your new featherweight champion, Isak Valtersen, ladies and gentlemen!” before he walked over a few feet to where Isak's opponent had removed his gloves, holding them in his right hand.

“Joakim”, William begin, placing a hand on the dethroned man’s back, “That was one hell of a fight. You lived up to your name sake and called it as it did end up going into the third round, but unfortunately, you weren’t able to best your opponent. What are you feeling right now, and how do you feel about this fight?”
Before the former champion could respond, the crowd broke into a cheer as he smiled and raised his right hand.

“Honestly, I am happy right now. It was a great fight and Isak is a good fighter. You know, I obviously wanted the win, but Isak was the better man tonight, and I congratulate him for this.”

“Joakim, I noticed you’ve taken your gloves off, and there was some talk before this fight about your possible retirement. Is it safe to say this is your retirement fight?”

Joakim smiled, nodding as he walked over to Isak, shaking his hand and giving his victorious opponent his gloves. He walked back to William, an arena full of fans cheering for him.

“Yes William, this will be my last fight. I’ve got one little girl already and another on the way and I want to be around for them for a long time. You know, I was planning to retire after this one, win, lose, or draw, but I do have to say, if I have to retire on a loss, I couldn’t pick a better fighter than Isak. He’s a great talent, and he will go far in this sport, I know this.”

William waited for the crowd to die down, once again letting their appreciation be known, particularly when the former champion said his catch phrase.

“Well Joakim, you are humble in victory, just as you are in defeat. And you are called The Oracle for a reason, so I’d say Isak has a bright future ahead of him. It has been an absolute honor to have you compete in the NFC, and I wish you all the best in your retirement. Ladies and gentlemen, Joakim Oglinovsky!” A final, heartfelt cheer resounded throughout the Stavanger sports arena as the fans let their love and appreciation for the now retired fighter known. Isak and Joakim shared one final hug, taking a few pictures together before a final, parting handshake. Isak walked out of the cage, flanked by his coaches.

Along the way, a man a few inches shorter than Isak stopped him, asking for a picture in a rolling, Irish brogue. Isak looked to his left, noticing the man as none other than Graham Boylan, the president of the UK based Cage Warriors promotion. Isak's smile was wide enough to cause pain to his deeply bruised left eye, but in the moment he didn’t even feel it.

“Oh! Yes, of course we can do this!”, the blonde informed the other man happily, his accented English bringing a smile to the other’s lips. Graham brought his head beside Isak's, a smile adorning his face as he snapped a picture with the new champion, thanking him and shaking his hand before sending him off. Isak was enthralled. Just meeting the Cage Warriors president was a big step in the right direction for his career. He continued walking until he reached the locker room of the arena, his coaches helping him down into a chair.

He hadn’t been in the locker room for more than a minute before a smiling Tobias burst into the space, a wide smile across his face as the younger man embraced his boyfriend tightly. Isak laughed deeply, returning the hug. The two parted, their foreheads meeting, before Tobi placed a light kiss on Isak's lips, being cautious of his black eye. He leaned back, settling into the chair beside his significant other.

“You know Isak, I really do think Joakim is right. You're going to go all the way to the top. I know this.”

The two boys shared a laugh at Tobias’ implementation of Joakim's tag line, but if Isak's introduction to and picture with the UK promotion's president was anything to go off of, he wasn’t wrong. As the doctor came in to drain the blood from the featherweight's swollen left eye and ears, he let out a long, happy sigh. Isak Valtersen was the NFC Featherweight Champion, and the world was his oyster.
Stuff for the fic

1. Stavanger Sports Arena (Idrettshall)
2. DJ Shadow feat. Run The Jewels - Nobody Speak
3. Isak's rubber guard
4. Graham Boylan
5. TPBCMV Playlist

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys enjoyed the chapter! This was a huge moment for Isak, and in the next several chapters his career will really start to take off, which means I'll be introducing you all to more of the men and women who make the sport possible, and I have to say I'm very excited to do so! There is more angst and back story ahead, but for now everyone id celebrating! Have a great rest of the weekend guys, and thank all of you for reading and responding to this fic!

https://open.spotify.com/playlist/71oHsLL1qDCOhUIA3xrZHH
Animals

Chapter Summary

Isak celebrates his win with his boyfriend.

Chapter Notes

What's uuuuup! So first thing's first, there is some smut in this chapter. If you'd like to skip it, it starts after Tobi asks Isak to join him in the shower and goes until the next scene. Also there is some drug use in this chapter. Nothing crazy or too hard, but it is there. I also wouldn't suggest doing the kind of drug Isak does after a fight, but hey, the guy just won a world championship. Anywho, I hope all of you are doing well and are enjoying the story! Leave me some comments or kudos if you wish and thanks for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

HoT Open Mind Night Club

Stavanger

11:48

Isak’s eyes moved around the club. It was cozy, but had an heir of fun to it as well. There were people packed onto the dance floor and crowded along the bar as well. Upon further inspection, the blonde saw that there were several people of the same gender dancing together, men and women alike. It was just beginning to dawn on the young fighter what Chris and Even meant when they said that wanted to try a ‘different kind of club’ than the gangs usual post fight haunt. Although considering that the name of the club was printed in rainbow coloring, Isak didn’t know why he was surprised. It wasn’t exactly his scene, but Tobi seemed happy enough and the rest of his team and coaches, including William and Noora, looked to be enjoying themselves.

Isak was sitting at the bar with his boyfriend sipping on a Tuborg, dressed in a pair of light colored jeans that hugged his legs and ass, much to his boyfriend's delight, and watching his friend's dancing along with the music. Tobi nudged the other boy motioning to where Chris and Even were dancing with a girl between them, both men's arms resting on the girl's as well as on each other's. Isak scoffed fondly, shaking his head.

“You know”, Tobias said, “I heard those two put up quite the numbers back in the day. With girls and boys.”

Isak smiled, but rolled his eyes.

“Yes Tobi, I’m sure Even and Chris had a fuckboi phase in their younger days.”
The boys had a laugh, Tobias opening his mouth to respond before exclaiming a loud “Ooh!”, as he recognized the song blasting out of the club's speakers.

Do the D.A.N.C.E.

12345

Stick to the B.E.A.T.

Get ready to ignite

You were such a P.Y.T.

Catching all the lights

Just as easy as A.B.C.

That's how we make it right

Tobias pulled puppy dog eyes on his boyfriend, grasping the taller man's hand and trying to get him off his seat at the bar. He smiled at Isak as the blonde begrudgingly followed the other youth. Tobi began to dance up against his boy, moving his hips in rhythm with the music. Isak giggled shaking his head.

“Babe, you know I don’t dance.”

Tobias groaned.

“Isak, the name of this song is literally called dance. If you don’t I’m pretty sure the god of gayness will strike you down.”

Isak laughed, shrugging, but nodding as well. Tobias smiled, retrieving a small, round item from his pants pocket.

“I uh, also have something that might help you loosen up a bit, if you’re interested.”

Isak looked from the small, scored pill back up to his boyfriend.

“Tobias Sverdiensen, are you offering me drugs?”, Isak asked, putting on a fake scandalized voice. Tobias bit the pill in half, leaving one half on his tongue and perking his eyebrows up at the other male. Isak looked a bit tentative, his eyes reflexively darting around the club. Tobias laughed, being careful to keep the MDMA on his tongue.

“Weh ehn ah gway cluh Isah!”, then younger boy shouted. Isak giggled to himself before shrugging and slotting his lips over his boyfriend's accepting his tongue into his mouth and letting the half a pill fall between his gums and teeth. The two made out for a while more, Isak catching the lights as they bounced around the club. When Isak opened his lids again Even was closer; the song had changed as well, switching to something with a harder, more aggressive beat. Even and the girl he and Chris were dancing with had switched places so Chris was now pressed against the other, although his lips were attached to the woman’s in front of him. Even gave his
fighter a cheeky wink before focusing back on the task at hand, which seemed to be pulling the girl and Chris tighter against his body.

Tobias broke away from his boyfriend for a moment, putting the other half of the pill into his mouth and allowing it to slowly dissolve. The boys rejoined their lips, moving along with the mass of bodies on the dance floor, all moving with the heavy, rhythmic bass of the club's DJ. Isak had a feeling this was going to be a fun night.

**Søndag**

**Frebruar 17th, 2019**

**3:07**

Tobias and Isak emerged from the club, laughing as the clung to one another. The small dose of the drug Isak had taken wasn’t quite enough to give him a “roll” as it were, but it definitely relaxed him, made him dance with his boyfriend unashamedly. At one point girl Chris had gotten in between the two boys, all three celebrating and having a good time. It wasn't something Isak planned to do often, in fact he wasn’t sure he’d do it again, but it was a good experience, and getting to share it with Tobi made it more special. The young men piled into the Uber, Isak being thankful the driver didn’t recognize him. Tobias turned to him, smiling before giving him a small smooch and grasping the other's hand.

“Who was the guy you took a picture with?” Tobi asked.

Isak sighed, a small giggle escaping his mouth.

“He was the president of the biggest mma promotion in Europe.”

Tobi’s eyes widened, his smiling pulling his lips apart.

“Isak that's fucking amazing! You think he'll contact you for a fight?”

“Can’t be sure,” the champion said, “There’s a lot of good fighter's from Scandinavia in Cage Warriors you know. But, he knows my name, so that’s a start for sure.”

The brunette hummed as he snuggled into his boyfriend.

“How long before you can train again?” Tobias asked.

“It’s going to be at least forty five days. Anytime a doctor has to drain a hematoma on your face, there’s gonna be a medical suspension. But I know the real reason you want me back in the gym.”

Tobi’s eyebrows offset as he looked at his boy.

“Oh?”

“Mhmm”, Isak responded, exuding a fake cockiness, “You just want to watch me get sweaty with a bunch of other guys.”

The young men shared a laugh, their driver cracking a short lived grin at Isak's joke as well.
“I mean, I won’t lie”, Tobias told his boyfriend, “Watching you and Even go at it on the mat? Pretty hot dude.”

“What!?”, Isak said half serious, pretending to push the other boy away. Tobi giggled as he explained himself.

“What? C’mon Isak. I mean obviously I’m with you, but you and Even? You’d make a sexy couple.” Tobi looked to the driver, “Sorry to be so crude.” The driver smiled back from the rearview mirror.

“Hey, no worries kid. I’ve heard way worse before.”

The trio shared a small laugh as the Uber pulled up to Isak's hotel. Upon Isak's coaches behest, he and Tobi were staying in different rooms, but tonight that wouldn’t be the case. The couple climbed from the car, thanking their driver before walking the short distance to the hotel entrance. They greeted the night manager as they walked in, going to the elevator and walking inside. Once the boys were in the small space, Tobias went on the attack, quickly pushing Isak into the elevator wall and pushing their lips together. Isak responded in kind, making a short, guttural noise in his throat as Tobias pressed their bodies further together. After several seconds, the blonde gently pushed his boyfriend away, laughing as he spoke to him.

“Jeez, did you not get enough at the club?”

Tobias smirked, griping Isak's half hard dick through his jeans and squeezing.

“Not quite.”

As the elevator doors opened the two made a mad dash for Tobi's room, the keycard somehow ending up in Isak's hand as they got to the younger's room. The shorter boy was kissing the taller's neck, his hands firmly settled on Isak's waist as he ground his crotch up and into the other's ass. Isak's breathing increased, both men saying a silent prayer as the door finally flew open. The fighter turned around, once again meshing his lips together with his boyfriend's, the pair kissing languidly as the removed their clothing, breaking only to shed their shirts before pressing their bare skin to one another. They’d moved back several feet, Isak's legs now less than a foot from the bed. As Tobias began to slowly lay kisses along his neck, the blonde let out a loud, involuntary sigh. As he was doing so, his significant other wrapped a hand around the back of his head, quickly pulling down before slipping his right leg behind Isak's own as he reflexively repositioned. A gentle push backwards was all it took for the smaller boy to send the other one flopping down onto the bed; surprised yet oddly very aroused. Isak couldn’t contain the short barking laugh that he released.

“Um excuse me, did my boyfriend just Ko Uchi Gari my ass onto the bed?”

Tobias laughed along with him, nodding as he straddled Isak, the shirtless couple grinning widely at each other.

“He did. And now he’s in full mount.”

Isak chuckled again, his eyes at half-mast as he began kissing his boyfriend again. Tobias was running his hands over the blonde's chest, feeling the hard work and hours of resistance training he’d put in at the gym and appreciating it all. The smaller boy leaned back, unzipping his own jeans and shimmying them off his hips and legs before stepping off the bed. He threw a coy smile to Isak over his shoulder as he sauntered to the bathroom door.
“I’m gonna take a shower”, he shrugged, “Join me.”

The words were a statement, but Tobias’ eyes held a question. A question Isak had every intention of answering with a resounding yes. But as soon as Tobi had entered the ensuite bathroom, a nervousness erupted in the older boy's gut. What if he wants to have sex? Making out naked and afternoon handjobs are a far cry from actually having sex with another guy! Isak was worried. He slowly stripped the rest of his clothing off, controlling his breathing as he opened the door, noticing the steam that had already begun to fog the mirror and moisten the floor. He gulped silently before speaking.

“Babe? You in there already?”

“Yep. Water's already nice and hot Isak.”

*Ok Isak. We can do this. He's your boyfriend for Christ's sake!*

The blonde uttered a small, “Ok”, to himself, before pulling back the thick, opaque shower curtain and stepping into the hot stream of water. He noticed Tobias was turned around, lathering shampoo suds into his hair as the rivulets of water ran down his back, gathering on the round swell of his ass before falling to the shower floor. He turned around grinning at his boyfriend as he approached him.

“Hi.”, Tobias said in a sultry tone, running his hands down and over Isak's back before grabbing two handfuls of the other’s ass.

“Oh, uh hi.”

The two giggled before meeting their lips again, their mouths working against each other as both their bodies reacted. The boy's were each sporting full erections in no time, Isak now dropping his head to kiss along Tobias' jaw and neck. He brought his right hand across his body, smoothing it down Tobi's before meeting the shortly cut curls above his hard dick. He opened his eyes, locking his gaze to his boyfriend's before he grasped him in his hand, bringing a pleasurable shudder out of the other boy. Isak started slowly, the two communicating using only one another's bodies as he got his boyfriend off. He dragged his hand up and down the brunette’s cock, the motion familiar to him by now.

He tightened up his fingers every time he passed over the head, pulling a soft “Fuck”, from Tobi's mouth. They pressed their foreheads together, looking into the other’s eyes. Isak's mouth opened now, his own breath beginning to increase slightly from his efforts. He turned his hand inward a tad, now adding a twisting motion as he got his boyfriend off. Tobias responded well to the adjustment, sighing before putting his head down on Isak's shoulder. He began kissing and nipping at the other’s skin, sucking tiny droplets of water up before they were deposited back onto Isak's skin, now mixed with saliva from Tobias’ eager mouth. The two continued like this for a little while, Isak increasing his speed until a wet, rhythmic sound could be heard echoing in the small space.

“Oh shit. Oh, God, fuck babe.”, Tobias squeaked out, thoroughly lost in the pleasure his boyfriend was giving him. Isak tilted his boy's head up, meeting his eyes again.

“Yeah?”, he asked, his voice moving into an authoritative yet erotic tone, “Like when I get you off huh Tobi? When I get my hands on you? Know I’m gonna make you feel good don’t you?”

Tobias could only respond with a hurried “Hmmm” and a nod. Isak chuckled breathily, stepping into his boyfriend a little more so the head of his dick was angled against the blonde's abs.
“I want your cum baby. Want you to cum all over this body you love so much.”

Thinking quickly, Isak pulled himself and his boyfriend out from under the spray, the two reveling in the hot steam that surrounded. Tobias was gone. Isak had been a little timid with the dirty talk when they’d first started hooking up with each other, but by now he was a pro. A few more strokes was all it took for Tobias to open his mouth against Isak's, the pair sharing a breath as the younger man came in hard, staccato jets against Isak's own dick and abs. Tobias leaned against his boyfriend once he was finished, letting go a short laugh of relief that Isak gladly joined in on. He pulled himself back from the taller boy, looking down to see his handiwork painted onto Isak's body and pubic hair in short streaks and various sized globs. He met Isak's eyes again, the two smiling before sharing a brief, passionate kiss. Tobi gripped his boyfriend loosely, bringing his lips to the other's ear.

“I had something a little different in mind for you this time.”

Moving back from the older boy he met his eyes again.

“That cool?”

What could only be described as a big, dumb, goofy smile stretched Isak's face a he nodded rapidly.

“Totally cool.”

Tobias smiled, kissing the taller man again before trailing short, sucking pulls of his lips down Isak's jaw, neck and chest, before finally settling on his knees in front of the blonde. He smirked up at the other young man as he began to lazily stroke his cock.

“Try not to cum too quick by the way. I’m pretty good at this.”

Isak snorted, a response on the tip of his tongue before Tobi pulled the foreskin of his dick back, using the head of Isak's cock like an icebreaker on a cargo ship to separate his lips before closing them just behind the head again. The fighter jolted, expecting the sensation, but not prepared for the reality of it. Tobias flicked his tongue out, massaging Isak’s dick with it as he pushed more and more of the taller boy into his mouth until he'd settled at the base, water from the shower dropping off Tobias' lips and down onto the blonde’s cock and balls. As he pulled back, the brunette situated his tongue between Isak's head and foreskin, rolling the skin back and forth over the appendage as he circled the moist organ around Isak. A flick of his eyes to the fighter's had Tobi humming in laughter. Isak appeared to be holding on by a thread. He pulled off entirely, a pained moan at the loss emitting from his boyfriend.

“Don’t want it to be over too quick babe.”

Isak just laughed as he exhaled, nodding to his boyfriend. After a few seconds, Tobi placed Isak back in his mouth, sucking the other boy down to the base. The older of the two looked down in awe. It wasn’t like Isak was particularly big or anything. In fact, Isak knew himself to be pretty average honestly. The idea of being able to swallow a dick down like that though? Well, this would last longer if the champion didn’t dwell on it. Instead, he closed his eyes, tracing his fingers through Tobias’ wet locks and sighing periodically. The shorter boy began moving his mouth up and down Isak's cock, following it with his hand as well. He did this several times before popping the erection from his mouth, slapping it against his own tongue as he looked up at Isak. Opening his eyes to the sight proved to be almost to much for the older boy, distancing his hips from Tobi for a few short seconds before saying a small, “Jesus, ok, go ahead”, under his breath.
Tobi brought his hands around to Isak's hips as he shallowly sucked the first few inches back into his mouth, slowly working his hands in between Isak's ample ass cheeks. **Maybe this was why he wanted to take a shower,** Isak thought to himself. He gulped, noticing Tobias had at some point gotten some soap and lathered his hands. He broke free from Isak's dick, moving his tongue along the other's balls before sucking one into his mouth and releasing it with a 'pop'. He looked back up at his boyfriend, moving a soap covered finger just outside his hole.

"Is this ok?”, he asked, clearly not wanting to alarm the blonde. After a few short seconds Isak nodded, speaking up for just a second.

"I um, I’ve never really……I mean, a couple times in like second and third year, but I didn’t really know what I was doing.”

A cocky, sexy smirk flashed across Tobi's face.

"Well, lucky for you, I know exactly what I’m doing.”

Before Isak could even formulate a response, his boyfriend had gotten back to work blowing him again, this time letting his saliva wash over Isak's cock head before taking him back in his mouth, at the same time slowly and gently working the index finger of his right hand into the blonde and stopping at his first knuckle. He sucked Isak down again, hard, as he noticed his erection withering just slightly. This brought Isak back to full hardness, also allowing Tobi to slip in a few more centimeters. He paused, letting his boyfriend get used to small intrusion as he focused on sucking him off again. As Isak laid his head back onto the shower wall, Tobias begin to move his finger around in a circular motion, rubbing gently against the hot, wet walls of Isak's hole. A small, broken moan pulled itself from the other boy's lips as Tobias renewed his efforts on his cock, breathing through his nose as he continued bobbing his head. Isak's relaxation gave him the last bit of space he needed, pushing the whole of his finger into the older boy's body before settling again, allowing him some time to adjust once again.

This took significantly less time than before, Isak relaxing into his boyfriend's experienced hands. Tobias’ brought his left hand to the other's full blooded cock, grasping it and moving his hand along it in the same motion with his mouth, all the while gently circling Isak's hole with the middle finger of his right hand. Letting go a small “Oh god”, and the body shudder along with it told Tobi he’d found what he was looking for. He curled his finger just slightly, pushing in a tiny bit further before massaging the small nub he could feel there. It wasn't a direct hit every time, maybe every third or fourth stroke of the digit, but it was enough the get Isak's thighs quaking. The older man sucked in a harsh, deep breath as his boyfriend slowly worked in his second finger, following the same process as the first. It wasn’t long before Isak's right hand held tightly onto Tobias head, his left dangling beside his body uselessly.

The pointed yet soft jabs at his prostate were adding up quickly for Isak. It wasn't long before he could feel his body break out into a sweat. Short whines and noises were now falling from the blonde's mouth of their own accord, the fighter having abandoned any attempt at composing himself. As Tobi brought his cock into his throat one last time, Isak began to feel himself losing it. He forced out a short, desperate “Tobi!”, to warn the other young man of his impending orgasm, but Tobias' only response was an affirming hum around his boy's cock. A coiled, hot spring unwound in Isak's lower abdomen, the pleasure being ripped from him almost painfully as he cried out. Tobi's two fingers were now buried as deep as they could get inside Isak, the blonde's eyes rolling to the back of his head as he shot stream after stream of cum into his boyfriend's mouth and down his throat. Tobi pulled off Isak, the last few ropes arcing across his lips and the tip of his nose. Isak opened his eyes after collecting himself for a few seconds, noticing his own lingering cum on Tobias' face and pushing a stuttered breath from his lungs as he met the other in a deep,
long kiss.

The boyfriend's broke apart, staring into each other's eyes before devolving into a short lived fit of giggles. Tobi reached behind the taller male, turning the shower knob until the stream of water cut off, leaving the boys in a the warm, steam filled room. He gave the blonde one last smooch before pulling open the shower curtain and stepping out onto the bathmat. He gathered up his own, fluffy white hotel towel, handing Isak his own before rubbing the fabric over his hair and body. The two opened the door to the bedroom again, wrapping their towels around themselves to stave off the cooler air. Both young men dressed in their underwear, Tobias letting Isak borrow a pair of his before they snuggled under the hotel bed covers and into one another. The taller man ran a hand over his boyfriend's face smiling at him and giving him a small forehead kiss then shortly after drifting off to sleep.

11:13

A pair of blue irises blinked open gradually, their owner squinting against the intruding late morning sun as he sat up in bed. Even felt the space next to him, a paradoxical wave of relief and disappointment coming over him as he realized the other side of the bed was empty. He was glad he hadn’t found a naked Chris Schistad on the mattress though. Even would never not admit that his longtime friend was a very handsome man. In fact, if the two hadn’t already known each other, Even would’ve seriously considered hooking up with him last night. But as sexy, charming, and funny as the kickboxer could be, Even drew the line at having sex with his friends. He rolled over to the right side of the bed, a yawn breaking free from his mouth as he put in the passcode on his phone, scrolling through some posts he and his friend's had put up from last night.

There was several short videos of Isak's finish and the fight highlights, with a variety of hashtags attached to them including, but not limited to, #NFCCCHAMP #FEATHERWEIGHTCHAMP #LITTLEVIKNG #ANDNEW. Even smiled, his slightly hungover brain still happy for his fighter. The tall blonde stripped his shirt off taking his underwear off next before cranking the knob for the hot water on the shower. Once it was suitable to him, the grappler entered the stream of steaming hydrogen and oxygen. He sighed, allowing the water to soothe and relax him. Closing his eyes, Even's brain was presented him with pictures of the night before, in particular images of Isak and Tobias. Even would be lying if he tried to tell himself he wasn’t watching the two younger men dance with one another.

They were a very attractive couple after all. And it wasn’t as if Even hadn’t imagined himself to be the one in female Chris' place when the boys had been dancing with her. Although he wasn’t about to admit that out loud. Just a Even's hand strayed to his now wet crotch, there was a soft knock at his bathroom door. “Yes?”, he inquired, an unintentional bite in his tone. “It’s Elias bro, just wanted to let you know Vilde, Magnus, and Isakias are ready whenever you are.” Even’s snorted, quickly turning the water for the shower and wrapping a towel around his waist. He cracked open the door, looking at Elias with his eyebrows pulled in and lips pressed together in a flat line, although a smile tugged at the corners.

“Isakias?”, Even asked, his tone clearly deriding the name for the couple. Elias shrugged, nodding.

“You, Magnus gave them a ship name.”

Even made short scoff in his throat.
“No, that’s not their ship name. I love Mags to death, but he’s wrong on this one.”

Elias pinned his friend with an interested set of eyes.

“All right then, o’ mighty ship name maker Even, what is it then?”

“Pfftttt, it’s obviously Tobisak Elias. Come one, this is day one stuff here.”

The long time friends laughed, the Morrocowegian leaving Even to get dressed and pack his things. It had been a great weekend, and getting to see Isak so open and happy had been the perfect cap for it. Although Even admittedly still wished he was the one with Isak. It hurt, but he would come to terms with it eventually. He’d have to if he wanted to keep training the young fighter.

Highway E18

Even was headed back to Oslo with the same crew he’d rode up with, Magnus now driving with his girlfriend in the passengers seat. The tall black belt was sitting in the back with Tobi and Isak, the featherweight champ pressed into his right side as his sleeping boyfriend was snuggled into his side. He smiled at the pair, motioning his head to the unconscious youth.

“Fun night for Tobias, eh?”, Even asked his friend. Isak smiled down at the boy sleeping in his shoulder.

“I’d say so. You know, Tobias told me you and Chris used to by quite the hoes back in the day.”

Isak turned his head, looking at Even with a smirk tugging at his mouth. Even scoffed, fake offence and putting his hand to his chest and moving backwards. Well, as much as he could in the small space anyway.

“Well I’m sorry that myself and Chris’ sexual liberation makes you so uncomfortable Isak. It’s not my fault I’m so handsome and charming you know.”

It was now Isak’s turn to scoff, smiling at his coach as he shook his head.

“Seriously though, I’m glad you and Tobi had a good time. You really do deserve it Isak.”

The two were silent for a short stretch of seconds, staring into the another’s eyes before Vilde cleared her throat, each breaking their gaze.

“So Isak”, she said, turning her body to look at her friend, “I saw the picture you took with Graham Boylan. Think he’ll be contacting you?”

Isak sighed, lifting his left shoulder in a shrug so as not to disturb his slumbering boyfriend.

“We’ll have to see. I’ve got a medical suspension for about a month and a half. And I’m not supposed to spar or have any heavy contact for three weeks. But yeah, he knows who I am, so I’m pretty psyched honestly.”, he said, a smile gracing his face.

“Man!”, Magnus exclaimed, “I’m so happy for you buddy! This is awesome!”

Isak chuckled.

“I appreciate it Mags, but let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Right now, we just have to take things as
they come.” Isak looked back to Even, his smile becoming larger. “But I have a good feeling about it. Especially when I’ve got a living legend in my corner.” The fighter nudged Even, the taller man smiling back at him, his ears and cheeks reddening at the praise. The younger man wasn’t sure what it was. Wasn’t sure he even had a word for it actually. But there was something he felt when he shared those short, stolen glances with Even. Something that he was nervous of, yet also undeniably curious about. And whether Isak was aware of it or not, that curiosity was all the hope Even needed.

Stuff for the fic

1. HoT Open Mind Night Club
2. D.A.N.C.E. - Justice
3. Animals - Martin Garrix
4. Tobias' Ko Uchi Gari
5. TPBCMV Playlist

6. Medical suspensions in MMA can vary from as little as a one week ban on sparring all the way out to a 180 day ban on any training. Under most fighter's contracts, competing during this suspension time for another promotion is usually grounds for release from the promotion they received the suspension under. 180 day bans are most often the result of an injury sustained within the match itself. Also, the majority of mixed martial arts Promotion's use the officiating athletic commission to issue medical suspensions, which usually have their own team of medical professionals who will assess a fighter. The vast majority of athletic commissions will issue a mandatory 180 day ban on any contact if a fighter in knocked unconscious. Medical suspensions are in place, realistically, to protect fighter's from themselves. In Isak's bout, he didn't receive a concussion, but he did have a cosmetic injury, a black eye, and that combined with allowing time for him to recover is the main reason for his suspension.

Chapter End Notes

Aww shit, Isak got a belt and then some! I hope the smut was to everyone's liking. I always feel weird writing it, but after I'm like, strangely kind of proud of myself. Anyone else ever feel like that? Anyways, I hope everyone is having a good weekend so far and I hope you guys have a great week as well. I've updated the Spotify playlist with the songs from the chapter if people want to check it out. There'll be a link in the stuff for the fic section and I'll put one down here as well.

TPBCMV playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/71oHsLLIqDCOuhULA3xrZHH
Ok, so on a completely, totally unrelated note, a favorite comedian of mine, Brody Stevens, has very sadly decided to take his own life at the age of 48. I know this is completely off topic, but I really can't not say something about it. Brody was an incredible talent and I've honestly been surprised by how much his passing has effected me. I just wanted to take this time to let you guys know that taking your own life is never the answer, even if it may feel like it. Brody was bipolar, had many friend's in the L.A. comedy scene, and a good support group of doctors and therapists. To paraphrase one of Brody's friends, sometimes mental illness can be like cancer; you can treat it, live with it, and in the end it still kills you. I'm not trying to upset any of y'all, but I do feel this was the case with Brody. So please, if you feel depressed or like you may be having thoughts about not wanting to be here, talk to someone. And please guys, let your friends and family know they're loved. I know it sounds cliche, and I didn't even know the guy, but unfortunately, I have had friend's take their own lives before, and that question of "could I have done more" is always there. Alright, I'll get off the soap box now, just had to say something. Remember to love yourselves and each other, always!
Chapter Summary

Even teaches his kid-jitsu class; Isak and Tobias talk.

Chapter Notes

Yo! I was gonna have this out Saturday or Sunday buuuuut, my brother's band ended up playing this awesome show on Saturday, I drank a little too much too fast and got to have a mini hangover while working on Sunday! Yay! But honestly, it was definitely worth it. Anyways, we're going to be seeing some more interactions between Evak here in the coming chapters as Isak gets some.....career changing news 😋. And we'll also be exploring more of Isak's back story as well. I don't want to give anything away and I have a feeling some of you have already guessed a few parts of our boy's past, but I hope everyone will be surprised and continue to enjoy the story. This chapter is a bit shorter than what I've been writing recently, but I promise there is a reason for it. And I've got another song for the Spotify playlist, a guilty pleasure song truthfully, and as always I'll have the links in the text down in the stuff for the fic section. Hope everyone is having an awesome week!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bred Akse MMA Gym

Torsdag

Mars 28th, 2019

18:33

Even was breathing heavily as he ran through the streets, his cheeks and ears red with exertion. His feet were pounding against the pavement in a steady rhythm. He paused at an intersection, the sound of nearly a dozen smaller shoes pitter patterning to a stop. The blonde was in the middle of teaching his seven through twelve jiu-jitsu class and had decided after some warm up drills and stretches that a nice run around the streets surrounding the gym would get his student's blood pumping. He looked back at the children, counting them off in his head to make sure no one was missing.

“Ok everybody, we're all gonna cross the street together, do another lap around the block, then head back to the gym.”

The children were surprisingly well behaved, although to some of them it was a bit embarrassing to be out in the streets of the city in their gi’s. They didn’t have to worry about being warm though, their instructor's vigorous routine protecting them against the slow to warm weather of the coast.
Once the sign indicator switched to green, Even strode across the crosswalk, looking like a uniformed daddy duck out for a stroll with his offspring. After they’d crossed the street, Even started up again, breaking into a loose jog so the younger jiu-jitsukas could keep up with him.

“Mis”, huff, “Ter”, huff, “Even?”, a blonde boy, David, asked the small group's leader.

“Yes David?”, The adult replied, being sure to look beside and back to his left, making eye contact with the young boy.

“You promised”, the child breathed in deeply, “We’d play a game”, another deep breath, “When we get back right?”

Even smiled at his student, nodding as he looked ahead to guide the flock of kids.

“Towards the end of class David, yes, I promise.”

The boy's nose and cheeks were flushed from his efforts, a wide smile breaking across his face and showing a snaggle toothed grin.

“Awesome!”, he responded, focusing back on keeping in stride with his instructor. Even smiled to himself. It was a longshot from getting to see Lillian everyday, but the kid's class was fun and interesting. It forced him to explain things in a way that was going to make sense to a child, especially to the younger kids, and allowed himself a chance to relearn and go over basics he may have taken for granted. The fact that the kid’s could see the techniques they were learning be used by Isak and the other fighter's in gym while they trained certainly helped as well. Actually, not Isak considering he was still a few out from his medical suspension being finished.

The man's thoughts drifted to the young up and comer. In lieu of the strenuous training and sparring the fighter was used to, he’d been doing more strength training and endurance lately. A few flashes of Isak squatting ran through Even's mind, the older man condemning himself for having such thoughts while he was still technically instructing his class. He breathed a sigh of relief, as did some of his students, as they saw the distinctive yet simple Bred Akse gym logo. It was something Mutta and himself had actually come up with; an elongated oval with a reverse triangle attached to one end. The words Bred Akse Mixed Martial Arts were printed inside the handle of the axe. The triangle contained the Moroccan and Norwegian flag, separated by a small border that contained the information Est. Oslo, 2011.

The class got back to the double doors of the front of the gym, a member that was leaving opened the door for the group, smiling at the children. Once they were all through Even noticed the man holding the door had been none other than Olmeive Deichtner, a friend and training partner of Isak's as well as the current NFC lightweight champion. He smiled politely at the man before entering the gym, relishing in the heated space as he felt his fingers and toes begin to rewarm themselves. He looked over to the featherweight champ, Isak currently running at a leisurely pace on one of the gym's treadmills. The fighter's calves flexed and rippled with each movement, Even's attention being pulled back by his class calling him over. His and Isak's gazes met for the briefest of seconds. He smiled at the children, dramatically running and then rolling onto the mat in front of them, slapping it as he did to the delight of his students.
Even had a bowl of candy sitting on his lap filled with several different kinds of treats, mostly chocolates and hard candy. He was using his fingers to stir the bowl, not unlike a witch at a cauldron. His eyes cast out a speculative gaze, looking at each of the children before pulling out a miniature Hobby bar, chuckling to himself as the youngsters eyed the chocolatey marshmallow candy with reverence. He tossed it between his hands as he asked a question.

“Who can tell me…”, toss, “What part of the body…”, toss, “A kimura effects?”

The children’s hands almost simultaneously shot up, each one wanting the bite sized bit of chocolate. He’d had the kids sit tallest to shortest, putting the taller ones in the back and his shorter students up front so he could see everyone. Even pointed to a little girl, age nine, sitting to his left.

“Go for it Ana.”, he encouraged the girl. She smiled shyly, but responded with confidence in her voice.

“A kimura immob- immobuhl-“, she stopped sighing before continuing, “It’s a shoulder lock Mr. Even.”

Even smiled at his student nodding as he gently threw the treat to the young martial artist.

“Yes Ana. A kimura, also called a double wrist lock, immobilizes the shoulder. It can also effect the elbow as well. Now, for a…”, The instructor scoured through the candy, eventually settling on a Smørbukk caramel, “Delicious caramel, can anyone tell me where the name kimura comes from?”

No sooner was Even done asking the question than a brunette, rather tall for her age, lifted her arm into the air, wiggling it with enthusiasm. The blonde laughed, his eyes squinting up as he did so.

“Can anyone not named Rjuka tell me?”

The girl narrowed her eyes at her sensei, reluctantly putting her hand down. Even searched for a raised hand he may have missed, his eyes doing a quick once over of his class. Just as he was about to move onto another question, a small voice spoke up.

“I think I know sensei Even.”

The instructor's attention was pulled to David, a boy who'd been in his class for a little under two months now. He’d had some trouble getting the child to come out of his shell and interact with the other students, so it was nice hear him speak up.

“Ok David”, the tall grappler reassured the white belt, “Answer whenever you’re ready buddy.”

The child appeared a little nervous, his dark green eyes darting around to his classmates before he answered, his voice small but confident.

“It’s named after a Japanese man. And uh, like, like from a long time ago I think.”

The jiu-jitsu instructor found himself pleasantly surprised at his student's response, using his long reach to hand the child the candy while nodding and smiling at him.

“That’s right! Very good David.”, he said, his own smile being reflected on the boy's face as he praised him. Even’s orbs darted to the clock noticing there was only a minute or so left until his class ended. He rifled through the candy, eventually finding one of the few full sized chocolate bars and thrusting it up into the air, his eyes widening as he waved the candy in front of his students.
“Ok guys, last question, and for a full sized, brand new, totally scrumptious Kvikk Lunsj, who is Jon Olav Einemo?”

Even wasn’t really expecting any of his student's to answer him. He’d always sought to teach them the history of jiu-jitsu, including it's Japanese origins and popularization and refinement in Brazil, but even he knew the question was a little esoteric. It did technically turn out to be one of his student's who answered him, but he wasn’t expecting the answer, or the loose, playful choke that his fighter put him in. Isak had placed a finger to his lips as Even was asking the question, loosely cinching up the technique after the black belt finished asking it. He threw his legs around the taller man's midsection crossing his feet as he answered the question.

“Jon Olav Einemo is a- whoa!”, Isak was surprised as Even turned into him, easily passing his guard and sitting on his hips. He secured the fighter’s legs with his own, trapping them in a figure four configuration, all while positioning Isak into a lateral position so he could look at his class. The smaller blonde crossed his arms, trying to fight the smile that threatened to widen his lips. Even sighed dramatically, putting on a show for the kids as he looked back down at his fighter.

“Oh I’m sorry Isak, I didn’t see you there.”

The class released a barrage of giggles and chuckles as the featherweight rolled his eyes at his coach, smile still present on his face.

“Well Even, what I was going to say, is that Jon Olav Einemo is a pioneer, a very important person kids”, Isak shot his eyes over to Even's class, “For jiu-jitsu in Norway. He won one of the world’s most difficult and biggest grappling tournaments in two thousand three.”

“I wasn’t even alive then!”, a young boy of seven or so said loudly, causing Isak and Even to laugh, as well as some of the older kids. Isak smiled at the child, nodding in agreement.

“And I was only six.”, a barley held back smirk formed on the young fighter's face, “How old were you sensei Even?”, Isak asked, pointing a finger at the man currently sat atop him. Without missing a beat, Even returned the smirk with one of his own, his eyebrows wiggling before he responded, “Old enough to do this!”, and quickly caught Isak's arm, throwing his hips off to the side and easily catching his fighter in an armbar. The shorter man tapped almost immediately, the children laughing at his defeat. He smiled to himself, looking to the mat before Even helped him back to his feet. The older man looked towards The gym entrance, noticing the parents of his students had begun to file into the building from outside.

“Line up!”, Even commanded, his voice reverting back to a more serious, instructive tone as he addressed the collection of young martial artists.

“Ok everybody, we had a great class tonight. Keep working those hip movement drills on your own alright? You guys looked awesome on the mat tonight. And if you have any questions for me” he looked back behind himself, noticing Isak standing somewhat awkwardly, “Or Isak, just ask ok? Remember guys, there are no stupid questions. Because if you’re asking questions you’re learning.”

With that the students and instructor bowed to each other Even smiling at his kids as they ran over to their respective parents. He looked back to see Isak looking at him with his arms crossed, his eyebrows raised, an impatient look on his face as he tapped his foot against the spongy thickness of the mat.

“What?”, Even asked, his voice breaking into a laugh.

“Uh I mean, you said whoever answered that question was getting that Kvikk Lunsj….”, Isak
trailed off, green eyes darting down to the abandoned candy bar.

“Hmm I did didn't I? Tell you what, if you can take me down I’ll give you half.”

Isak scoffed.

“Half? C'mon Naesheim, I deserve the whole thing. Plus I’m still on my suspension anyway. No training for another five days. Doctors orders.”

Even nodded, pursuing his lips in a false frown as he snatched the candy up from the mat.

“Well, guess I’ll just have to…..”, he began to slowly crinkle the wrapper as he unsheathed the chocolate. Isak's eyes widened as he stepped toward his coach.

“Don’t you dare, Even Bech Naesheim.”

Even just smiled at his fighter before essentially attacking the candy, a faux enraged Isak gently tackling him to the ground as he laughed, crumbs from the wafer spilling from his mouth. As Isak chased the remainder of the treat with his hands, the older man finally acquiesced, chucking half of the candy at Isak's face and laughing when he skillfully caught it in his mouth. Isak stood up, pulling himself from his position atop the other man and bowing before chomping away at the chocolate. A few chews in, the younger blonde heard his phone ringing. He walked over to the device, picking it up and sliding the button over to answer it.

“Hello?......oh, hey babe, I didn’t see it was you calling.....yeah another few minutes.”

He paused, momentarily looking to Even before continuing.

“Oh, ok. Well I can just wait here for you or.....oh, uh yeah I’ll ask him. If not I can catch the tram......yep, ok....”, he chuckled lightly, Even intrigued by the other's laugh, “see you there then, bye.”

As Isak was talking to his boyfriend he’d been gathering up his belongings, tugging his joggers back on over his athletic shorts. Even's eyes strayed to the fighter's round yet perfectly toned bottom as he bent over to collect his duffel bag. He scolded himself, immediately turning his gaze away as soon as the young man had righted himself. He pulled on his jacket, the insulation needed for the weather not as heavy as it was earlier in the season. He strode over to Even, a thin scarf wrapped around his neck. He smiled somewhat sheepishly before inquiring to the older man.

“So Tobi told me he has to work a couple extra hours and I’m kind of beat from my workout. It’s totally cool if you say no, but I was just thinking-“

“Yes Isak.”, Even interrupted him. Isak's eyes widened.

“Oh, um ok. Seriously though, I don’t mind taking the tram if you can’t or don’t want to drive me.”

He brought a hand up to his neck, rubbing it a he shrugged. “I know if I drove this would be a lot easier and everything I just um…”, the boy trailed off, looking at Even through his eyelashes. The taller blonde smiled, shrugging his shoulders in response.

“It’s cool Isak, I honestly don’t mind. You just need me to drop you off right?”

Isak nodded, making a small “Mhmm” as he did so. Even told him to hold tight for a few as he got back into his street clothes, Isak's eyes wandering over the grapplers long, leanly muscled legs. He’d be lying if he told himself he hadn't thought about those legs before. Granted it was before he’d met Tobias. But that wasn’t to say Isak wasn’t aware of how attractive his coach was either; he just chose not to acknowledge it. Once the other man was ready, the two left the gym, waving
goodbye to their friends before making the short trek to Even’s car. The two men got in, the older man starting the car before looking through his phone for some music.

“What’re you feeling like today, champ?”, Even asked his fighter. Isak tried to hide his smirk, shaking his head as he did so.

“I’m sure whatever you choose will be appropriately unbearable.”

Even gasped, looking across to his friend before breaking into a grin.

“Well, maybe unbearable for you. I’m feeling……Puerto Rican.”

Isak returned his gaze, his look shifting from playfully annoyed to quizzical. He didn’t have to wait long before his answer was vibrating out of the speakers of the coach's car. Isak groaned, although his face showed how entertained he was. Even laughed at his student, pulling out of the Bred Akse parking lot as the two bobbed their heads to the raucous, wild beat of Gasolina.

23:11

Isak and Tobias had been making out for the past few minutes, the boys bodies strewn lazily over Tobi’s bed. The taller man turned into his boyfriend, trailing his hand up and down his chest before moving it just above the other’s waistline. He started to push his fingertips under Tobias’ sweatpants, but the younger boy made a small sound in his throat, softly guiding Isak’s hand away. He pulled back from the other young man, his eyes showing concern.

“You ok man?”

Tobi sighed nodding as he threw his arms over his eyes.

“Yeah I’m good, just really tired. I’m not like, trying to blue ball you baby, I promise.”

Isak snorted a laugh as nodded.

“I know you’re not. You've just been tired, like this whole week so….”

Tobias turned back over, sitting up on his elbows and peering down at his boyfriend. His eyes had changed. Normally when he looked at his significant other, the boy's gaze was warm and happy. Now though, it was like sharp, jagged steel.

“Well Isak, when you work for a living to pay for your rent and food and clothes that can tend to happen, so yeah, sorry if I haven't really been ‘into it’ lately.”

The shorter man sighed, moving out of the bed as he swiped a half smoked pack of cigarettes from the nightstand beside his bed. Isak pushed his own sigh from his lips, groaning internally, before following his boyfriend out onto the small balcony located outside his room. He held his arms around himself in attempt to ward off the nighttime chill in the air. Tobias usual smiling, carefree face was pulled in, his features displaying someone who was deep in thought. Isak gulped.

“I didn’t mean to…..to imply you don’t work hard or anything. I’m sorry if I made you upset with me I just…..”, the blonde sighed, throwing his hands up, leaning against the wall a few short feet
away from the balcony, “This is all new to me Tobias. Not just being with a boy but, you know, the affection, actually liking the person I’m dating and uh…the…the sexual stuff too. So maybe, I don't know, maybe it’s overwhelming or something. Either way, I don’t mean to push you or anything I just…..”

He shrugged, looking down at his sock clad feet. Tobias snuffed out his cigarette; smoking being a rare thing to see from him, which was part of the reason Isak was a bit worried. The shorter boy walked over to his man, encircling his arms around his waist and laying his head on the other's shoulder. He pressed his lips softly to Isak's neck, his breath engulfing the older boy's ear as he spoke quietly.

“I’m sorry, Isak. I know this is all new for you. Very new. And I get that we come from different backgrounds and everything. I’m not trying to…..I don’t know….call you over privileged or something. I know you’re not. I just think, maybe, sometimes our views on life clash a little bit. It’s not just about me being tired babe, it’s about where I’m at in my life and where I’m trying to get to. It’s different for you, there’s a set path, you know what you want to do and what you have to achieve to do it. Becoming a counselor…..it's a little different. I’m going to be giving advice and guidance to kids in a crucial stage of their life and, honestly, I guess I need to start taking some of my own.”

He smiled up at the older man, but his smile didn’t reach his eyes. Isak understood though; ultimately, Tobias wanted to make a positive effect on the kids he’d be working with eventually, but was currently somewhat at a loss for how he was going to do it. He nodded, pushing their foreheads together as he spoke.

“You're going to be amazing baby, I know you are. I know it sucks, but not getting the help and support you needed when you were younger actually helps you in the long run. Cause you know how it feels. Sympathy is good for consoling, not for understanding and offering solutions.”

Tobi smiled up at his boyfriend, it was a small one, but this one brought the brightness Isak was so familiar with back to his eyes.

“Did Sana tell you that?”

Isak chuckled, nodding his head.

“She did actually, but she's right you know. The reason you're going to be such a good counselor is because you understand all those shitty feelings Tobi. Also, and I don’t mean this to sound like insensitive or anything, but hardship makes for way more interesting people. Show me someone who's never faced adversity and I’ll show you a person who might be really nice, but is also really boring.”

Tobi huffed out a laugh, not in complete agreement with his boy's philosophy, but also understanding the thought process behind it. Isak placed his hands on the other man's face, tilting his head up so the two could look each other in the eye.

“I know you’re nervous or concerned babe, but you really don’t need to be. I don’t believe in like, fate or stuff like that but everyone has something they do better than anything else. Something that they can give back to the world. So if I were you, I wouldn’t be worried about not being able to help the kids you’re going to work with because, well…..”, Isak's eyes moved off to the side, not really looking at anything as he gathered his thoughts, “You help people Tobi. It's what you do. And I know you're going to be great at it.”

The couple now each had small, but authentic smiles on their faces. They shared a brief kiss before
retreating back into the warmth of the younger man's apartment. Isak was sure, without a doubt, that Tobias would be an incredible guidance counselor for the young people of whatever school he’d end up working at. What he was becoming increasingly unsure of, unbeknownst to his boyfriend, was whether the two would still be together when that time came. He hoped they would, but the universe was vast and complex, and sometimes, Isak wasn't convinced that his place in it would always be with the boy laying beside him.

Stuff for the fic

1. In martial arts, a **Gi**, short for keikogi, is a uniform worn by the practitioner. Gi's are generally thought of as pertaining to Japanese martial arts, but uniform dress is common in the martial arts of many different cultures. Gis come in many different styles and weave strengths. The jiu-jitsu gi I've linked in the text is different than what you might find in say a karate or taekwondo school. Grappling based martial arts usually have thicker, more tightly woven gis than a striking based martial art would. The keikogi itself was developed by the founder of Judo, Kano Jigoro.

2. The inspiration of the candy types for this chapter all came from [this](#) awesome article on some different Norwegian and Swedish candy.

3. A **Kimura**, also known as a reverse Ude Garami in Judo and Japanese Jujutsu and a double wrist lock in catch wrestling, is a submission hold that is implemented by working against the natural shoulder and elbow movement of the human body. If performed correctly, it can break, dislocate or even tear a person's tendons and muscle around their elbow and shoulder.

4. **Masahiko Kimura** is a legendary Judoka and Japanese professional wrestler whose name has been synonymous with this submission since he used it to defeat Helio Gracie back in 1949.

5. **Jon Olav Einemo** is a retired Norwegian MMA fighter who has competed within the promotions of Shooto, Pride, and the UFC in the heavyweight division. In 2003 he won his weight division in the ADCC Submission Wrestling World Championship, making him the only person in the organizations history to do so against the Brazilian Roger Gracie.

6. **Daddy Yankee - Gasolina**

7. **TPBCMV Playlist**

Chapter End Notes

So......Tobisak aren’t necessarily as rock solid as we may have thought! But they do definitely care for one another and I’m interested to see how you guys will react to some of the plans I’ve got for them. I hope you're all enjoying the fic and I look forward to posting a new chapter either this weekend or the beginning of the next
week. I've got some scheduled time off from my job coming up next week so hopefully that will mean more updates for you guys! Have an awesome week and weekend everyone, and leave me a comment or kudo if you'd like! Remember to love yourselves and one another!

TPBCMV Playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/71oHsLL1qDC0hU1A3xrZHH
The Great Outdoors

Chapter Summary

Isak recieves some news from Chris about his next fight. Even invites Isak to go camping with him.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone! I was gonna get this out Saturday, but ended up binging some Umbrella Academy on Netflix after work. Also, I don't know if anyone else has noticed this, but there seems to be a formatting error where when I go to another webpage the text reverts back to html instead of the rich text and eliminates any changes I've made during an editing session. It's Damn frustrating, but I think I've figured out a fix for it. Anywho, we're really starting to move along in Isak's career and the story now, so y'all have got the meat of the plot to look forward to! I hope all of you had a great week and a fantastic St. Patrick's day. There is some very minor smut in this chapter. It's at the very beginning of the scene at 22:03 if you'd like to skip it. Enjoy the chapter, I'll see everyone at the endnotes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Even And Mikael's Apartment

Lørdag

Mars 30th

21:05

Even Bech Naesheim was the epitome of stone faced. His eyes, usually a warm, welcoming blue, now a calculated, stormy shade that looked like something that broke against jagged rocks jutting from a cliff. The man's gaze moved around the table, sizing up his fellow players. He looked back down to his own hand of cards before suppressing a small smirk. There were some fights on in the background, the television having been turned down low. Finally he heard an aggravated sigh from the man beside him. Eyes darting over to his left he saw Mikael, squished into his chair with Mutta. Just as he was about to speak, Sonja's voice broke the silence.

“Guys! You’re missing the fights!”

Even sighed, rolling his eyes as he, Mutta, Elias, Mikael, and Adam all laid their cards down. Glancing around at the other’s hands the tall blonde groaned, laying down his own hand, two pairs, before addressing his friends.

“Guys! C'mon it's like your not even trying!”
“Even, buddy.,” Adam said, locking eyes with his friend, “This happens every time you invite us over to watch fights with you and Mikael. We say we'll play a game of poker first, then we end up playing two, then finally three and you get upset at us because we become more interested in watching the fight card than playing with you.”

The consensus of nods as well as a few “True”s and “He’s not lying bro”s didn’t bode well for the completion of Even’s card game. Finally seeing the eagerness in his friend's faces, the grappler sighed, shrugging his shoulders.

“Yeah when you're right you’re right. You guys go ahead, I’ll be in in a few.”

The friend's let out a collective cheer, acting as if a parent had just approved a sleepover rather than just their friend relinquishing them from their poker game. As the other men exited the kitchen into the small den area of the apartment, Even noticed Sana and Isak walking in from the den, the blonde laughing and shaking his head while the sports psychologist smiled at him. Her smile widened upon seeing Even, the two sharing a short hug in greeting as they hadn’t seen each other when the younger woman had arrived.

“So, Isak's been telling me he’s thinking of hiring you full time as a mental coach. Gonna get to travel the world once he makes it big. Graham Boylan spoke to him after he won the championship you know.”

Even smiled at his fighter, enjoying the light stain of pink blossoming on Isak's cheeks as he bragged on his friend and student.

“I wouldn’t go that far, Even. I haven’t heard anything back yet. I’m still about three days out from even being ok to train again.”

Even’s grin showed his canines, the saliva slick points catching the kitchen lights.

“Isak is just being modest Sana. Believe me, a year from now, people are going to be talking about him for the Cage Warriors title.”

He punctuated the statement with a nod and sip from his water bottle. Isak couldn't hold back the smile that shown on his face.

“Well”, Sana said, “Cage Warriors or not, I’m not leaving Oslo to travel the world Isabelle, sorry. But I'd definitely be down for some Skype sessions.”

“Ah, see, I knew I could count on you Sanasol.”

The friend’s smiled at one another, a short knock echoing throughout the apartment as their host prepared to answer it.

“Oh, it’s cool Even. I can get it.”

The older man looked over to his friend.

“You sure? I don’t mind.”

“Yeah, of course. I mean, you don’t see them nearly as much as you see me.”

Taking Isak's reasoning into account, Even thanked him and returned to the den, the volume now having been cranked back up. As Isak was listening to the commentary in the background he walked out of the kitchen and through the small hallway to his coach's door. He opened it,
revealing a group of several people. It looked like they'd all arrived around the same time. Yousef, Tobias, girl Chris, and Vilde and Magnus were all smiling at the champ. Yousef was the first one to talk.

“Hey man, I don’t think we’ve actually ever met before.”

Isak stepped back, allowing the others to file into the apartment. He shook Yousef's hand, introducing himself.

“No, I don’t think we have. I’m Isak, Sana has been giving me some mental coaching my last couple fights.”

“Yeah, she’s talked about you. Congratulations by the way. I’m not a big fight fan or anything, but I think it’s awesome what you've been able to accomplish so far.”

As he Isak was preparing to reply, he noticed Yousef's eyes light up, spotting his wife in the background and greeting her with a hug and kiss. Isak's own significant other smiled at him, walking up to him and pecking him on the lips. A short, high pitched squeal caught everyone's attention as they looked over to Vilde and Magnus. The taller blonde noticed everyone's eyes before saying, “What? It was her not me.” Vilde scoffed lightly, shoulder checking her boyfriend before turning back to Isak and Tobi.

“Sorry guys. You're just so cute! I can’t help it!”

Isak rolled his eyes as his boyfriend laughed at Vilde's observation. It wasn’t the first time she’d remarked on how adorable she thought they were, and it likely wouldn’t be the last. Isak felt relieved at seeing Chris, his manager being the easiest one of the bunch to talk to currently. The group moseyed into the den as Chris snatched Isak by his arm, pulling him back into the kitchen.

“Not so fast Valtersen, we’ve got some business to discuss.”

Isak groaned, receiving a scolding from his manager and agent.

“Hey, don’t whine at me mister. I’ve been working all week to get you a spot on an upcoming CW card.”

The young man’s demeanor changed, going from annoyed to excited almost instantly.

“Seriously? Oh my god, Chris, that is so awesome! What card is it!? Is their a contract drawn up yet or-”, Isak stopped abruptly as the young woman pushed her index finger against his lips.

“Be calm child. Now, here’s what I want you to do. Go get us a couple beers, and let’s have a chat at the kitchen table, capiche?”

Isak was thrown off a bit, not least of all by the odd insertion of conversational Italian at the end of his manager's sentence. But he’d do it if it meant getting an answer. And besides, girl Chris was an awesome hang anyways.

21:32

The brightness in the champion's eyes had waned slightly, settling back to normal. Isak nodded his
head at his manager, throwing in the occasional “Right” or “Yeah, ok”. When Chris was done
talking however, it only took her a few moments to realize her friend hadn’t really absorbed
anything she said. She rolled her eyes, smile still on her face.

“Ok, and answer honestly please, how much of that did you get?”

Isak paused, quickly coming to the conclusion that he’d need the information he was just given
explained again to him. Chris huffed, preparing to do just that.

“Alright, listen this time Isak. You’d be fighting on the one-o-six undercard on the twenty ninth of
June at the Hammersmith Apollo. I don’t have an opponent lined up yet, but I’ve been told we can
expect a short list within a week. Now, I’ve gone ahead and taken the liberty of doing some data
analysis using the algorithm I’ve been working on with my statistical analysis class and found out
some interesting stats concerning your Twitter and Instagram followers.”

Isak's eyes went wide, he was impressed, yet also a little embarrassed that he wasn’t even sure
what Chris was studying until this moment.

“The stats that I gathered showed, as to be expected, the vast majority of your fans are
Scandinavian, or living in Scandinavia, with a strong central base in Norway. Having said that, you
do have just under eight percent of your fans based out of the UK and Ireland.”

Chris sat back in her chair, her smile now showing the pride in the work she'd done. Isak was
impressed, but still somewhat confused.

“Um, well, that’s good to know I guess. But, uh….I just don’t really see why it’s relevant….?”,
Isak said, squinting his eyes with a turn of his head.

Chris groaned.

“It means you'll have some fans there supporting you dude! C’mon man, this really isn’t that hard.”

Isak chuckled, throwing his hands out by his side.

“Well, sorry Chris, it’s just a little odd hearing a Norwegian girl in pigtails and a Bone Thugs shirt
rattle off statistical analyses.”

The woman shrugged, pursing her lips.

“Well, statistically speaking, I’m probably not going to be your manager by the end of this year.”

Isak quirked an eyebrow, the statement suddenly causing his concern to rise.

“Why? You've been with me literally since my first fight. Since I was still an amateur. We make an
awesome team, girl!”

She smiled at him ruefully, nodding in agreement.

“I agree, we really do. But I have to start thinking about my future here too Isak. To be honest, I
never thought I’d be going this far with you. I though after you turned pro you’d get a real
manager-”

“Hey, you are a real manager.”

Chris rolled her eyes, but the blush and smile on her face told the champion his compliment was
accepted.
“Look, I love you Issy, really. That’s why I’m telling you this. It’s been fun and I’ve really enjoyed getting you fights, yelling at William and Noora about getting you higher level opponent’s and I’m not going to lie, the ten percent perk from your winnings has been nice as well. But this isn’t what I want to do with my life. I want to use data analysis to help people. And as much fun as we’ve had, continuing to be your agent doesn’t really help me do that.”

Isak sighed, nodding as he took in what his friend and manager was saying.

“Also, I may know a certain announcer who’s been chomping at the bit to be your manager.”

Isak flapped his lips, letting out a few giggles as well.

“Eskild always told me he wished he’d still been managing fighter’s when I made my debut.”

“Hey, the guy’s got skills. Who do you think I was getting advice from when I didn’t know what to do with your skinny ass.”

“Oh it's not skinny, believe me.”

The pair of friend's looked up to see a more than tipsy Tobias saunter into the room. He plopped himself down in his boyfriend's lap, giving him an exaggerated, wet kiss on the cheek. Isak pulled his head away, but encircled his arms around the younger man.

“Of course”, said Chris, “Forgive me for insulting your glorious ass Isak. Anyways, I’ll be chilling in the den if you boys need me. Don’t fuck on the table!”

Chris paused in thought before looking back at the couple.

“Actually, go for it. Not my apartment anyways.”

Isak and Tobi laughed, the shorter boy kissing along Isak's neck, seeming to take the girl's instruction seriously. Isak giggled, gently pushing the other boy away.

“Babe, c’mon you're drunk.”

“I mean, ok maybe, but you’re really sexy and I need your mouth on my dick.”

Isak scoffed, burying his head in his boyfriend's neck to hide his reddening face. He stood up slowly, making sure Tobias was steady before leaning him against the kitchen counter.

“You stay here. I’m going to tell everybody goodbye…..and if you can sober up on the way home…..maybe I’ll blow you before you pass out.”

“Shit, I’m sober right now if that’s the case.”

Isak rolled his eyes fondly before returning to the den, his friends and coaches conversing and talking animatedly. Even had apparently noticed Isak's approach, breaking free from a conversation with Vilde and Magnus to speak with him.

“You taking that hot mess of a boyfriend home dude?”

Isak let out a small chuckle before nodding, looked up and into the warm, blue wetness of Even’s gaze.

“I am, just wanted to let you guys know.”
“Yeah, cool. Thanks for not ghosting us. Oh, before I forget I meant to ask you something.”

Isak nodded amicably.

“Yeah, absolutely.”

“So, every year for her birthday, I’ve tried to take Lilli on a trip right? And this year, especially with myself and Iben… coming to a new understanding of one another, I’ve decided to take her to Hardangervidda. I don’t know what Tobi’s schedule looks like, but I was planning on doing it this coming weekend. It wouldn’t be too many people, just myself, a couple of the boys…”, Even paused, “Maybe Sonja and my parents.”, he finished, flashing a brilliant smile at Isak. The younger man had begun to feel a warm, not entirely unpleasant churning in his gut lately when he saw that smile directed at him. He answered without thinking.

“Uh, yeah, no totally. That sounds really fun actually. It’s literally been years since I went camping or hiking or anything.”

“Awesome, well just talk it over with Tobias and let me know.”

*Yeah. You know, your boyfriend Isak.*

Isak smiled back, nodding then proceeding to tell the rest of his friend’s goodbye.

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22:03

Tobias hand was clinging to his boyfriend's head as let out a long, deep groan, his orgasm being violently pulled from him. Isak popped back up after a few seconds, tucking the other man away. He smirked up at him before repositioning himself, his head resting on the other's shoulder. Tobi let out a loud “Woo!”, his right arm encircling the taller male. Isak giggled, turning his gaze to the boy.

“You all sobered up now?”

Tobias responded with a lazy nod.

“Definitely. You sucked out any alcohol that was still in me. I don’t even know how you did it either. You haven’t even been sucking dick half a year and you’ve already got skills.”

Isak buried his head into the junction of the other boy's neck and shoulder as his body rocked with laughter. Tobi joined in, the couple now cracking up together. They settled down after a bit, Isak turning to look at the young man next to him.

“Even’s daughter’s birthday is this coming week. He’s taking her to Hardangervidda for the weekend if you think you can make it.”

“Yeah, that sounds awesome let me just…”, Tobias reached over his boyfriend, picking up his phone then unlocking it, navigating to his schedule. His face fell once he got there, dropping his head back and onto his pillow before letting loose a heavy sigh.

“I can't go man.”

“Wait, seriously? You don’t work any days this coming weekend do you?”
“I don’t”, Tobias said, “But there’s a day long symposium on adolescent and teenage mental health and development that the university is hosting and I really should be there. I’m sorry baby.”

“And it's this coming Saturday?”, Isak questioned, just to be sure.

The shorter male nodded, his head scratching against the pillow his head laid on. Isak let out a small sigh now as well, muttering a small “Damn” under his breath. Tobi sat up in bed, cracking his neck and back.

“You should go though Isak. Seriously, I know you’ve been putting in some extra time at Java and you’re not scheduled to work this coming weekend either.”

“I know, I just thought it’d be something nice we could do together. I feel like we haven’t had a night out or anything since I won the title.”

Tobias shrugged.

“You’re not wrong, but I think this could be a good opportunity for you dude. If Even isn't set on being a full time coach for you maybe this trip can seal the deal.”

Isak chuckled.

“Are you telling me I should schmooze Even into being my coach indefinitely.”

“What would it hurt? Plus with Chris leaving her position as your manager after your next match it’d be nice to get someone who understands the ins and outs of getting fights. I know Eskild is totally stoked on becoming the next agent for the best and most handsome fighter in the world-“

“Ok, only one of those things is true.”

The two men giggled softly.

“For real though Isak, you should go. Plus if Even ends up getting back joint custody of his daughter you’ll likely be seeing more of her too.”

The champion was taken somewhat off guard by his boyfriend's statement.

“You knew about that?”

“Of course. You know you’re the one who got me to go to Bred Akse in the first place. And I might not be a gossip, but I do have ears.”

Tobi lifted himself from the bed, yawning loudly as he stretched out and walked over to the small bathroom connected to his room.

“I’m gonna shower then call it a night ok?”

A knowing smirk curled his lips up.

“Unless there’s something I can do for you.”

Isak laughed, shaking his head.

“I appreciate it, but I’m honestly beat babe. I’ll keep that in mind for later though.”

Tobias nodded, telling the other boy he’d remember that. Isak laid back on the bed, his thoughts swirling around in his head. You know what? I think I am going to go with Even and Lillian this
weekend. Tobi's right. It'll give me a chance to see how serious Even is about being my coach fulltime and it’ll be a nice little weekend get away as well. The blonde let his eyes slowly slip closed, images of mountains, rivers and streams, the same hue of Even’s eyes, appearing in his mind. Yeah. This weekend will be just what I need.

Highway E134

Fredag

April 5th, 2019

7:34

Lillian met her father's eyes in the rearview mirror, the daughter sharing her dad's mischievous, crinkle eyed grin. Her index finger was poised above the play button on her phone, ready to strike at a moment's notice. Isak, the poor bastard, was sound asleep in the passenger's seat. Upon Even's signal, a simple head nod, the younger Bech Naesheim struck the play button with glee. There were a few seconds of peace before the sleeping fighter was violently torn from his slumber, startling into consciousness as the bass from *nineteen ninety nine* by Charli XCX vibrated the cabin of Even's car. The black belt turned the sound down, Isak’s ears now graced with laughter from his coach and the man’s daughter. He groaned loudly, looking at the two perpetrators and shaking his head.

“What is wrong with you two?”, he said, his voice half joking as a tiny smile tugged at his lips.

Lilli’s face drew inward as the fighter looked at her, quickly pointing the finger, literally, at he father.

“It was dad's idea not mine.”

The shorter blonde switched his gaze, now settling it on Even as he crossed his arms. Even huffed, faux offended as shook his own head.

“I don’t what she's talking about dude. Seriously, she put me up to it. I do have to say though, I approve of your choice in music Lilli.”

Even gave a not quite full wink to his daughter in the backseat. Isak tried to hold in his laughter but couldn't.

“I can’t believe this. Your daughter has horrible taste in music as well!?” , Isak asked his coach, his sarcasm playful and light. He looked back to the newly turned twelve year old. “No offense Lilli.”

“Oh, much taken. Charli XCX is a badass bitch and Troye is an icon.”, the girl threw her eyes to her father, the man trying to hide his own wide grin. “I thought you said this guy was cool dad.” Lillian's face held a small, barely suppressed smirk of her own, thoroughly enjoying the back and forth she was having with Isak. Even shrugged his shoulder, briefly meeting his daughter's eyes in the mirror.

“Language Lillian! We'll forgive him though, Isak hasn’t been properly exposed to pop yet. He’s a good guy, I promise.”
The older man shot a brief glance to Isak, a full smile catching the morning sun off his teeth and pulling one out of Isak as well, even as he shook his head. Something told the featherweight champion he and Even's daughter were going to get along just fine.

**Norefjorden Lake**

**Uvdal**

**Hardangervidda National Park**

**11:36**

The majority of Even and Isak's friend's had already arrived by the time they had parked and made the trek to the lake. Elias and the rest of the balloon squad, excluding Yousef, had already made a small fire; Adam and Mikael sitting on the slowly thawing rocks along the shore of the lake with their fishing rods. Even had been worried that the lakes may have been frozen, but while winter was definitely still around, the snow was ebbing away and with it so was the ice. Ideally, the group wanted to eat what they caught, but none of them were expecting much in the way of fish without actually getting out on the lake. It made Even glad to know Elias had brought his canoe though. As Even was setting up his tent, Lillian going about the same, a thought occurred to Isak.

“Um…..I'm not trying to bring the mood down, but I don’t really have a tent.”

Elias looked back to his student, sharing a short glance with Even. Even shrugged as he was tapping the stakes to his own mobile abode into the thawing ground.

“It's cool. My tent’s actually sleeps three people, but someone”, The father’s eyes playfully flitted over to his daughter, “Decided they’re getting too old to share a tent with their dad. Just toss your stuff in.”

Isak nodded in understanding, turning his head to survey the surrounding area. It really was stunning. Isak had been on camping trips before when he was younger. His and Jonas family had enjoyed a few excursions into the Norwegian wilderness before, but they’d always rented a cabin; had heat and electricity. The idea of ‘roughing it’ had never held much appeal to the champion. Well, until now anyway. As Isak was setting his belongings in Even’s tent and preparing to select a fishing rod of his own, he heard the pleasant exchanges and greeting from outside the tent. Popping his head out to see who had arrived, he saw who he recognized as Even’s friend Sonja and who he could only assume were Even’s parents talking with Lillian, Mutta, and Even. Even smiled at him as he approached, Isak again feeling that strange flutter in his stomach as he returned his own.

“And this is the young man you’ve been training I presume?”, Even’s father asked.

“He is. Just won the featherweight title for NFC back in February, and if I’m not mistaken he'll be moving on to another, bigger promotion for his next fight.”

Elias, patted his fighter on the shoulder.

“Yep, soon enough he'll be too big for our gym.”

The friend’s laughed, Even’s parents and Sonja joining in as Isak reached to shake both of their hands.
“Isak Valtersen.”

“Nice to meet you Isak. I’m Søren, Even’s father.”

Isak smiled as he moved onto Even’s mother.

“And I’m Karolina, Even’s mother. Most people just call me Lina though.”

“Well it’s great to meet both of you. Even’s actually already met my parents. You know he wasn’t even planning on training me at first.”

“Oh?”

Isak hummed in affirmation, going into the story of how Even had become his coach as he engaged with the older man’s parents, Elias chiming in with details every so often. Sonja had taken the opportunity to approach her long time friend, he eyes still fixed on Isak, Elias, and Even's parents. Lillian, having already said her hellos and thank yous, was sitting near Adam and Mikael, chatting about how the fishing had been so far.

“How was the trip?”, asked Sonja.

“Yeah, good. Me and Lilli had some fun messing with Isak. He says he's not into pop music, but I think he’s starting to come around.”

The woman smiled, pulling her scarf tighter around her neck.

“So you're really doing it then huh?”

The grappler's brows pressed inward at the question.

“Being Isak's coach I mean.”, she clarified.

“Oh, uh yeah. I mean, look, it’s not going to be like it was back in the day. I don’t have any interest in training other fighters. Isak……there’s something about him. He could be great. Already is really. The best I can hope for is to help him realize and reach that potential.”

“Mhmm.”, Sonja agreed, sitting herself down in the collapsible camping chair next to her ex boyfriend. “And do you think being in love with him is going to help or hinder that?”

Even sighed, his gaze suddenly focused out on the shimmering lake reflecting the late morning sun. Sonja continued.

“I’m not saying this to be mean Even, you know I’m not. Isak's got a boyfriend though. Do you really think it’s fair to yourself to keep training him?”

Even threw his hands up.

“Well maybe it’s better that way Sonja. Maybe it’ll make it easier for me to get over it. Listen”, Even sighed, “It hurts ok? It does. But it’s not just about me alright? It’s about what Isak represents. About who he represents. What if he does get to the UFC? What if he becomes champion? Imagine what he could do. The impact he could have for lgbt people in mixed martial arts. It’s not about me Sonja. In comparison to the effect Isak could have? My feelings don’t fucking matter ok?”

“They matter to me Even.”, Sonja replied, “They matter to your friends who have to watch you put all that pain aside as you continue to punish yourself for something you can’t ever go back and change. What happened at Stavanger sucked ok? I know that. But this self flagellation act you’re
doing isn’t ever going to help you move past it. I just don’t want you to get hurt again.”

The black belt shot a stern look at his friend.

“I appreciate the concern Sonja, but it’s not your decision to make. I-“, the man’s train of thought was broken as he heard a loud, excited scream, followed by the hurried instructions of his friends.

“Pull it up! Pull it up! You got it Lilli!”

He sprinted over just in time to see Adam helping his daughter heave the large fish out of the water, Mikael standing by with a net as the rest of the small crew cheered and shouted their praises. The father beamed at his daughter, the two embracing as Mikael carefully carried the writhing fish over to the large cooler they’d brought before flopping the trout inside and closing the lid. The rest of the group walked over to Even’s daughter, her grandparents congratulating her on the catch as Mikael brought the fish back out, motioning Sonja over as the friend’s and family prepared to take a photo. Mikael handed the fish back to Lillian, the girl too excited to be bothered by the slimy, wet exterior. Isak had apparently been chosen to take the photo, his own eyes meeting Even’s as he flashed a few shots in a row.

The coach and student were unaware that Sonja had seen their exchange of looks. She’d noticed the same enamored expression that currently shown on Isak’s face before on other’s; knew it had been on her own as well when she and Even had first started dating. The observation made her question whether or not she had been correct in her summation of Tobias and Isak’s relationship. She was conflicted; not wanting Isak to hurt Tobi by leaving him, but at the same time not wanting Even to be sad because Isak was unavailable. Time would tell ultimately she supposed. And despite what she’d seen, she knew it was important not to give Even false hope, no matter how tempting it was.

Stuff for the fic

1. The Hammersmith Apollo is a venue for entertainment in London. It is currently referred to as the Eventim Apollo due to a sponsorship.
2. Bone Thugs-n-Harmomy are a hip-hop group from Cleveland, Ohio
3. Hardangervidda National Park is the largest national park in Norway.
4. Charli XCX - 1999
5. Norefjorden Lake is in the municipality of Nore and Uvdal and is known for it's fishing.
6. Uvdal is a village within the municipality of Nore and Uvdal.
7. Lilli’s trout
8. TPBCMV Playlist
Our adorable dorks are bonding! There'll likely be more exploration of Even and Isak's backgrounds through their conversations as the story continues. I'm writing the second chapter right now so it should be up sometime Friday through Sunday. As I've been doing, I'll include the link for the updated Spotify playlist in the stuff for the fic section and here. Hope everybody has an awesome week!

TPBCMV Playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/71oHsLLIqDCOhUlA3xrZHH
The Great Outdoors Part II

Chapter Summary

Isak talks with Even, gets news about his first fight in Cage Warriors, and overhears a conversation.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I'm sorry this is late. I've been distracted by other things happening in my life right now so it's hindered my writing a bit. Having said that, I plan to be back on my normal schedule by this coming weekend. We're going to be starting to get more and more into real world MMA now and because of this I do feel I need to put a little disclaimer here: Any portrayal of a real life figure, be it good, bad, or indifferent, is done purely for the purposes of the story and does not reflect any behavior in real life. Also from this point on, Isak's opponent's are going to be real world fighter's as will the referees officiating his fights. Just a little business I felt needed to be taken care of. The links for the chapter are in the text and stuff for the fic section per usual and I'll include the Spotify playlist in there as well. We've got some fun songs coming up! Ok guys, onward and enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

22:54

Even was sure just about everyone was asleep now, if not snuggled into their tents. He’d brought a vape pen with him, not wanting to use it in his daughter’s presence. It’s not like Lillian was unaware of what cannabis was. Hell, most of the strides toward legalization and regulation of the plant and it’s use in Norway had taken place in her lifetime. She knew what it was, knew it was something for adults to use if they chose to, and knew that her dad would occasionally take part, but that was as far as it went. The father didn’t have any shame about his marijuana use, but it wasn’t really something he was keen on talking about with his daughter. And besides, he had more pressing things to think about at the moment. Namely his conversation from earlier that day with Sonja and the unintentional mixed signals he’d been receiving from Isak.

At least, he assumed they were unintentional. It’s not like he could just ask the guy. Yeah that would go over well.

Scenario one: Hey Isak, I know you have a boyfriend, but is it just me or are you like super attracted to and in love with me? Oh you aren’t? Well this is pretty awkward huh? Guess I should probably leave the gym and never talk to you again.

Scenario two: Hey Isak, I know you have a boyfriend, but is it just me or are you like super attracted to and in love with me? Oh you are? Awesome, go ahead and break your boyfriend’s heart then bang me in this tent.
Yeah, neither of those sounded like a good idea to Even. The grappler stared into the fire, leaning toward it in his seat and using his long reach to adjust the wood, the new position of the logs reinvigorating the blaze. He settled back into his camping chair and enjoyed the warmth from the combusting material. He heard a zipper opening, the sound puncturing through the night noises of hooting owls and the near silent movements of the tree branches. Even was happy yet also frustrated when he saw his friend and fighter sit in the chair just to the right of him, wrapped up in his outerwear, but still sporting a pair of flannel pajama bottoms.

“Trouble sleeping?”, the coach asked, his eyes still fixed on the fire. Isak nodded, realizing the older man couldn't see his response.

“A bit yeah. You know the last time I went camping I think I was like twelve or something. We never stayed in tents though.”

“Oh yeah?”, Even said, “You go with your parents?”, as he put forth the question he handed Isak the vape pen, the fighter taking a puff before replying.

“Yeah. Well, me and Jonas’ family. Staying in a tent's a lot of different though I have to admit.”

Even gave a tight lipped smile but hummed in agreement all the same.

“Oh it is. It’s too bad Tobi couldn’t join us though.”

Even was testing the waters, he knew it was a dumb thing to do, but it was almost as if some other worldly force was guiding his speech instead of what he’d been planning to say. Isak pursed his lips, giving a short shrug.

“Yeah, it is. He had this symposium thing to go to though. I think he’ll really enjoy it. He's going to UiO to become a guidance counsellor. Wants to get a master’s in adolescent and teenage education management eventually.”

“Sounds pretty noble. All my work with kids is teaching them how to break bones and choke each other.”

Isak laughed along with his coach, but he could feel the small truth hidden by the self deprecating humor.

“Honestly though Even, what you do for those kids is pretty awesome. Actually makes me wish I’d found martial arts when I was younger.”

Even shrugged, taking another hit from the vaporizer.

“I do what I can.”

The two sat silently for a brief moment, Isak accepting the small device before taking a final puff and handing it back to Even. He had a question, but didn’t want to appear rude for asking it. But Isak was a master of tact inside the cage, not always outside of it, so he just went for it.

“I thought people with bipolar disorder shouldn’t smoke weed?”

Even sighed, looking over to his fighter, his eyelids hanging low across his pupils.

“Usually, yeah, that’s the case. It used to effect me a lot when I was younger. Could make me hypomanic sometimes even. Now though? Not so much. But I also don’t smoke quite as much as I used to.”
Isak nodded, accepting that mental illness, just like anything else, was different for everyone that experienced it. He had another question, this one far more personal. The younger man wasn’t quite sure how to ask it though, taking the fact that Even hadn’t asked him how he knew about his bipolar as a good sign and forging ahead.

“I want to ask you something Even, but I don’t really know how. You don’t have to tell me. You don’t even have to answer me if you don’t want to.”

Isak took Even’s continued silence as an ok.

“What happened at StavMAC?”

Even sighed deeply, his breath forming into a tangible vapor as he did so.

“I can’t tell you all the details Isak. I’m not at liberty to. What I can tell you is that I got involved with my ex, Iben’s, boyfriend at the time. They had gone through a personal tragedy and because of it, Iben was neglecting her eventual fiancé, Julian. Me and Julian had known each other since primary school and I’d always thought he was attractive. It’s not like it was some grand affair or me wanting to get back at Iben. The thing with Julian and me just kind of….happened.”

Even looked over to Isak.

“I’m guessing it was similar to you and Tobi?”

“Well, yeah, but, you know, Tobi wasn’t dating someone else when we met. I don’t mean any offense by the way, it’s just…..”

“Not an entirely fair comparison?”, Even finished for him. The other man let out a small sigh of relief and nodded.

“Well, anyway. I ended up having a pretty bad episode when Julian ended the thing between us. Of course, Iben found out, which meant the whole damn gym found out. I had a breakdown, smashed up the gym a bit and settled with the owners. They were understanding though, more than they should’ve been really. I did end up having to stay in a hospital for a mandatory two weeks though. Lost custody of Lillian as well. Ever since then I’ve had kind of an awkward relationship with everyone I used to know there. It’s not that thrilling of a story really. Just the latest in a long list of fuckups.”

Isak didn’t know what to say. It was the most personal thing Even had ever shared with him and he didn’t really have a response.

“You’re not a fuck up Even. You have fucked up, sure, but from what I can tell you’re learning and growing. A real fuck up would just keep doing shit the same way.”

*You have no idea Isak.*

Even was broken out of his thoughts by Isak asking another question.

“Sorry?”

“I was just asking why you decided to go with Bred Akse. It’s not like there’s tons of mma gyms in Norway, but you could’ve gone to a lot of places. Why choose to move back to Oslo?”

*Because it was the only place I felt like I could go.*
“Elias offered. I got a job with PurKonchus’ Oslo division and everything kind of just worked out.”

Even tried to hold his tongue, but his heart wouldn’t allow him to.

“And….I saw you. The first day I was there, I noticed you right away. You were sparring with Olmeive. I could tell you knew how to fight, but there was more than that. I saw something in you Isak. Something I’ve only seen in a few other fighters.” Even stopped, looking up to the night sky, bright with star and moonlight alike. “I saw greatness in you. And I made it my mission to make you realize it in yourself. Truthfully, I was going to ask Elias if I could begin training you before Mahdi got injured, but things turned out the way they did. Everything happens for a reason I suppose.”

Isak didn’t know what to say. Or, more accurately, didn’t have anything to say. He gulped, hoping Even hadn’t heard it.

“So um….so you wanted to coach me, like, since the beginning?”

Even sensed the heaviness between them and knew it wasn’t just the dense, cold air. He broke it with a big, goofy grin, lightly grasping Isak’s hand in his own.

“Isak Valtersen, will you give me, Even Bech Naesheim, the honor of being one of your coaches?”

The exaggerated request brought forth a chuckle from the smaller blonde as he nodded, withdrawing his hand from Even’s loose, yet welcoming grip.

“I do so declare thee, coach of Isak Valtersen.”, Isak replied, mock knighting the older man with his out stretched arm, making Even show him that blinding smile. The light from the dying fire highlighted the shadows and lights on the other’s face. If Isak had thought it impossible for Even to look more attractive he was once again proven wrong. The pair poured a small bucket of ash on the still smoldering fire, not wanting to leave it unattended after they went to bed. The curled up in their respective sleeping bags, neither planning on saying anything even though they ended up pressed tightly to one another in Even’s tent. Besides, Isak reasoned to himself, It's not like I’m cheating on Tobias or something. It is still cold out after all. With the justification for the half cuddling of his newly deemed coach, the fighter allowed himself to wade into the warm waters of sleep. His mind held a vision of a wide, plump lipped smile and kind blue eyes, but Isak was none the wiser.

**Lørdag**

**7:13**

The water of the lake was still, like a glistening sheet of crystalline glass. Even looked out over it, breathing the morning air deep into his lungs. He held it for a few seconds, letting it go slowly before taking a sip of coffee from his thermos. He hadn’t heard his daughter’s tent unzipping, only noticing her when she went to reach for the caffeinated beverage. Without peeling hid eyes off the water, the father pulled the container away from his daughter, uttering a quiet, “Hmm, nope.”, as he did so. Lillian groaned, sitting down on the rock next to her dad and giving him a tilted head, half lidded, ‘I’m not impressed’ gaze.
“You’re too young for coffee Lil.”

“I’m like, less than three hundred and sixty days away from being a teenager pops, I don’t see the problem.”

Even gasped, eyes going wide as he turned to his offspring.

“Pops?! Little lady, I am your father, not some geriatric being taken care of by his daughter!”

The tiny glint in the man's eye gave him away to his little girl, the twelve year old shoving his shoulder but smiling all the same.

“Rumor around the campfire is that you're going to be training that Isak dude.”

Even loudly slurped his coffee as he nodded.

“That’s the plan. That Isak dude is a real prospect.”

“Too bad he’s already got a man, huh?”

Even turned to look at the girl, forgetting momentarily how perceptive his child could be.

“Whoa, watch out ladies and gents, Lillian Bech Naesheim's coming in with the hot takes.”

The daddy daughter pair smiled at one another, each thoroughly enjoying their banter.

“I feel for you though dad.”, said Lilli.

“Oh?”, Even questioned, “Why is that? One of those weird Fortnite playing boys in your class not giving you the time of day?”

The younger Bech Naesheim rolled her eyes, shaking her head.

“No. I mean, I don’t know, kind of I guess. I just…..I don’t know if he’s interested in…you know…girls. He is the one who turned me onto Troye Sivan so…”

Even laughed, his cheeks pressing up into his eyes.

“Hey, maybe he’s just got good taste in music. But give him a little time sweetie. I had no clue what I liked when I was your age. I was just happy if someone cool and cute was talking to me. Unless you have something you want to let me know…?”

The question had the structure of a joke, but Lilli knew it was her father’s way of letting her know he was there for her. She smiled at him, shrugging before giving her reply.

“Nah I don’t think so. Pretty sure I’m just a boring hetero white girl.”

“Hey, no daughter of mine is going to be boring!”, Even said, his false authoritative tone making his little girl smile and laugh.

“Can I at least get a name for the young man who has caught my lovely little girl's eye?”

“Um….let's just say it rhymes with Shmalexander.”

Even giggled, nodding his head and raising his coffee.

“Here’s to hoping the boy whose name rhymes with Schmalexander is into girls.”
The two had a small chuckle between one another, sitting in companionable silence, watching the sun's slow and steady ascension above the lake. The girl turned to her father, a tight smile adorning her face. She got up from the rock she was sitting on, kissing her dad on the cheek before shrugging her shoulders again.

“Isak doesn’t know what he's missing.”

Lillian turned around, heading over to the cooler that held the filleted fish the group had caught the earlier day, opening it and preparing to make herself and her dad breakfast. Even continued to watch the sunrise, his daughter's words sticking in his head.

10:21

Isak Valtersen was drenched in sweat. The midmorning sun was at his back, penetrating through his sweater and causing his skin to perspire. His thighs ached, hell, his whole body ached. He looked up in front of him, greeted with the site of his newly minted coach's backside. He cast his eyes down, chastising himself for thinking of the man that way, especially with Tobias waiting for him back home. The older man was walking along side his daughter and Sonja. Mikael was a little further ahead, chatting with Even's parents. Elias was next to Isak, in about the same shape, panting heavily before stopping, letting out a loud exclamation of breath before chugging down some gulps from his Camelbak backpack. He looked over to Isak, stretching the hollow hose in an offering.

“Dude, ew.”, said Isak, stopping along with his coach and quenching his own thirst. The two men were leaning against a tree, the other's in the group walking slowly so they'd be able to catch up easily. Elias turned to look at Isak.

“Even’s officially you're coach now then?”

Isak nodded, taking another sip of water.

“Cool. I’ll let Mahdi know when we get back in town. Guy's gonna be disappointed you know.”

Elias had a smile on his face, causing Isak to return one as the pair got back onto the hiking trail, eventually catching up with the rest of their group.

“Well”, the champion started, “He'll have plenty of other fighter’s to train. And more time to focus on working at his parent's restaurant.”

“True, I think he liked training you though. I mean you guys have known each other since you were seventeen bro. He told me he always dreamed of giving you your black belt when you were ready.”

Isak huffed out a small laugh before replying.

“Well, I guess that’s up to Even now. Maybe I can have a promotion ceremony with the kids, eh?”

Elias chuckled at this, raising his brows as he looked over to his fighter.

“Hey, I wouldn’t put it past him dude.”

“Yeah, me neither.”, Isak said, his voice full of mirth, "Right now I just need to focus on starting to
train again. Chris told me this is going to be her last fight with me as my agent. Then I’ll have Eskild to deal with.”

The featherweight had rolled his eye as he spoke, but his coach could see the excitement in them. The matchmaker and announcer was known for getting the fighter’s he’d managed excellent matchups as well as putting together some of the best cards in the Norwegian mma scene. It was a peculiar talent for a man who was also an avid Britney Spears fan to possess, but if anything if made Isak and Elias like him even more. Even if Isak wouldn’t admit it aloud. It also didn’t hurt that he’d been very receptive to helping the younger man for the few months he’d been homeless. It wasn’t something Isak thought he’d ever be able to fully repay him for, although he’d continue to try.

As the group was nearing the summit of their trail, Lillian, who was leading the pack up at the front with Mutta and Adam turned around quickly, nearly causing her grandparents to crash into her. She smiled broadly, surveying her father and his friends as she looked out over the incredible, vast wilderness that surrounded them. She cleared her throat before speaking.

“So, everybody, I just want to let you guys know, this is seriously like, an awesome birthday present. I don’t get to see my uncles”, she motioned her arm to Elias, Mutta, Adam, and Mikael, “As much as I used to, so, yeah that’s pretty cool. And I was in single digits the last time I went camping.” Elias snorted, shouting “You mean like a few years ago?” up to his friend’s daughter. She smiled back at him. “Well yes Elias. I know for you that was like literally yesterday, but I’m still spry you see. I guess I take after my old man.” Her grandparents laughed along with the others, Even’s mother saying “Ooh, two birds with one stone on that one Lil!” The girl took a bow, her hair falling into her face. As she rose back up she locked eyes with Isak, smiling at him.

“And this new Isak guy is pretty cool too I guess.” Isak smiled back, putting his hands to his heart. “Aww, Lillian, I’m touched, really.” The smaller Bech Naesheim giggled shrugging and saying, “Hey, you’ll be even cooler when your taste in music improves.” The group ‘Oh’d!’ collectively, Sonja looking back at Isak. “Shots fired, huh Isak?” Isak scoffed, nodding while failing to suppress a smile. “Right? She’s like a tiny, girl Even.” Even now turned to look at his fighter. “Hey there’s only one of me buddy. I don’t think the world could handle two.” A bright smile tugged Isak’s own out of him, laughing along with everyone else. The group continued to move up the trail, stopping to settle in a small clearing next to a slowly moving stream.

Once Isak was seated, he felt a low vibration from the pocket of his jogging pants, the feeling reverberating down his right leg. He fished his phone from his pants, unlocking it to see who the culprit was. Once he was at his messages, the blonde's heart skipped a beat. It was a text from Chris. His manager Chris. Short, simple, and oh so promising.

**Chris, The Agent:** Got you an opponent for the 106 CW card.

Call me for the details boy.

Isak couldn’t control his reaction, he clung to Elias like a spidermonkey, the embrace half attack half hug. Elias was surprised, but caught the younger boy, being lifted off the ground a few inches as Isak let out an unadulterated sound of joy. He was panting for an entirely different reason now, his happiness from the news radiating across his body and displaying on his face. He looked around, everyone had stopped to see what the news was, their rapt attention on the young man. Isak couldn’t hide the massive smile on his face as he turned to look at everyone.
“Guys, I’ve got a fight. We’re going to London!”

The group cheered their friend's news, Even immediately wrapping the other blonde in his arms and letting the joy for his friend and student show through. Isak Valtersen was going to fight in Cage Warriors and Even Bech Naesheim was going to make sure that his fighter was prepared for whatever opponent the promotion had in store for him, personal feelings be damned.

Søndag

12:34

Isak’s eyes were narrowed in concentration as he thumbed through his phone. Chris Berg had sent him the name of his opponent and the champ had spent most of the car ride so far studying up on his competition. The guy wasn’t doing anything Isak hadn't dealt with before. He had some decent defensive wrestling and a nice right high kick though, but the featherweight had no plan of letting the other fighter employ either in their fight. Isak was already envisioning the bout in his head, going over how he’d setup traps for his competition and capitalize on them. Even’s voice broke through his thoughts.

“So, how’s the competition looking?”, Even asked. Isak caught the older's eyes for a split second before shrugging and giving his answer.

“Not too shabby. Some good takedown defense. He sets up his right kick nicely. Nothing that shocked or wowed me though.”

Even gave a nod.

“Tape? You mean videos on youtube?”

Even smiled, nodding along with his fighter. He looked at Isak briefly before smiling, his eyes compressing into slits as he did so.

“I can’t believe your fighting in Cage Warriors dude. Next stop will be the UFC!”

The shorter blonde blushed at the praise, his eyes meeting the tops of his shoes as he nodded.

“That’s the goal. Ultimately I mean.”

“And it's one I know you’re gonna reach.”, said Even, gripping the other man’s shoulder before patting it softly.

“What’s his name?”, Lillian asked from the backseat. Isak turned slightly, grinning at the girl.

“Cameron ‘Party’ Hardy.”

The adolescent giggled.

“Hey, at least it rhymes. I mean, no offense Isak, but a Norwegian fighter with viking in their
Isak huffed at Lilli, his eyebrows pressing into his face in a fake expression of anger.

“Hey I’m not the one who thought of it missy.”, the fighter said, pointing a jokingly accusing finger at the young girl. He smiled at her which caused the other to respond in kind. The originator of the nickname wasn’t someone Isak liked to think about though and the two always seemed to be linked for him. He was glad Lillian seemed to be warming up to him though, jokes aside.

His eyes were drawn back to the figures moving on his phone screen. The fight had switched, this one from a more recent bout, showing Isak's soon to be adversary had improved. But the blonde could see the holes in the others game and was already planning on how to capitalize on them. He was running drills in his head for the combinations he’d be working with Chris and Elias, imagining himself implementing them in the fight. After watching a couple more videos of the other fighter, Isak relaxed, leaning his head back against the cushion and allowing his breathing to slow down. He cracked an eye open out before falling asleep, noticing a pair of kind blue eyes meet his, only for a second, and then returning to the road in front of them. A tiny smile worked it’s way onto the younger man’s lips as he let himself slip into dreamland.

Tobias and Tank's Apartment

Oslo

19:32

Tobi sighed as he looked at his boyfriend from across the table. He and the older boy had been going back and forth over the younger's unwillingness to give Isak an answer about coming to his fight in June.

“I'm not saying I can't go Isak. I'm saying I don't know if I'll be able to. It's two months away babe.”

Isak nodded, his lips pulled tightly across his face.

“I get that Tobias. I'm just asking you to find out for me. I've already requested that week off at work anyways so-“

“Wait a minute”, said Tobi, “I thought it would be for like a couple days?”

“Well, I mean, I'd like you to be there for the whole week if you can.” Tobias’ face drew in a little, but he nodded, giving a small shrug to his significant other.

“Yeah, I'll see what I can do. I'm not gonna make any promises though.”

Isak got up from the table, clearing his plate as well as that of his boyfriend's. He leaned down, kissing him on the cheek.

“Thank you.”

Tank had entered the apartment by the time Isak had rinsed his and Tobias utensils and plates, stacking them neatly in the dishwasher. She scooped herself out some of the remaining parmesan
and pepper penne Tobi had made, helping herself to the salad Isak had fixed as well. She settled down into her seat, consuming the meal joyously while letting a contented sigh through her nose.

“So Isak”, the young woman addressed the blonde after swallowing her bite, “Tobi tells me you’re moving up in the world of professional ass beating?”

Isak laughed at the question, nodding as he did so.

“Yeah I am, Tank. I’m fighting for an organization called Cage Warriors. Biggest mma promotion in Europe and the UK.”

The punk rocker nodded in a approval telling Isak “Nice bro!”, in English while affecting a California surfer accent. They bumped knuckles as Isak walked past the roommate’s and friends. He informed them he was going to go shower and proceeded to do so. Once he was dressed in some of Tobi's sweatpants and one of the many hoodies Chris had given him in his early days, Isak walked out of the bedroom. His socks felt soft and comfortable on his shower warm skin. Isak could see Tobias and Tank talking. Smiling to himself the champion began to approach, lowering his body so the pair wouldn't see him. Isak caught the end of something Tank was saying.

“-From his point of view though Tobs. I get that it's not like, what you planned for your life, but you have to weigh that against what you want for yourself man. Isak seems like a great guy. I think he’d understand.”

The aforementioned man was quiet, sitting stock-still on his heals, quickly becoming concerned about the conversation he was hearing.

“Yeah, I know.”, Tobias said, sounding exasperated more than anything. “I just guess……I don’t really know how to say it without sounding mean……I didn’t realize that fighter's had to be so…..selfish you know?”

Isak heard Tank hum her agreement.

“True. It makes sense though. It’s not like Isak got where he is through not putting himself first. No one can given you the right answer though dude. But you really should think it over. I mean, you’re his first real relationship Tobi. What you guys have means a lot to him.”

“It means a lot to me too!”, the young student countered back. “But so does my career. I don’t know.” Isak's boyfriend sighed heavily. “It's just……not an ideal situation. I don’t want what we have to end up stunting either of our dreams, but at the same time, I don’t want to hurt him.”

Isak heard a satisfied exhalation of breath from the raven headed female, inferring she must’ve been drinking something.

“I understand that, but you gotta think Tobs, what’s gonna be best for both of you? You need to tell him soon if you don’t want this going any further. Otherwise it’s just gonna hurt you both worse when it does end. You got a decision to make my man.”

Tapping the table a few times, Tank stood up, giving Isak the perfect cover he needed to quietly move back into Tobias’ room. He laid on the bed, eyes trained on the ceiling for several seconds before the younger man walked in. He pulled the door to the edge of the frame letting it rest against it. Tobi laid down next to his boyfriend, smiling at him and saying “Hey” before connecting his lips with Isak's for a short series of kisses. He placed his head next to the blonde's, sharing one pillow. He brought up his Netflix account on the TV in the middle of the wall directly in front of his bed.
“Want to watch a movie?”, Tobi asked, his face appearing bright and happy.

Isak gave soft grunt in reply, kissing his boyfriend again, this time deepening it slightly before resettling himself. He snuggled in against Tobias’ body, cuddling him close. The shorter boy reached across his man, turning out the lamp so only the TV screen was lighting the room. Isak had his head perched securely on his boyfriend's chest, trying to pay attention to the film, but repeating the conversation he’d overheard between him and Tank instead. He didn’t want to think about it. Isak Valtersen was having his first fight outside of Norway in June and that’s all that mattered right now.

Stuff for the fic

1. [Camelbak](https://www.camelbak.com/) is an outdoor equipment brand that makes hydration packs for civilian and military use.

2. [Cameron 'Party' Hardy](https://www.mmafight.com/?page_id=91) is an English mixed martial artist who currently competes in the featherweight division, but has also fought at lightweight (155 lbs, 70.3 kg) and bantamweight (135 lbs, 61.2 kg). He is currently ranked 27th among 255 active featherweight mma fighters in the UK and Ireland.

3. [TPBCMV Playlist](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/71oHsLLIqDCOhUlA3xrZHH)

Chapter End Notes

We're chugging along here everybody! I'm so excited for what I have in store for you guys. I also have an idea, which I'll explain in the notes of the next chapter, that I think might make the fic a little more interesting. I'm writing the next chapter now so look out for it sometime next weekend. I hope everyone is enjoying the fic and I hope all of you are happy and healthy! Remember to love yourselves and one another!

TPBCMV Playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/71oHsLLIqDCOhUlA3xrZHH
Tempest

Chapter Summary

Isak trains. Chris and Iben talk. Even recieves some good news. Isak introduces Tobi to his parents. Isak and Even talk.

Chapter Notes

Welcome back my wonderful readers! I hope all of you have had stellar weeks and weekends and am soooooo stoked about this chapter! We've got a lot going on here. New plot lines being hinted at and introduced, other ones moving further along, all kinds of stuff. I can't say too much without giving things away, so I'll let you guys get to it. Links are in the chapter text and stuff for the fic section as usual. Also spoilers for this chapter are in the endnotes just fyi. And last but, absolutely not least, hjertetssunnegalskap(Crazyheart) made a totally badass painting for this fic which can be found here: https://archiveofourown.org/works/18303176. I'm gonna include another link in the stuff for the fic section just to make sure it works. Thanks to Crazy Heart for the killer artwork and thanks to all of you as well! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Torsdag

April 11th, 2019

Bred Akse MMA Gym

10:32

The hand wraps and boxing gloves had perfectly molded to Isak's hands over the years. He approached the ring in the center right side of the gym, noticing not Chris, but Feliciana. The woman had on the usual mitts, shin, thigh, and body protector Chris used when he was training the featherweight. Isak looked at his fellow fighter with a question in his eyes.

“Chris not here today?”

“Taking a personal day.”

Upon Ana's reply, the buzzer went off, signaling the round to begin, the woman putting her hands up, running through a few combinations with Isak. Lead jab. Right cross. Footwork. Slip. Counter leg kick. Slip. Right knee. Left hand to the body. Isak rolled his eyes, speaking through his mouthpiece.

“If anyone needs a personal day right now it's me.”
Duck. Slip to the right. Left leg kick. Bob. Right hook to the body. Left hook up top. Circle left. Weave. Feint. Right leg kick. Block and counter on the way out. Stance switch. Right front kick. Reset. Slip the jab. Right hand over the top. Step in left knee. Ana sighed, nodding as the brought the mitts down against Isak's strikes. The sonic energy flowed around the pair, the leather and skin cracking against the synthetic material of the striking pads.

“He’s been coaching you for over four years Isak. I think he can take a break if he needs to.”

Isak punctuated the end of his friends statement with a hard left hook to the focus mitt. He leaned back, hands on his hips.

“Yeah ok, but like, I'm the one fighting. This is my first fight in another country and he isn’t here? Not to mention that I’m pretty sure I might not have a boyfriend after this next fight. I just think-“, Isak flinched moving his head backwards as the edge of the striking pad clipped him across the nose just slightly. He looked at his friend surprised and confused.

“What the hell Feliciana!?"

The kickboxer shrugged, pulling her elbows in.

“Keep your hands up kid. Day one shit if you ask me.”

Isak shifted his eyes to the time, seeing less than a minute left in the three minute round. A stiff teep kick to his right side brought his attention back to the present. Slip to the right. Lead right jab. Short elbow moving to the left. Check the leg kick. Left uppercut to the body. Right hook upstairs. Duck the counter. Move away from the follow up knee. Answer back with a straight left. Angle. Right kick across the front of the thighs. The buzzer sounded just as Isak was started to breath heavier. He walked over to the edge of the ring, plucking his water bottle from the ground and opening the top with his mouth before gulping down the liquid. He sat the container back down before turning his head side to and tilting his head back and forth.

“I know you’re going through some things right now Isak. I wasn’t trying to be mean or something.”, the Brazilian born fighter said to her friend. “But when there's a lot going on, the best thing you can do if focus on the present. So just take a minute. Close your eyes for me.” Isak did as he was asked. “Now, imagine all the other things in your life right now, everything else besides training. Imagine it's in a little ball of air Isak. It’s swirling around in your lungs. I want to hold that image in your head, eyes still closed, and breathe out, slowly.” Isak let the breath go, the imagery his friend was describing playing out in his mind's eye. His breathing returned to normal. He opened his eyes and lifted his head.

“Better?”, Ana asked. Isak nodded slowly, as if he just realized the visualization had actually worked.

“Yeah, actually.”

Feliciana smirked at him.

“Good, cause I was going easy on you for round one.”

Isak returned the smirk, finally starting to enjoy his training as the buzzer for the second round sounded. Slip the jab. Return fire. Slip again. Block the body shot. Step in knee. Weave. Jab. Left hand. Angle…..Block…..Counter kick to the body.......
Chris was lazily stirring his coffee, his face scrunched in thought as he did so. He had his right hand placed under his chin, his eyes staring off into the ceiling. He hummed, as if deep in thought, before sighing and shaking his head to and fro.

“Yeah, I just don’t see that going well. Sorry Iben. Thanks for playing and good luck!”

As the striking coach prepared to leave his seat, his longtime friend and ex grasped at the hem of his shirt, making him groan, but accomplishing the task she'd wanted to. Chris took his seat.

“So it doesn't eat at you? You don’t always have that little voice in the back of your head berating you for lying to him?”

“Oh”, the man started, “That voice went away a couple years ago for me. Now if I hear it I can just drown it out with weed, booze, and meaningless sex.”

Iben scoffed.

“I’m being serious Chris!”

The brunette leaned in closer.

“So am I Iben. What good would telling him do, hmm? Especially right now. And if I remember correctly, the original decision was that if we ever did it would be fifty fifty. So don’t think I’m about to let you go behind my back on this.”

Iben crossed her arms, lips tightening as she leaned back and nodded.

“Ok, fine, you’ve made your point and you’re right. We did agree it would be mutual. But it is wearing on me Chris. And I know it is on you too. I don't want to bring a child into the world without a clean conscious.”

Chris whistled.

“And people say I'm self absorbed.”

Iben cocked her head to the side, lowering her eyelids in a show of annoyance. The man groaned.

“Obviously we're going to tell him eventually, ok? But now isn’t the best time Iben, I’m telling you. Look I know I was a shit boyfriend, but I am a pretty good friend actually. And I'm saying this to you as your friend. Don’t tell him right now. Wait. There will be a better time when it makes sense. That’s when we should do it.”

Iben sighed, defeated but knowing her friend had the right idea. She changed the topic after conceding her lost argument.

“You think you guys could get me, Julian and Lilli tickets to Isak's fight?”
Chris nodded as he sipped his coffee.

“Assuming your creepazoid brother doesn’t try to tag along.”

Iben held in her laugh, her smile matching Chris’.

“Nah. He’s gonna be staying home for this one. Got himself a girlfriend you know. And a new job.”

“Oh?”, the chestnut haired man exclaimed, “Is his job constantly convincing his girlfriend to not breakup with him?”

Iben giggled, shrugging her shoulders.

“Actually I think he does that for free.”

The friends laughed together, each checking the time on their phones before standing and pushing their chairs in. Chris encircled Iben in a short hug, the woman returning the somewhat stunted embrace.

“I’ll work on getting you guys tickets to the fight. Air fare is going to be on you though.”

The woman nodded.

“Fair enough. Tell Isak I said good luck. And tell Even we’re all really proud of what he’s doing. His campaign drops in just a few weeks you know?”

“Oh damn, it does doesn’t it? I’ll be sure to let him know. And I’ll message you about the tickets ok?”

Iben responded with a hum, her speech currently impeded by a delicious croissant. The friends went their separate ways each with the same voice echoing in the back of their head.

13:09

PurKonchus’ Oslo Office

Blue eyes were focused into concentration on the screen in front of them. The tall man leaned down over his co-worker as the video on the screen played. The voice over was completed, now the team was working on cutting together the footage they’d gotten from a few gyms across Oslo. Even felt his pulse rise when Isak’s face appeared on screen; the younger man’s short interview being interspersed with footage of him training on the mat, hitting mitts, and exercising. Even leaned back, looking down at Adam.

“Yeah man, it’s coming together nicely. And we’re getting ad space on some big websites as well.”

“Oh?”, his friend questioned. Even nodded as he took a sip of his coffee.

“Yep. We’ll have it running on sherdog, bloody elbow, on all our social media too. Not gonna lie, I’m pretty excited about it.”
The black belt heard his phone ping; he gave his friend a wide smile and shoulder pat before going back to his own work station. He sat down in his chair, sighing contentedly as he fished his phone from his pocket, quickly scrolling to his messages. He righted his posture upon seeing who the text was from. It was a short, simple message, but Even couldn't hold back the emotion he felt, his eyes immediately wetting.

**Kirstjen:** You're appeal for regaining joint custody went through. Call me as soon as you can for the details.

He held the phone to his heart as he got his breathing back to normal. He cleared his throat, pushing out a small ‘woo!’ that caught his friend's attention. Adam spun around in his chair, facing his friend.

“What’s up?”

Even smiled.

“My custody appeal went through. My lawyer told me to call her to get more details.”

Adam rose out of his seat with an exuberant “Dude!” Even did the same, exclaiming “I know!” loudly before the two embraced one another in a tight hug. As they broke apart Even sighed, nodding to himself.

“I’ll call her first thing after work.”, he told his coworker.

Adam balked, shaking his head.

“No way dude. Call her now!”

“You sure?”, Even asked.

“Absolutely man. I’ve got this editing covered. Go make that call bro!”

Even giggled and shrugged, thanking his friend as he walked to the front lobby of the office, retrieving his phone from his pocket and quickly selecting his lawyers contact number. There were a few rings before his call was received.

“You got my text I presume?”

Even nodded rapidly, unable to control his excitement.

“I did! Is there a court date set yet?”, the creative director asked.

“Not yet”, answered Kirstjen, “I’ll need to get in contact with Iben’s representation. I’m hoping we'll be able to get a date in the next couple months though. It depends on Iben and her schedule of course, as well as the court’s, but I’d say we're probably looking at sometime early next month.”

Even laughed gently.

“Yeah um, that's….wow, thank you so much Kirstjen. Seriously, I mean I don't know how I can repay you.”
The family law specialist chuckled, accepting the praise.

“Well I’m happy to do it Even. The whole reason I started my firm was for cases like yours. Sometimes a parent just needs some time to get their own life together before they’re reunited with their child. And I think the courts would agree with that you’ve done exactly that. I’ve got other clients I have to get to Even, but I’ll let you know when I’ve got a set date. And If I was you I’d let Iben know before she hears it from her lawyer. I can’t imagine she’s going to be very happy about this news.”

A few months back, Even likely would've agreed with his attorney, but now he wasn’t so sure.

“I don’t know about that. Iben and myself have……had a newly found understanding of one another I believe. But you’re right, it’ll be better if I tell her directly. Man, I really can’t thank you enough Kirstjjen. Don’t be surprised if you get some flowers and chocolate in your office in the next few days.”

The lawyer laughed.

“So old fashioned. I love it. Your parents raised you right Bech Naesheim.”

Even smiled.

“That they did.”

“Oh, also one more thing Even. If everything goes according to plan, I’ll be representing you directly in court for this custody trial. I’m glad I’ve been able to help you, and I promise you’ll know the court date as soon as I do.”

“Thank you Kirstjjen, honestly. I’ll look forward to hearing from you.”

The client and lawyer bid one another adieu, Even waltzing back into the office with a massive smile across his face.

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Isak, Tobias and Isak's parents were sitting outside, the early spring weather particularly warm for the season. Everyone had already ordered, the waitress looking at Isak and smiling.

“And for you sir?”, she asked.

“Um….I'm gonna have the stone baked tenderloin. Medium rare if you can.”

“We certainly can. Alright guys, if you want more pita bread or any sauce just flag down somebody in the wait staff and we'll get it to you.”

Isak’s parents thanked the young woman, showing their appreciation for the service. Marianne cleared her throat once she was gone, smiling at Tobi.

“So, Tobi, I understand you’re going to school at UiO right now?”
The question was asked just as the brunette had taken a sip of wine, responding to Isak's mother with a hum and nod.

"Yeah, that's right. I'm going to get a degree as a school counsellor. And eventually I'd like to get into educational planning for adolescents and teenagers. Particularly kids who... might not come from the best places."

Isak smiled at his boyfriend, gripping his shoulder and squeezing as he did so.

"He's a saint guys, what can I tell you."

The table laughed, Tobi insisting against Isak's praise.

"Far from it I'm afraid. I am serious about helping kids though. What about you guys? What do you do for a living, if I can ask."

"Well", Terje responded first, "I run a small investment advisory company. We're not too big, mostly trading penny stocks and such, although we do have some international clients as well. I can't say Isak was ever too interested in my work."

Marianne giggled and nodded.

"He's right about that. You know Tobias' Isak was always very interested in science when he was growing up. My adorable little scientist!", Isak's mom cooed, smiling at her son. Isak rolled his eyes, smiling brightly all the same. Terje concurred, nodding along with his wife.

"That's right. You know the whole fighting thing was out of left for us. We were honestly a little worried at first", said Isak's father, ending his sentence in a breathy laugh. "Of course then we met Coach Schistad and everyone at Bred Akse. They were just so great to Isak and we could tell he was really happy. Makes me wish he'd started earlier honestly."

Isak placed his hands on the table, smiling at his parents, albeit a bit tightly.

"Yeah. And the rest is history. But we're here to celebrate right guys?"

The other three nodded as Isak began raising his glass.

"Oh, Isak, honey, would you like some wine?", asked Marianne. Isak's face pulled in as he shook his head no.

"I don't drink during training camps. Sorry mama."

Terje shrugged.

"Probably for the best I'd imagine. But you're right son, we are here to celebrate, so", the paternal Valtersen brought his glass up, meeting the others as they exclaimed "Skol!" in celebration. Afterwards Isak began tearing into the pita bread, much to the amusement of his boyfriend and parents. He look up from his plate, half of the bread hanging from his mouth. He bit the piece off, saying "What?", before chuckling along with the rest of the table. Isak finished chewing.

"Sorry, I haven't eaten since around nine thirty this morning guys, so I'm pretty hungry."

"Don't spoil your lunch, babe.", Tobias scolded, a playful grin on his face. Isak chuckled, shrugging in response.

"I'll be burning it all off later when I train with Even and Magnus anyway."
“Oh, how is Magnus by the way?”, the maternal Valtersen inquired.

Isak took another sip of his water.

“Yeah he's good. Him and Vilde have been dating since before we graduated. It's weird to think of, but I’m happy for them. I think he’s gonna be helping me out with my wrestling actually. I always though he just hung around the gym for fun, but I guess he’s pretty useful.”

“Isak!”, his mother said, discipline in her voice. The champion ducked his head, smiling despite his mother’s disapproval. “I’m joking mama, Magnus is a welcome addition to my team.”

Terje looked between the two youths.

“So boys, you know we still don’t really know how you two met.”

Tobi and Isak looked at one another, each imploring the other to tell the story. Isak finally gave up, smiling at his boyfriend while he rolled his eyes.

“So”, Tobias started, “I actually met Isak when he came into the UiO mental health services office to see one of our post grad program workers. It just so happened she was actually the sister of Isak's boxing coach.”

“Elias’ sister?”, Marianne asked. Isak nodded.

“Yeah. Him and Chris sort of……I don’t know…..coaxed me to go. It turned out to help quite a bit though, Sana is amazing at her job. She has a degree in how athletes with mental disorders play sports mom. And she’s getting her master’s in sports psychology. I mean, I know I don’t have a mental disorder, but she still helped me out a lot. Awesome girl.”

“Oh wait”, Terje said, “Marianne, we met Sana back in December, after Isak’s fight, remember?”

The statement must have jogged the woman’s memory as she looked to Isak and Tobias.

“Oh that’s right! Oh and she has that adorable baby boy.’”, she quickly looked to Tobi. “Tobias, what is your opinion on children? Having them I mean. Is that something you think-“, Isak cut her off, laughing awkwardly.

“Whoa, mama, that’s um….you know, a little soon to start asking about kids don’t you think?”

“Well, I mean, I don’t know Isak, I’m just trying to get his opinion.”

Isak raised his hands in surrender. Tobias laughed.

“I could see myself with children one day Marianne, yes. You know, I love working with them. And I think once Isak’s in the right spot in his life he’d be a great dad.” Tobias looked over to Isak, the blonde returning his smile, even though it didn’t totally reach his eyes.

Difficult to have kids if we're not together isn’t it.

Isak didn’t know where the thought came from, but he had more important things to worry about right now. Like chowing down on the delicious meal that had just been placed in front of him. He looked around the table, noticing his boyfriend and parents dishes had been brought out as well. The chef had apparently come out to greet the patrons too. He was a squat man, tattoos littering his arms and disappearing under his jacket.

“Alright everyone, hope you all enjoy it as much as I did making it. And Isak, I don’t want to
fanboy out, but I’ll definitely be rooting for you buddy, so good luck.”

Isak was surprised at the chef's admission, but thanked him for the well wishes. The wait staff took their leave along with the cook, the four beginning to dive into their food, enjoying each other’s company. Isak still wasn’t sure where he and Tobi were relationship wise, but at that moment, he wasn’t really concerned about it.

Bred Akse

20:55

Magnus had been brought up wrestling, his father getting him into the sport at an early age. Isak always forgot about his friend's extensive wrestling background, but was currently being reminded of it as he laid heavily atop him in a side long fashion. The other blonde’s knees were based far apart; one aligned with Isak's shoulders as the other dug into the side of the champion's right thigh. Even was standing just off of the mats, coaching Isak through escaping the pin.

“Bridge your hips and turn!”, Even called out. Isak attempted to do so, but his friend moved along with him, letting his body go limp against the other man.

“Uh, yeah, not gonna happen, Even. Jesus Mags, what've you been eating dude!?”, complained Isak.

Magnus let loose a gasping scoff.

“Bro, are you fat shaming me?”

Isak sighed.

“No, moron, I’m not fat shaming you. I’m lamenting the fact that you're obviously a better wrestler than I am.”

“Stop!”, Even instructed, his voice causing both of the younger men to fix their eye upon. The tall man skipped over to the gym’s sound system, turning up the volume before dancing back to his spot on the mat. The boys separated, standing up, Isak putting his hands up above his head as his breath came back to him. It was only then he noticed the song that his grappling coach had cranked the volume on, recognizing the lyrics and beat.

Lookin for some hot stuff, baby this evenin

I need some hot stuff, baby tonight

I want some hot stuff, baby this evenin

Gotta have some hot stuff

Gotta have some love tonight
Isak made his head loll back and to the right, a grin splitting his lips apart. Even pointed at him, trying to hide his own smile and shaking his head.

“Don’t you give me that look Isak Valtersen! If you’re about to shit on Donna Summer, I don’t even know if I want to be your coach anymore.”

Isak laughed aloud now, Magnus joining in as well. He nodded at Even’s words, switching his gaze to his sweaty friend.

“I’m with Even on this one dude. Donna Summer was one bad mother—”

“Shut yo mouth!” Elias yelled from his spot in the office, overhearing the conversation as the mats were only a few feet away from the open door. A few seconds later he appeared in the doorway, smiling at his friend’s.

“Alright boys, I just finished up paying the bills for last month, so I am out of here. Lock it up when you leave. Peace!”

The gym owner had been making his way towards the double doors of the facility as he was talking, breezing through them as he left. Magnus stretched his arms high above his head, letting out a long yawn. Before heading over to pick up his gym bag and water bottle.

“I’m headed home as well my dudes. It’s…..date night with Vilde soooo”, Magnus made gyrations with his hips as Even laughed and Isak rolled his eyes, lips and face giving away his amusement. The other two waved their friend goodbye as he exited the gym, now left alone with only the thumping bass of the song in the background. Even looked over to his fighter.

“Wanna work on that escape from side mount?”

Isak chuckled and nodded; the coach and student taking their positions on the mat.

21:21

The fighter and instructor were circling each other on the mat, their senses heightened. Each was bent at the waist, waiting for the other to engage. It was Even who moved first, putting the palm of his right hand against Isak's head a few times, the other pulling it down quickly. On the final time, Isak had grasped Even’s wrist and the outside of his right arm tightly, whipping his own arms down while keeping his forehead glued to the black belt’s arm. As the mixed martial artist tried to rush in on Even, the taller of the two distanced his hips and pushed Isak's head away from his arm.

Even's single arm wasn't stronger than both of his student's though. The shorter blonde let the arm go, again trying to close the distance, this time diving for the other's legs. Even snapped his hips down to the mat, entangling his hands behind Isak's neck. He attempted to work his arm underneath the champion's neck, but the featherweight held onto it tightly, using both hands to control his training partner's right arm. Even abandoned Isak's neck, now rapidly bouncing on his knees to try and take the younger man's back. As soon as the pressure was off his neck however, Isak popped his left hip to his side, going to his back and pulling guard with his legs hanging lazily in the air.

Even stood tall, bending at the knee to try to crowd the fighter's legs up to his body. Isak slid to
one hip, now with one hand behind himself. Even crouched to his knees, keeping one hand out in
front while the other hung by his side. As Isak went to stand back up, getting to one knee, Even
surged forward. As Isak began to turn his hips to avoid the other man, he sprung to his feet, easily
making himself perpendicular to the younger's body and attempting to initiate a clinch. Isak
shucked him off easily, but his feet were now closer together. Even had set him up! Without
enough time to react, Isak was unable to defend the swift double leg. Even lifting and pushing his
body forward at an angle. The two landed heavily, Even sat between the others legs. The grappling
coach looked at the clock, sighing and rolling over.

Isak sat up on his elbow, the martial artist's left and right legs resting against one another.

“Don’t tell me you’re tired out?”, Isak suggested facetiously. Even smiled, shaking his head.

“Not at all, although it is about fifteen till, and we still have to clean and lock up.”

Isak make a displeased sound, falling back onto the mat in dramatic fashion making Even laugh.

“I do have some pretty great news though.”, Even informed his friend.

Isak turned to face him.

“Oh?”

Even nodded, his eyes bright and smile making his face scrunch. It was cute.

*Where the hell did that thought come from?*

In the small blip of time Isak had caught himself thinking, Even had begun explaining what he'd
learned earlier that day.

“I don’t have a specific date, but, yeah man, it looks like if every goes well I’ll have joint custody
of Lillian again.”

Isak met his coach's eyes, his own widening as he found himself smiling at the instructor's
statement.

“Even that’s amazing! Seriously dude, that's awesome! I’m really happy for you bro!”

Isak's body acted on it's own volition engulfing the other man in a hug. As he pulled back, he
noticed his friend's smile had shrunk. Isak asked if he was ok, to which Even responded that he
was.

“But, there is something I wanted to ask you.”, Even told him.

“Sure.”

“Because of the reason that I lost custody, it’ll make my case for regaining it stronger if I have
people there to vouch for me. Character witnesses. I don’t expect you to say yes. I mean, obviously
you need to be here training, but I figured it wouldn’t hurt to ask so-“

“Yes.”

“What?”, asked Even, wanting to confirm Isak's answer.

“Yes I’ll be a character witness for you Even. Are you kidding? You're an awesome dad. And a
great coach. I mean…..”, Isak paused, looking down at his lap, “You're amazing, like…..yeah…..”
The fighter laughed a bit awkwardly, Even joining in as well. He looked into Isak's eyes as their laughter died down.

"Thank you, Isak."

Isak swallowed and nodded, suddenly noticing how close the older man was. The two didn’t speak. Even’s eyes, shining blue rubies, dipped down to Isak's lips, before settling back to look at his face. Isak's did the same, his face slowly leaning towards Even's. The taller man's movements mirrored his own. Before either was aware, their eyes had closed, lips pressing together softly for a short handful of seconds. The sound of one of the gym's doors opening shattered the moment, the pieces falling onto the mat before blowing out of the building. It was Elias. He had a rectangular, envelope like document in his hand.

"Sorry Ev, forgot to give you your check. I’ll see you guys tomorrow!"

Elias had come and gone like a flash flood, soaking the two men in the wrongness of what they’d just done. And he hadn’t even known what they were doing. Or at least they thought so. Even cleared his throat, standing and going over to the shoe cubby that his friend had left the check on. He pulled the sealed paper from the third row where it sat, popping it against his knuckles a couple times. Isak finally broke free from his trance, the reality of what just happened startling him to action. He stood abruptly, going over to where he’d left his gym bag. He stuffed the rest of his gear in quickly, not noticing that Even had come to stand behind him. He began apologizing as soon as Isak turned around.

“That was completely unacceptable of me Isak. I’m very sorry. I don’t know what happened I just um….”

Isak stood still, unsure of what to say.

“I understand if you’d like to…..to seek another grappling coach. In fact if you need me to leave to really feel……feel completely comfortable, I understand….. I uh…..”, Even sighed not having the words to express himself. Isak made a few steps towards him, until he was standing in front of him, their height difference now magnified. He looked up into Even’s eyes, his pulse quickening.

“You make me feel….very comfortable Even….and I think that’s the problem. But I’m not going anywhere. And neither are you.”

Isak's movement stuttered a bit as he leaned forward, kissing Even shyly on the corner of his lips. He took his leave from the gym, not looking back. Even sat down, sighing deeply as he laid back, arms flopped to his side. He looked up at the ceiling.

“Fuck.”

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**Stuff for the fic**

1. Feliciana's (Chris') focus mitts, shinpads, thigh pads, and body protector. These kinds of pads are used to help a fighter experience resistance in their striking drills while still protecting the coach/person training them.
2. **Supreme Roastworks** is a coffee shop in the Grünerløkka neighborhood of Oslo. The shop is known for their service and pastries.

3. **Sherdog.com** and **bloodyelbow.com** are both news sites for mixed martial arts. Sherdog also has a forum system and ranks its users with an extensive "virtual belt" system.

4. **Mirabel** is a waterside restaurant in Oslo. It's known for its atmosphere and Mediterranean themed cuisine.

5. In wrestling, mma, and certain other martial arts/sports (luta livre, sambo, shuai jao, etc), a [double leg takedown](https://www.mma.com) is a technique implemented by dropping down to secure the opponent's legs, lifting them and thereby taking their base away, causing the competitor to either try and escape or be taken down to the canvas. There are many ways to perform a double leg takedown. The one in the story text is being done by retired fighter and multiple time UFC champion George St. Pierre (GSP) who is known for his successful implementation of high level, basic wrestling techniques. Wrestling holds a high significance in MMA because it allows as fighter to control where the contest will take place.

6. **Donna Summer - Hot Stuff**

7. And finally, this stunning piece that [hjertetssunnegalskap (Crazyheart)](http://www.override.com) made of Isak in his sparring gear. She did an incredible job on it! There's also a link to it in the previous chapter, but I wanted to put one in this chapter as well along with her profile. Check her out! Ok everybody, I'll catch you guys next weekend!

Chapter End Notes

It. Happened. It finally happened! I guess the burn doesn't seem as slow when you're the one writing it, but damn dude I guess it really has been hahah. I hope you all enjoyed the Evak embers here, or I guess at this point it's more like a flame. There will be more developments with them as the story continues. And Isak is going to have some....difficult decisions to make. I hope all is well out there for everyone and that you have a great week! I'll plan on updating this upcoming weekend. See y'all soon!
Aftermath

Chapter Summary

Isak tells Tobi about what happened with Even. Even talks to Elias. Isak makes a decision.

Chapter Notes

Yooooooo! Holy shit, the UFC 236 main and co-main were incredible! But anyways, welcome back to TPBCMV everyone! I hope your weekend was as fun as mine! There's a lot going on in this chapter that I don't want to spoil, so I'm gonna let y'all get right to It! Check out the stuff for the fic section for the in story links. Spoilers in the endnotes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tobi and Tank's Apartment

22:24

Isak's face was red, his ears were burning as he sat across the table from his boyfriend. He didn’t know what to say. He wanted to be honest with Tobi, to tell him the truth, but he was scared. Scared of his reaction and scared of losing Tobi. The thing with Even had been there for a while. It wasn’t like Isak was fantasizing about his coach. Well….ok, it wasn’t like he was acting on those feelings. But he still liked Tobias. A lot. And he didn’t want to hurt him or make the younger man resent him. It didn’t make it any easier though.

“Isak, whatever you did….just tell me. We can work it out ok?”

The other boy nodded, not even noticing his eyes had begun to water.

“I uh…..I…..didn't mean to ok? I promise Tobias, it just happened.” Isak breathed deep, preparing his explanation. “It was at the end of the night. Elias and Magnus had gone home. Me and Even were working on some wrestling and-"

“Isak?”’, Tobi interrupted his boyfriend, his tone was calm, but held an edge as well. “Just tell me what happened, ok?”

Isak nodded, unable to look his boyfriend in the eyes.

“Me and Even kissed. It wasn’t like….I don’t know……serious or something. And it only lasted a couple seconds.”

“Did he initiate it?”, the smaller boy asked. His voice was oddly devoid of emotion, like a detective
working on a case.

Isak shifted, shaking his head.

“Not really, no. We kind of both did, but….yeah. I don’t know it just happened and I’m really sorry Tobi. I didn’t mean to do it and I just…”

Isak was getting upset, his breathing beginning to quicken. Tobi leapt from his chair, encircling his arms around the fighter. He pulled his head to his chest, kissing the side of it.

“It’s ok Isak. Alright? I’m not mad ok? I promise.”

Isak’s guilt was overwhelming him. He knew he had to tell Tobi about the second kiss, but was too emotional to do so.

*Everything was going great! Why'd I have to fuck it up!*

The boys heard the soft treading of socked feet on hardwood. Theinkesia poked her shorn head around the corner.

“You guys ok in here? I heard crying.”

Tobi looked back at his friend, his eyes widening as he looked at his friend, indicating with a move of his head for the young woman to leave the two alone. She raised her hands, nodding and moving back into the hall. The younger man, pulled away from Isak slowly, sitting in the chair opposite to him and leaning in, smiling small at Isak.

“It’s ok baby. Thank you for telling me. I know it was just a kiss, but I appreciate you being honest.” Tobi swallowed, looking over the other's shoulder as if he was gathering strength for what he was going to say. “I um…..I've thought this for a while now, but…….”, Tobi sighed through his nostrils, “I love you Isak. I really think I do.” Isak sniffled, moving away from his boyfriend. He knew he should have been elated, should have thrown his arms around his man, kissed him and told him the same. But he didn’t. He didn't say anything.

“It’s ok if you can’t say it back yet.”, Tobias reassured. Isak nodded; the only response he felt comfortable giving at the moment. The blonde had calmed down now, sighing and sitting back in his chair. He’d been so nervous that when he got home he didn’t even eat. He wasn’t nervous anymore, but he wasn’t hungry either. Tobi coaxed him up from his seat, moving him out of the kitchen, down the hall and into his room. He laid Isak on the bed, kissing him softly, before heading into the bathroom to prepare for bed. Isak usually wouldn’t go to bed for another few hours, but his training combined with the emotional stress seemed to be taking it’s toll. He pulled down his athletic shorts and removed his shirt, leaving him in just his boxer briefs. After a few more minutes, Isak's boyfriend returned, settling into his spot beside the mixed martial artist. Isak immediately got up, informing Tobi he’d be taking a shower, hoping to clear his head. Just as he prepared to hop in, his phone pinged in the other room. Isak sighed, getting in the shower anyway, too tired to see who was texting him anyway.
Even was twiddling his thumbs, looking around Elias’ small office, recognizing the pictures of friend’s, family members and fighter’s. Old poster’s of fights that were held in the gym and exhibition matches dotted the walls. It had been a week since “the incident” as Mikael and Sonja had dubbed it, believing Even was blowing the situation out of proportion. But the black belt knew better. His relationship with Julian had began much the same way. Granted their first encounter hadn’t happened at the gym and involved significantly more kissing. The door to the office creaked open, the pebble glass insert shaking in it’s frame. Elias sat in his desk chair, stretching his arms out in front of him. Coach Chris followed after him, sitting on the edge of the well worn oaken furniture.

“So, what’s up Ev? What pressing matters do you need us to attend to?”, Elias questioned his friend.

Even sighed before giving the details.

“Last week, I……acted inappropriately with Isak.”

“No way!”, Chris said, clearly not taking the situation seriously. “Did you guys hook up on my mats? Cause you know we’ll have to clean those again now. I mean extra clean Even. Bleach if we hav-“

“Honestly!?” Even interjected, his emotions rising at Chris flippant response to the information he was trying to give him and Elias. The kickboxer raised his hands.

“Whoa. Sorry Even. Like, seriously man. Didn’t know you were…..I don’t know…..that upset about this.” Elias looked between his friend’s, shaking his head and addressing Even.

“Ok, what really happened here Even? I mean, you and Isak have been getting along great. Doesn’t seem like anything's wrong.”

“Well you obviously wouldn’t know since neither of us has said anything till now. It was after you and Magnus left. Me and Isak were working on escapes from side mount. We got to talking and……fuck dude. I don’t know, it just happened.”

Elias thought for a second, nodding his head as he ran through his memory.

“And what exactly happened?”

“We kissed”, Even replied.

“Like kiss grandma on the cheek kiss or make out in the back of a movie theater kiss?”

Elias held his hand up.

“Yeah, Chris, I don’t really think that's the issue here man.”

The brunette shrugged, nodding.

“Ok so you kissed. Was this before or after I came back to give you your check?”

Chris scoffed, slapping the back of his hand against Elias’ shoulder.

“Total cockblock Bakkoush.”
Even rolled his eyes; the gym owner pinched his thumb and forefinger to the bridge of his nose.

“Oh, Schistad, can you and the thirteen year old boy living in your head step out of the office so the adults can talk please?”

Chris smiled letting out a “Pfttttt”, but abided by his employer's request. Elias looked back to Even, prompting him to continue.

“It was before. I guess I'd like to think that that’s where it would've ended, but, yeah….. Oh and Isak kissed me before he left.”

The jiu-jitsuka’s longtime friend hummed, leaning back into his chair. His facial muscles were pulled taut.

“Well, I’m not going to, I don’t know, fire you or banish you from the gym dude. And like I said, Isak doesn’t seem to be that effected by it. Ultimately, this is between you, Isak, and Tobi. Talk to Isak. Get his opinion on it. Who knows, maybe things will work out for the best.”

Elias finished the statement with a smile, entirely in contrast to the stern face the other man was showing.

“Really Elias? Do you not remember how this worked out last time?”

“I do remember, but Isak is also a completely different person and the situation is entirely different as well. You're not in the beginnings of an episode right now. You’re clear headed. I’m leaving this up to you guys to sort out ok? And I’ll support you in whatever your decision is. But, I love having you here dude. Me, you, and Chris' dumb ass? We're the dream team bro.”

Even couldn't hide the little smile that peeked out from his previously serious expression. He nodded to himself standing up and thanking Elias for meeting with him. Elias was right. He needed to speak to Isak. To get a clear answer. Even wasn’t going to allow a repeat of the events that took place in Stavanger.

Kaffebrenneriet

13:42

Isak was studying his boyfriend with a critical eye. His face like that of an impartial scientist, although there was a whirlwind stirring in his chest. He hadn’t noticed it till the night before, but Tobi had apparently replied to the text Even sent him, apologizing a second time for the kiss they’d shared at the gym. The blonde had been scared to look at the text. Not wanting to read it, and only gathering the courage to do so after he’d gotten home the night before. He'd decided to spend the night in his own apartment, watching a movie with Chris and a woman who he may or may not have been hooking up with.

Tobias cleared his throat.

“I’m sorry that I replied for you Isak. I shouldn’t have done that.”

Isak's eyes raked over his boyfriend's face, crossing his arms as he sat back in his chair, his half drunk medium roast sitting alone in the middle of the table.
“Yeah, well, you should be dude. I get that I’m your boyfriend so like, obviously the whole situation effects you. But you didn’t have the right to do that Tobi! If I decide I want to end….what we have tomorrow then that’s my decision. If I decide I want to…..I don’t know, abandon mma and become a microbiologist, that's my decision. I know my choices effect you, but that doesn’t mean you get to dictate them for me. Ok?”

Tobi nodded, guiltily looking down to where the message in question was still in frame on Isak's phone.

Even: Hi Isak. I just wanted to apologize again.

I can promise it won’t happen again.

If you feel we need to let Elias know, I understand.

I hope this doesn’t effect our relationship as coach and student.

Isak: I accept your apology

I know it won’t happen again

If you want to tell Elias you can

I’m not letting a kiss end our fighter and coach relationship

The message itself was pretty benign, Tobi having cooled down since Isak had been honest with him. At least as far as he knew anyway. Isak had gone back and forth over the course of the past seven days. At times feeling on the edge of ending his relationship with the university student and at others wanting to throw the boy down onto his bed. He was conflicted to say the least. Isak cleared his own throat now, sighing as he sat up in his chair, looking into the other man's eyes.

“I’ve made a decision. And I don't want you freaking out or getting upset ok? Cause it's more to do with me than with you.”

Tobias’ eyes widened, his face morphing into a look of concern, but nodding all the same. Isak sniffled and nodded back.

“I think it might be a good idea, for both of us, if we um…..if we…..took a little break from spending time together. I’m not talking about breaking up ok? I just think if I really just focus on my training camp right now that-“

“Hmm, I’d say you're focused enough on it already.”

The comment had pushed forth from then shorter boy's mouth without any preamble. No checks or balances ok’d it, it just flew out like a dead fish, sitting awkwardly between the two. Isak chuckled ruefully nodding as he got up from the table, pushing his chair in as he quickly put his jacket on. Tobi rushed to his side.

“Babe, Isak, I’m sorry ok? I didn’t mean that. Ignore It ok? It was just…. I don’t know, the first
thing I thought. I didn’t mean…….shit.”

He rushed to catch the fighter as he made his way out of the café, jogging to catch up to him.

“So it’s the thing that came to your mind first, but I should ignore it? Ok Tobias.” Isak stopped turning to face his boyfriend. “You know I might not be in university, but I know what cognitive dissonance is.”

Tobias face pulled into an unspoken question. Isak sighed.

“I’m talking about us babe. About being together right now. Please don’t get me wrong. I care about you, I want you to succeed in life and I want you to be happy. But I’m also a realist and I don’t know if realistically we're good for each other right now. Our lives are going in completely different directions and there’s no guarantee that that’s going to stop. That’s why I thought taking a break might be good for us. I want this to workout Tobi, but I think we have to be aware of the possibility that it might not work too.”

Tobi sighed, leaning back against the wall of the coffee shop.

“I appreciate you telling me that Isak. But this isn’t some……science experiment to me. This is a relationship.”

“It’s not to me either, but I want what's best for both of us and that might mean neither of us being happy right now.”

The two were silent for a long stretch, other people walking past the couple, going about their day.

Tobias spoke first.

“If you think taking a break will help us in the long run or…..or I guess help you decide if this is what you want then……well…yeah I don’t like it, but I understand it. And I accept it.”

Isak breathed a sigh of relief and nodded, grasping his boyfriend’s hands together and pulling him from the wall of the establishment. He wrapped his arms around the shorter boy, tucking his head into his neck and breathing his scent in. Pine, coffee, and lingering tobacco smoke. The embrace brought the boys together, but to Isak it felt like he was pushing Tobi away. He pulled back from him, smiling sadly at the highlight haired man.

“Thank you. Thank you for doing this Tobias.” Tobi nodded, pecking Isak on his lips before the other boy could react. Normally Isak would've been apprehensive about such a blatant display of affection in public, but given the current circumstances it was the least he could do. The two hugged one more time before separating, Isak returning to Bred Akse and Tobi going back to UiO. It wasn’t a feeling Isak relished in, but he couldn’t deny that the whole interaction had lifted some pressure off him. He just hoped it didn’t mean Tobias getting hurt in the end, but the fact that the younger boy wasn’t aware of the whole truth didn’t bode well.

Onsdag

Mai 22nd, 2019

Bred Akse
Isak felt he'd made the right decision. It had been a little over a month since he and Tobi had chosen to take a break from each other. The champion had been more focused, more engaged. His coaches had even made mention of it. The reality of the situation was more uncomfortable however. The featherweight was realizing that at this point in his life and career, having a boyfriend may not be in the cards. He still wanted to try with Tobi though. Now that he knew what if felt like to be with someone, Isak wasn't too thrilled with the idea of having no one. Surprisingly, things with Even pretty much went back to normal. Both teacher and pupil he become a bit more serious though; the usual playful banter between the two having been tamped down. Neither man liked it, but they accepted it.

Isak was currently waiting on Chris to call him over for a demonstration the two were doing for Bred Akse's Instagram page. The gym had a decent online presence in the Scandinavian mma scene, but were always angling to expand their reach. Vilde held her phone in her hand, waiting for Chris to signal Isak. After the brunet had taken a swig of water he motioned for the younger fighter to come over. Once Vilde had let Isak know he was in frame, the striking coach told her to start recording. Chris smiled wide at the camera, Isak standing off to the side.

“What’s up everyone. This is coach Chris from Bred Akse giving all of you another Bred Akse breakdown. And today my lovely assistant will be the current NFC’s featherweight champ.” The coach motioned to Isak. “And today we’re working on elbow setups from the clinch. Isak?” The champion came closer, tying up with his instructor at his behest.

“So there’s different ways to break a clinch right?”, Chris asked the online audience. “But I always want to capitalize whenever I can, and a fighter might be vulnerable after they break free. So let’s go through a couple different scenarios ok?”

“If he tries to break clean, I can crowd him”, Chris moved in further as the blonde attempted to separate himself, “This sets up some short shots to the body, but today our focus is on elbows. If your opponent knows what they’re doing they’re not dropping their hands on the break.” Chris allowed Isak to break free, miming a left hook as Isak brought his hand up to block it. “So I have to get him to break the clinch in a position where it’s hard to protect himself.” The pair engaged again.

“There’s a lot of different ways to do this, but we're going to set it up off Isak's counters,”, Chris turned back to the camera, “So I’m fighting for hand position in the clench, trying to set up an elbow or maybe go for some underhooks.”, Chris demonstrated while he was talking. “If I keep my hands on his neck and arms I can feel when he's going to throw. So as soon as I feel Isak set up…”, he waited a bit, the men loosely grappling back and forth before Isak tried breaking, Chris stopped him just as he was about to feint the strike. “Ok, so as we can see, Isak is about to try to break and throw his lead left elbow. So I’m going to cut a corner to the outside while moving my head away” the coach nodded as the blonde to finish the technique, missing Chris at the elder martial artist moved his hands off the center line.

He looked back to Vilde.

“Now I’m in position to throw an elbow of my own over the top, a right hand, go for a knee to the gut or ribs, so you see, this one simple set up gives me a ton of choices. So one more time, half speed.” The friends clenched again each spending a few seconds trying to gain the advantage before Isak forced the break, timing his elbow while Chris angled to the outside of the other's left leg. He flashed a quick combination, left hook to the body, right knee to the ribs, right straight on the disengage. “And again, this time full speed.” Both training partners crowded into the clench again, expertly pulling their shots so they didn’t land and accidentally hurt one another. At the end of the combo, Chris wrapped his hands around Isak's waist, lifting him while he groaned in fake
exertion, chuckling as he sat the other boy back on his feet. Isak started laughing as well. Chris addressed the camera once more.

“Alright guys, that’s the Bred Akse breakdown for this week. Check back with us every week to get new tips and demonstrations, check out the links in our profile description for our website and links to merch from the gym. Isak, tell ‘em what you got.”

The champion was a little nervous at being put on the spot, but he knew it was a good opportunity to promote his fight.

“Uh, so I’ve got a fight coming up. It’s my first fight outside the country. I’ll be fighting on the Cage Warriors one-o-six card next month and yeah, I’m pretty excited about.” Isak looked back to Chris, his expression almost asking for approval. Chris smiled at his student, looking back at the camera.

“That’s right everybody, Bred Akse's very first fighter in Cage Warriors. So go check out Isak's profile, follow him, follow us, and we’ll see you soon. Peace!”

Vilde ended the video, a grin breaking across her face.

“You guys looked awesome! I’ll upload it right now! Oh, and Isak, Elias said you got a call on your phone earlier when you were training.”

“Ok, thanks for letting me know Vilde.”, Isak told the young woman. As he strode off the mat to his gym bag, Isak noticed someone had walked into the gym. He was dressed in one of Isak's baseball tees, the sleeves lime green. He wore a short, dark jacket and finished off the outfit with a small knit beanie sitting askew on his head. It was Tobias. The boys hadn’t set up an arranged time or anything, but it was nice to see that he looked like he was doing well. The two approached one another, the air heavy between them. They had texted, chatted on Facebook, their conversations mostly surface level however. Both cleared their throats at the same time. They spoke simultaneously as well.

“You look-“

“I’m glad your-“

Each stopped, apologizing before laughing at themselves. Tobi gestured for Isak to go first.

“Oh, uh, I was just going to say I'm glad you've got that work study thing now. It’s with Nissen right?”

Tobias nodded.

“Yeah, yeah, it’s going good. I guess their idea is that the kid’s will relate more to me so….”

Isak hummed, nodding along with the other young man.

“How’s uh, how’s your training going?”, the shorter boy inquired.

“It's good, yeah. Lot of wrestling for this camp, so……but, yeah, I feel good. Weight cut has been really smooth.”

The pair stood awkwardly next to each other. A tentative, deep voice broke through the air.

“Hey.”
Each turned, finding a somewhat sheepish looking Even with his backpack slung over one shoulder.

Tobi looked up at the older man.

“What’s up Even.”

Tobi’s voice was neutral, his eyes hardened as they met the taller’s.

“Just uh, getting into the gym for a workout. Isak told me you’re getting some good, real world counselling experience?”

“Yep. I’m working at Nissen right now. Molding young minds and building confidence.”

Even forced a small laugh, smiling at the younger.

“I went to Elvebakken. Weird art kid through and through.”

Tobi gave the towering blonde a tight grin.

“Hey, weird art kids need support too.”

The three had a short round of laughter between each other.

“Well, I’m gonna get going on my workout. Maybe it’ll give this one an advantage later.”

Even knocked his shoulder into Isak, smiling as he walked over to where the exercise machines were located.

“And um…..things…..things have been good between you and Even? No more…..incidents?”

Isak shook his head.

“Nope, no. We’ve been fine. Getting along great.”

“Cool.”, said Tobi, trying to appear relaxed and noncommittal.

He stepped closer to Isak.

“So, if I wanted to come over to your place later tonight and……I don’t know….get stoned and watch old kung fu movies….?”

Isak smiled, nodding as he moved closer to Tobi as well.

“Yeah um, we, we can do that.”

“Cool.”

Tobias leaned forward, Isak moved his head backward, just slightly, looking down at his feet.

Tobi got the message.

I’m not ready. I still need to make a decision. Sorry.

“Alright, Isak, I’ll see you around…..?”

“Oh, I’ll be home around nine.”
“Sounds good. I’ll see you then.”

Tobi backed out of the gym slowly, turning around right before he reached the double doors of the entrance. Isak let out a breath he wasn’t even aware he was holding. He knew he needed to make a decision regarding where he stood on himself and Tobias dating again, but that decision would have to wait.

Chris and Isak's Apartment
22:23

The boys were sitting on the couch in the living room, watching Seven Samurai. They’d chosen the film based on Chris' recommendation, the man informing them that it'd actually been Even who he watched it with first. The kickboxer stretched his hands up above his head, yawning loudly. He stood and cracked his neck, collecting the small bowl of popcorn he’d been eating while watching the movie.

“Allright boys, I love Kurosawa, but I love my bed more. Take it easy on the couch alright? The old girl's getting on in her years.”

Tobi laughed, Isak rolled his eyes, used to his roommate's comments at this point. After Chris had stacked the dishwasher and started it's cycle, he retreated to his room, telling the pair goodnight once more. There was some space on the couch between Isak and Tobias, the younger boy had been attempting to close it since the start of the film. Isak had more or less stayed in the same position, moving slightly so he and the other man weren’t pressed flush to one another. As Isak read the subtitles appearing across the screen, he felt a small pressure on the pinky finger of his right hand. He stilled, slowly turning his head to meet the shorter boy's eyes. They were dark, the lids hanging low across the pupils.

“Your roommate just went to bed.”

Isak swallowed.

“He did.”

“Want to uh…..take advantage of that?”

Tobias turned to face Isak, a smirk showing on his face.

Isak chuckled awkwardly.

“I uh, was thinking we’d take it slow.”

“Oh I plan to.”, Tobi said, moving further towards the blonde.

Isak sighed, moving away before finally standing.

“I’m for real dude. I’m not……I’m not ready for……whatever we are ok?”

Tobias responded with a heavy sigh of his own, crossing his arms as he sat back into the couch.

“Well that’s the problem isn’t it Isak? Only one of us knows what they want. Look, I love you and
I care about you, but I’m starting to think this relationship might not be the best thing for either of us right now.”

Isak's face drew into a point.

“What, Tobi, why- I, I want to be with you, I-“

“Do you though? You're an awesome guy Isak. I think you’re an amazing fighter and I already know you're an amazing person. I don’t want this to limit that.”

Both sat in the silence for a while, neither saying anything. It was Tobias who spoke first.

“Do you want him, Isak?”

The featherweight jerked his head up, expecting to find an accusatory set of eyes, but he found more sympathy than anything.

“Would you be mad if I said yes?”

Tobias let his breath out of his nose.

“No. I wouldn’t be happy about it, but I’d appreciate you being honest with me.”

Isak nodded, it was a small gesture, mainly to himself.

“That um….that kiss?”

Tobi stood now as well, “Mhming” for Isak to continue.

“It….it wasn’t the only one. I….kissed Even again before I left. Nothing serious, just a peck, but yeah….so…..”

Isak shrugged, collapsing down into the reclining chair next to couch. Tobi sighed.

“I wish I’d known that earlier, but thank you for telling me now.”

A stretch of silence fell over the room again. Isak felt his eyes water involuntarily. Tobi looked back to him, his own pair showing a glossy wetness as well.

“Is um…..is this us breaking up?”, Isak stated, his voice held a tremble, but his words were sure.

Tobi cleared his throat, sniffling before wiping at his eyes and nodding.

“Yes, Isak I um….I think it is.”

Isak swallowed the lump in his throat, nodding before slowly walking over to the younger boy and gathering him in his arms. He finally let his tears out, small stuttered breaths that tore through him like scissors to paper. The auburn haired man held him tightly, stoking his back in comfort. The pair pulled apart from each other slowly, looking into the other's eyes.

“I want you to be happy Isak. And I want you to be sure in the decisions you make. What we've had? It’s been awesome man. You've opened up an entirely new world for me. Got my lazy ass in the gym too.”- Isak choked out a short laugh- “But if you can’t be sure about us? About what you want? Then I think it’s better we end it here. Before either of us gets hurt anymore than we have to. I’m not saying we can’t be together ok? But….I don't think right now is the right time. And, also, we have to consider that it might never be the right time for us Isak. This might be what we had.
And we have to respect that, cherish it, and move on.”

Isak stepped back, wiping his own tears as he nodded in solidarity with the other young man. The two looked at each other again, embracing once more then separating. Tobias gathered his jacket, getting his phone from where it sat on the arm of the couch. Isak walked him to the door. Once there the two shared a short, but passionate kiss. Their lips pressed softly to one another. It was an odd feeling. The last kiss. Isak held onto it for as long as he could, like an ache he didn’t necessarily want to go away. Tobi ran a hand through his hair.

“If we can, I’d still like to be friends. I mean, I still want to support you in your mma career. But I also get if you’d rather us not see each other anymore.”

“No”, said Isak, “I’d like to be friend’s. Like, not immediately, um, but after some time…..yeah.”

Tobi shot the fighter a small, heartfelt smile, stating he understood. As he was opening the door to the apartment, the student looked back.

“And one more thing, Isak?”

“Hmm?”

A smirk showed across Tobias’ lips.

“Even is so fucking gone for you dude.”

After Isak’s now ex had left, he shuffled back inside, falling down onto the couch and sighing heavily. His phone vibrated, pulling an audible groan from the champion. He pulled the offending device from his pocket, thumbing through his messages. One was from Jonas, the other from Chris Berg. He read Jonas’ first.

**Jonas:** Hey man, heard about your next fight

Would’ve been nice to hear if from you and not Eva

Still planning the wedding for spring of next year if you can make it

Also gonna try and make it to London for your fight

Proud of you bro!

Isak smiled to himself, his lips still shaking a little from the recent emotions he’d experienced. Next he selected Chris’ message, deciding to get back in touch with Jonas later.

**Chris, The Agent:** Pick up your phone when I call bitch!

Anyway got an interview with Mørkve if you want it

William and Noora are going to be on too

Let me know by tomorrow so I’m not leaving them on the hook
He turned his phone screen off placing the piece of technology on the coffee table in the center of the room. Isak didn’t have the mental energy to make it to his bed, and right now he didn’t care. He let the soft pull of sleep welcome him into dreamland, looking forward to escaping from his reality; at least until morning came.

Stuff for the fic

1. **Seven Samurai** is a Japanese epic film released in 1954 and set in the Sengoku period of Japan. It pits seven ronin (masterless) samurai against a group of bandits.

2. **Akira Kurosawa** was a Japanese film director and largely regarded as one of the most influential filmmakers of all time.

Chapter End Notes

Alright everyone, Tobisak............is no more. The boys will remain friend's, Tobi will support Isak and vice versa. From here on out though, Evak shall rule the roost! I'm planning on Isak's Cage Warriors debut being in the chapter after next. I hope everyone's week is going well and y'all are enjoying your own lives. Let me know what you think in the comments and drop ya boy a kudo if you feel like it. Looking forward to updating within the next week or so. Have an awesome week everyone and remember to love yourselves and one another!
Ta En Sjanse

Chapter Summary

Isak, William, and Noora have an interview ahead of Isak's debut in Cage Warriors. Isak and Jonas have a chat. Elias encourages Even.

Chapter Notes

Welcome back my wonderful readers, commenters, and kudo givers! One of the things I'm finding in matching this story up with the real life goings on of the sport is that there will be some times where I'll kind of have to move the story along without any real world events, because they haven't actually happened yet. So if I haven't updated in a couple, weeks, this might be why. Also, your boy just gets lazy sometimes hahah.

But anyway, the chapter after next is going to be the fight and y'all...no spoilers, but it's gonna be crazy. Hope everybody enjoys this chapter! I'll have a new song to add to the playlist next time so be on the lookout. As always, the links for the chapter will be in the text as well as in the stuff for the fic section. Have a great week you guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mandag

Juni 17th, 2019

NFC Corporate Headquarters

10:26

Green hazel irises lazily swung back and forth over the small office, eventually landing on a wood faced mechanical clock. Isak allowed his eyes to close, his shoulders to relax and his body to ease backwards into the rolling chair he was sitting in. He could hear each minute ticking by, nearly seeing the gears moving, shifting and rolling in sync with one another in his mind’s eye. Soon enough the gears became two figures, grappling and moving to gain position over each other in an endless scramble for dominance. That was one thing the champion had learned early on about martial arts. It was an escape. At least for him. Since the breakup, Isak had been obsessive about his training camp. He was the first one at the gym, usually the last one to leave. Would probably sleep there if Chris and Elias would allow it.

He knew it wasn’t really the best way to get over Tobi, but it worked for right now. As the fighter slid further into his relaxed state, his mind expanded on the almost shapeless, wrestling forms and they quickly shifted into something else. He recognized hair falling out of a styled quiff as sweat began to weigh it down. An open, cherry red set of lips were turned up at the ends, canines on display. Blue ice eyes scrunched up as a wide smile formed. The contest continued, Isak first trying
to keep his thoughts from straying, actually going over position and technique in his head. After a few minutes of this it was tedious though, easier to let his fantasy play out, even if he did feel a bit weird about it. It’s not like the mixed martial artist hadn’t had…….carnal thoughts about Even, but he always had his relationship with Tobias to shut down any ideas. Now it was much harder to justify.

The blonde knew the implications of his thoughts. Knew that from a third party standpoint it was tricky at best and a disaster at worst. **What if we broke up? What if Even leaves the gym? What if I leave the gym?** It was much the same reasoning he’d reminded himself of when he when considering a relationship with Chris, brief as it might have been. Isak didn’t want to think about these things right now though, exhaling long and loud before allowing the scene in his head to continue. **Even was sitting heavy on Isak's hip, the two fighting for hand position. Isak buck’s, putting a hand underneath the black belt's butt. His lifts forward as he tries to slip his hips out to the left, but Even is onto him, turning his right knee toward Isak’s body while working his other leg back across so his knee is set heavily into the smaller man's stomach. He presses down, slicing the other knee across his student's body and laying perpendicular to him. Even pulls away, his arms bracketing Isak's head. Their eyelids are both half shut, like a broken set of blinds. They move closer, noses eventually nudging together. Isak can feel, can breathe the breath the taller man is letting go from his lungs. Their eyes close, lips approaching one another. Isak can just feel a-

The door to the office opened, making Isak regain his balance as the noise brought him out of his mind, he looked with wide eyes at Noora and William. They were looking at him like someone might a scared animal, both with question marks in their eyes and on their faces. Isak cleared his throat.

“I um…….just……resting till you guys got here. Uh, we're supposed to call Mørkve at ten thirty, yeah?”

“We are, yes. Sorry about being late by the way, stayed a bit longer at the doctor than we were planning.”, Noora explained.

“Everything is ok right?”, Isak asked.

William nodded, smiling big.

“Everything's amazing dude. It’s hard to believe just a few months from now we'll be parents!”

He looked to his wife, she flashed him a smile back, a hand against her belly. The couple made there way over to the desk Isak was sitting behind, rolling up chair's and moving beside him, angling the monitor of the computer so they were all in frame.

“Well, shall we?”, Noora queried, pressing the Skype icon on the screen before either William or Isak could answer. She found the number she was looking for, quickly selecting it before the soft, deep, rolling drawl of Tarjei Mørkve echoed over the speakers on the monitor.

“Noora, William, and Isak?”

“Yes, all here man.”, William assured.

“Awesome! I just hit record, so I’m going to get right into it you guys, if that’s cool.”

“Absolutely, we're ready whenever you are.”, Noora supplied.

“Great, so first off congratulations are in order to all three of you. William and Noora you all have a child coming in a few months if I’m not mistaken?”
“We do!”, they replied together, each with smiles wide on their faces.

“No due date right now.”, William informed the other man, “But we're looking at the first half of August.”

“Well, I wish both of you luck and am very happy for you. And Isak, you have your first fight in an international promotion coming up next week. You’ll be the first member of your gym to compete in mma outside Scandinavia I believe?”

Isak, sloshed off the grey cloud that had been hanging over his head ever since his break up, putting on a large, toothy smile and nodding.

“Yes, that’s right Tarjei. I’m gonna be on the Cage Warriors one-o-six card on the twenty ninth. Um, I’m excited about representing Bred Akse and Norway, and I’m psyched to be competing at a more international level.”

“That’s great Isak, I’m absolutely looking forward to it. Hopefully I’ll be watching you on Fight Pass soon enough.”

Isak forced a laugh out.

“Hey man, that’s the goal.”

Mørkve hummed in understanding.

“And before we continue, there was been speculation about a possible title defense of your NFC championship. Isak, do you have any plans for that?”

“Honestly, I don’t really. I mean, yeah, if I hit a skid of fights or something maybe, but to me as soon as my foot touches that Cage Warriors canvas on the twenty ninth, that belt is vacated. Let the other up and comers fight for it.”

The interviewer laughed gently, nodding at Isak through the digital connection.

“Honestly suits you well Valtersen. So, I’d kind of like to get some background for all three of you. How you met, how Isak has become one of the more popular fighter’s from your promotion William and Noora, and also later I'd like to get into your ideas about being on the management and behind the scenes side of mma as well Noora. Cause I feel that’s an experience we don’t hear from much.”

The couple looked over to Isak, suggesting he tell their collective story. Isak put on a happy face, nodding a bit before going into his narrative.

“So, I met Noora when I was nineteen. It was a couple of month's before my first amateur fight and I think she, like, came into Bred Akse to talk to Elias or something. Elias Bakkoush is my head coach, by the way. But yeah, I asked who she was and that’s kind of how it started. Um, also it’s a little embarrassing, but after I had moved out of my old place, where I was actually living with the NFC's announcer-“

“Eskild Tryggvason, if my memory serves me correct?”, The journalist suggested.

“Yes, he's the one. And I actually have some news, um, later, that I want to share about Eskild, but yeah, I was staying with him, and my coach who I’m currently living with, Chris Schistad, was having his apartment renovated. So I pretty much crashed on Noora and William's couch for like a week, but they were really nice and welcoming and that's when, you know they suggested, hey
maybe come fight for our amateur promotion and eventually I ended up going undefeated in four amateur bouts and then turned pro."

“I’m glad you mentioned, Eskild Isak. That man, is, seriously, for me, right up there with Bruce Buffer as far as announcers go. Love how into it he gets, the pronunciation, everything. So, you’re living on the couch of the owners of, what was at the time, one of the biggest mma promotions in Norway, uh, now I’d say probably the biggest in Norway. Noora and William, what do you guys, um, like did you immediately notice something about Isak? Like, oh ok, there’s an x factor here. What was the reason you all thought, hey, this kid, he belongs in our promotion.”

Noora fielded the question.

“It was really Isak's work ethic that we noticed, Tarjei. When I say this kid was sleeping on our couch? That’s literally what I mean. He was usually out of our apartment before we woke up and, maybe we visited with him for a half hour or so before we'd go to bed.”

“Absolutely. Isak's dedication was just so clear right away.”, William supplied. “And he was super respectful of our living space too.”

“I smoked my weed outside.”, Isak broke in, causing laughs from the other three.

“Yeah, Isak is an awesome house guest everybody. Ten out of ten for sure.”, The male co-owner said.

“Sounds like you've got at least one stellar air bnb review Isak.”, joked Mørkve.

Isak giggled shortly, agreeing.

“Now Noora, if you could just, kind of give me your perspective on your position in the promotion. You and your husband are co-owners, so how do things get delegated is it, like, certain things he does, other’s you do?”

“Essentially, we make just about every decision together. This might surprise some people, but I don’t actually watch mma very much. I have a ton of respect for the fighter’s, and am very interested in the progression of the sport, but I’ve always enjoyed managing more of the logistics side of it. And as far as being a female in my position, I guess it is kind of rare, but it just feels normal to me. Obviously women's mma has really evolved rapidly in just the past decade or so. We have Ronda Rousey, in my opinion, being the first really globally known female mixed martial artist. As well as someone like Amanda Nunes, being the first openly gay UFC champion. And also winning titles in two different divisions. So I think the…..outside the cage part of the sport could do with some more female influence, uh maybe even from former fighter’s. And of course this should be done based on merit, but I’d certainly be glad to see some more women on the management, matchmaking, and promotional side of things, yes. And I think with organizations like Invicta and of course our own, we're going to start seeing more of that.”

“Wow, well that’s a great answer Noora, it really sounds like you’ve put some thought into this, I really appreciate that insight and I think you made some great points and cited some good examples as well. One interesting thing you did bring up; Amanda Nunes, first openly gay UFC champion, first female champion to capture titles in two different weight classes in the UFC. She's an incredible talent in the sport, and you know it’s not so uncommon to see, uh, lesbian women within the sport of mixed martial arts. I would have to say though, I can't think of a single, openly gay male fighter. I think, as a whole most mma fans would, pretty much be indifferent to it, you know. Maybe a few dummies here and there have a problem with it. Isak, Noora, William, do you guys think we'll possibly be seeing a gay male UFC fighter or, uh, or maybe even a champion, in
the next say, five years?"

The pair didn’t mean to immediately look at Isak, but they had. The fighter swallowed, indicating with head nod he’d answer after they did. William spoke up first.

“You know I think we will Tarjei. I feel like, as you said, for most fans of the sport, it would pretty much be a non issue. A historic moment, I think we can agree, but you know, a fighter really shouldn’t be judged or um…have their value dictated by something like sexuality. Nor should anyone, really. But I think there’s probably a couple gay or non heterosexual, male UFC fighters right now. And maybe they’re out to friends, to family, and coaches. Could just be easier, for now anyways, to kind of keep that close to the chest. I don’t think anyone wants to get pigeonholed as the ‘gay’ fighter. I do think an openly gay fighter could maybe help others though. Uh, at that point even if the fighter doesn’t want to be, they probably are a role model, and I’d say particularly for kids or younger people who maybe, don’t fit into what we’ve come to define societally as this gay male stereotype, which has and continues to be broken over and over. And I think , in that situation, a fighter would need to be aware, hey, you do kind of carry the hopes of some people and you do um, represent them, even if it’s in an unintentional way. But, yeah. I think we probably will. And I’ll let him know, right now, if he’s listening, you have myself, Noora, and Isak’s complete support and we look forward to seeing you compete.”

It might have been the most Isak had ever heard the man say at one time. He was kind of blown away, and also didn’t miss the underlying implication that the statement’s made were directed at him. He looked up from the desk to see William and Noora, smiling at him, like proud parents.

“Wow, hell of an answer. Isak your thoughts?” prompted Tarjei.

“Uh, yeah, you know, what William said.”

The four broke out into laughter for a second time. Isak may have been deflecting with the humor, but at least it earned him some chuckles. The trio delved into the rest of the interview, going over what Isak had been focusing on in his camp as well as Eskild's upcoming reinstatement as a manager and agent. Also going over certain matchups they were looking forward to or were hopeful for. It always felt relaxed with Mørkve. The man had a knack for easy, chilled out conversation while still covering relevant content and events. Isak was thankful for it.

11:48

The interview had gone longer than expected, but Isak was happy about it. It ended up being some great exposure for him and a good way to promote his fight. Upon William locking the offices back up, the three friends walked out of the building, enjoying the steadily warming days in Oslo. The fighter was now comfortable in just his jeans and a navy blue windbreaker, a blue pride fighting championship hat displaying the promotions well known logo sat atop Isak's head. They chatted a bit before parting ways.

“Well Isak, we won’t be able to make it to London, unfortunately, but we’ll be rooting for you man.”, William assured his former employee, puncturing the statement with a clap to the younger man's shoulder. Noora sighed and nodded.

“Yep, I hate we can’t go, but…”, she gestured to her stomach. Isak smiled.
“No, of course, you guys are going to be parents man, that's, yeah, I can’t even imagine.”

The friend's talked a while longer, the couple eventually walking back to where their car was parked on the side of the street, and Isak walking the other way. He pulled his phone from his pocket, unlocking it and thumbing his way to Jonas’ number. Sighing, Isak hit the call button, holding the phone up to his face. He couldn’t help the little grin that quirked on his lips when he heard his best friend's voice.

“Is this my best friend who's a professional ass kicker?”

Isak snorted shaking his head.

“Dude, I’m your only friend who's a professional ass kicker.”

“True. Listen man, I know I should've told you this before but……”

The fighter waited for the inevitable, fully expecting Jonas to tell him he wouldn’t be able to make it to London for his match.

“We're going to London Isak.”

“Wait, seriously?”

The blonde was surprised to say the least.

“Fuck yeah dude! I’m not going to miss your debut outside Norway. You're going to have those English lads all over you.”

Isak chuckled, telling his friend he was starting to sound like Magnus.

“And it’ll be a English lad all over me. Or not actually. My wrestling defense is on point this training camp.”

“Oh that’s right!”, Jonas said, his memory effectively jogged, “I keep forgetting you have a boyfriend bro.”

Isak paused, the silence that settled heavy, even over the phone. He cleared his throat.

“Yeah, um, I kind of….. don’t, have a boyfriend anymore. I mean, just uh, yeah, we're not together anymore. How did you know me and Tobi were dating anyway man?”

Isak heard the other man “hmm” to himself.

“Just kind of figured it out I guess. I can figure it out when you're into someone bro. You know it was so funny when you came out to us when we were at Nissen man. I thought you’d been having all this, hot, secret, closeted gay guy sex and it turns out you were striking out just like the rest of us.”

The friend's laughed, reminiscing on their earlier days. Isak remembered coming out well, how cool his friend's had been about it. It would be a few more years before he actually started to feel more open with himself. And longer still before his first official boyfriend, but the support of his friends had been invaluable.

“Think you guys might get back together at some point or….?”

Isak appreciated what Jonas was trying to do, to give him that glimmer of hope, but the
featherweight had already made up his mind.

“Nah, not really. We're still friends. He hasn’t been coming to the gym as much though.”

“Damn, Isak, you got this dude to work out for you? Must've been pretty serious.”

Isak let out a small, breathy, laugh, understanding his best friend's attempt at using humor to ease the sting, but not really being in the mood for it.

“Yeah I guess it was. I fell hard and fast. He did too I suppose. Maybe it was better we realized it wasn’t going to work earlier than later though you know?”

“True.”, Jonas agreed. “What about that Even dude? The one that was coaching you?”

“Oh, uh, yeah. He’s actually my full time coach now. I mean, he has another job as well, you know, when he’s not doing that….”, Isak trailed off.

“Yeah, that’s awesome man. I know he’s like, really good and everything. Also… I mean hey….good looking guy am I right?”

Isak felt his cheeks bloom hot with blood at the thought of his coach.

“I mean sure, I guess.”

“You guess!?”, the man on the other line said, false outrage emitting from his voice. “Isak, I’m getting married and I’d hook up with that guy. And I'm not even gay! Your boy's got those make-a-straight-guy-question-himself looks.”

The champion laughed out loud at that one.

“Yeah I mean, he’s a good looking dude, what do you want me to say.”

“You don’t need to say anything bro, he likes you enough for the both of you.”

Isak rolled his eyes.

“You know Tobias said the same thing when we broke up man. Said Even was ‘so fucking gone for me’. I don’t see it.”

Jonas scoffed in disbelief.

“Seriously? Cause he is man. I hung out with the guy for all of three hours and I could tell he like liked you. You’re telling me you guys haven’t done anything? No errant boners in the middle of an intense training sesh?”

Isak swallowed his laugh, the sound bouncing to the top of his mouth and exiting his nose.

“Ok first of all, please don’t call my practices a training ‘sesh’”, Isak jokingly scolded his friend, complete with air quotes that the other couldn’t see. “And second of all….something uh….kind of did happen. Among……a lot of other reasons, it was kind of the catalyst behind mine and Tobi's breaking up.”

“Dude!”, Jonas replied excitedly, “You hooked up with that hottie!?"

“We didn’t hook up, Jonas. We kissed. Twice…..but….uh…. Yeah I mean….it was….it was nice.”
“Shit, I think he wants you man. And I think you should go for it. Imagine if the roles were reversed? You’d be telling me the same thing.”

Isak sighed, sitting down on the bench next to the stop for the tram.

“Maybe, I mean, I’m not really ready for anything right now anyways. And besides Even's my coach. You know how awkward it would be if we broke up? One of us would be moving gym's. He’s got more important things to do right now than try and seduce me though.”

“Hey, let’s be honest here Isak, he wouldn’t really need to try.”

Both friends laughs echoed through their phone's.

“Well listen man, I’ve got to get to class, but me and Eva are definitely coming out to jolly old England to support you.”

“Seriously, you’ve recanted your stance that mixed martial arts is just a glorified form of street violence with capitalist roots that subjugates it's athletes?”

“I mean, now that my best friend is doing it…..”

The two had a short chuckle between. Isak had to hand it to Jonas though, his views on the sport had evolved quite a bit. He still didn’t like seeing his friend get hurt, but he understood that it was Isak's passion and that he likely wouldn’t be the person he was today without it.

“Seriously though bro, I’m so happy for you. I mean, it’s been less than two years and you're already fighting in a different country. I’m really proud of you Isak.”

“Thanks Jonas.”

The friend’s were silent for a stretch, each caught in their feelings a little bit. Isak broke the silence.

“Well, I’ve got one last training sesh to get in before my flight tomorrow so….”

Jonas laughed at his friend’s use of the word, telling him he understood. The friends told one another goodbye and ended their call, each smiling as they did so. There were still things Isak needed to hash out with Jonas. Still things the other boy blamed himself for that Isak wished he didn't. He knew they would cross those hurdles when they were ready though, because for right now, Isak just wanted to fight.

Bred Akse

21:48

Gloved fists smacked against the training pads. Shins and feet landing heavily, the sound echoing around the gym with a loud exhalation and noise. Sweat was steadily falling from the fighter’s hair, soaking his torso and matting his hair to his head, darkening it. The few people left in the gym were cycling between their own workouts and peering over at the mixed martial artist. Chris was running through some combinations with the younger man, instructing him as he did so. He paused, resetting so Isak could throw the combination again. Right jab, slip to the outside. Right
hook to the ribs, left knee up the middle, switch to orthodox. Shoulder roll to dodge the counter. Fake the takedown. Clench. Knees. Elbow on the break. The pair repeated the striking drill a few more times, the Muay Thai practitioner praising Isak for his accuracy.

“Our combinations are looking great dude. Let’s work throwing that knee at different angles now alright? Focus on hitting our target as we move. Cause look, if I come in”, the brunette held his hands up and moved forward in an almost skipping motion; Isak thrust his knee straight up the middle, the strike landing cleanly on the body protector, “It works, exactly, but the defense for that knee is just a stance switch as I come in right?” The coach moved back out, coming in again only this time switching his stance from orthodox to southpaw as his pupil struck, the technique glancing off the side of the protector. “So you need to cut that angle as I’m or coming, or as your circling out, that’s what it's there for. Alright, let’s go again.”

The men reset, loosely moving around one another before Chris charged in again, faking a jab at Isak's head. The featherweight dipped off to his right side, popping a relaxed cross over his coach's jab before moving the outside of his instructor's left foot, firing off the knee like he would a kick to the legs and landing dead center in the chest of the padded piece of equipment. Chris had again changed his stance to avoid the strike, but he was right; it hadn’t mattered. Isak had still landed it nearly flush. As he set his knee back down, the kickboxer shook his head.

“Stop resetting after our combinations ok? That’s why we’ve been working from both stances for this camp dude. If you finish a combo in southpaw, stay in southpaw. Finish in orthodox? Stay there. The only time I want you transitioning in this fight is if you're throwing or if you’re out of range for his strikes and takedowns alright? Our combinations are going to open up the clench, which is how we get to our wrestling. Again.”

The duo went over the technique again, this time Isak let his left foot land in front of his body as he backed away from the quick counter Chris had snapped out. The blonde felt the tug of a smile on his lips. The novelty of a technique working as he correctly implemented it hadn’t ever really worn off, and Isak hoped it never did. He repeated the drill. Circle to the right. Feint the jab. Head movement. Angle the knee while moving the head. End up in southpaw. Slip the counter on the retreat. Repeat. Once the two had drilled the stance switch combination several times, Chris instructed him to start mixing it up, adding his own creativity to the combination. Slip the jab. Close distance with a straight lead right. Head off the center line. Knee. Circle to the right. Teep kick to the hip with the lead leg. Isak was starting to develop a rhythm. Elias and Even were off to the side, leaning against one of the concrete pillars watching their friend and student run through the drill. Even’s longtime friend appraised him with his eyes. He shot him a sympathetic smile.

“Fuck man, you do have it bad.”

Even was brought out of his trance, momentarily hypnotized by the groove Isak had created. He pointed to himself.

“Moi? This guy? Elias, c'mon. Besides, Isak’s like ten years younger than me and I’m training him.”

“Hey dude I’m just calling it how I see it. I’ve seen that look in your eyes before. And I think you know who I mean.”

The taller man had to go through his mental rolodex for a second before he realized who the head coach was referring to. His eyes widened as he did, his face and eyebrows pulling in.

“Mikael? Eli, I was like seventeen. And I was manic.”
Elias shrugged, turning to look at his friend.

“Yeah, and? Did it feel any less real because of that? What about with Julian? That was just your bipolar as well? Sonja? You can’t just write feelings you don’t want off as being part of your illness Even. Even if they might actually be that.”

Even released a sigh from his nose, crossing his arms and shrugging.

“I get that man, I do. But my feelings don’t change objective reality. Besides, I’ve learned my lesson with all the shit that happened in Stavanger.”

The other man released a “tch” in response to his friend. He shook his head, returning with a sigh of his own.

“Not a valid comparison and you know it. I just hate seeing you do this to yourself. I get it ok. The guy might not be interested. You’re his coach, it might get messy. Well, this just in, love can get messy Even. If you keep making excuses for yourself you’re never going to do anything about it. I’m not saying throw yourself at the dude alright? Take it slow. Him and Tobi haven't even been broken up a month. You know I don’t care about the whole gym being a ‘work environment’ bullshit man. People are attracted to other people. If you guys like each other go for it. Last time I checked you’re both grown ass men.”

Elias pushed himself off the pillar, patting Even on the back before settling his hand on his shoulder.

“I’m serious man. I mean, yeah give him some time, but try it out. The sooner he turns your lame, lanky ass down the sooner we can focus on making him a world champion.”

Elias hadn’t been able to get through the faux insult without a grin spilling his lips apart. Even smiled as well, shaking his head at the man, the light hearted ribbing had been a currency of fondness for the two since childhood. The shorter man separated from Even, striding back to the office to complete his end of day duties. As he entered the threshold, Isak had finished strong in his combination, creating several varieties from the basic setup Chris had shown him. The fighter let out a loud, long, high pitched breath of air. He glanced over to Even, grinning widely at the jiu-jitsuka. Even returned the expression, his eyes warm and cheeks colored red.

*Maybe Elias is right.*

**Stuff for the Fic**

1. **Fight Pass** is the UFC's streaming platform. There are several combat sports available to subscribers; including boxing, kickboxing, Muay Thai, Sport Karate, Submission Wrestling, and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu.

2. **Bruce Buffer** is the UFC's Octagon Announcer. He's known for his catchphrase "It's time!". He has a half brother, Michael Buffer, who announces for boxing and professional wrestling.

3. **Ronda Rousey** is, in my opinion, the most well known and one of the most important female mixed martial artist of all time. She defended her bantamweight title six times, the most of any female fighter in the UFC at the time. Outside of mma, she holds a bronze medal in Judo from the 2008 Olympics. She is currently retired from mixed martial arts and made her WWE debut in April
4. Invicta Fighting Championships is a mixed martial arts promotion, whose roster is all female. The promotion was founded in 2012 by Janet Martin and Shannon Knapp who both held managing and logistics positions in other promotions. The promotion offered female fighters a place to compete before the UFC started to expand on and promote women's mma. Invicta can be viewed on UFC's Fight Pass and I believe some of The older cards may be available on YouTube as well. The promotion has become a good funneling organization for the UFC, with several women coming up in Invicta and going on to successfully compete in the UFC. Jessica Penne, Leslie Smith, Michelle Waterson, and Liz Carmouche are just a few of the fighters who are alums of the promotion. Also a fun little tie in with Scandinavian mma: My favourite fighter currently competing in Invicta is a Finnish woman named Minna Grusander who competes in the atomweight division (105 lbs, 47.6 kgs).

5. So there actually is one openly gay, male mixed martial artist I do know of. His name is Shad Smith and, despite a pretty gnarly record of 14-24 and being 46 years old, the guy is still doing the damn thing. If anyone wants to know more about him, there's an illuminating New York Times article featuring him written back in 2008.

6. I'm basing the stance switch defenses Isak is going over with Chris on a fighter named Max Holloway's preference for changing his stance rather frequently while in competition. Max is know for his steadily increasing pace over the duration of a match and his voluminous striking. He is the current featherweight champion of the UFC.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, sort of a slow chapter, but our Evak fire is being fanned, somewhat aggressively, by Elias. And Jonas too really. Drop me some comments or kudos is you want and I'll see everyone in the next update. Peace my people!
Fredag I'm In Love

Chapter Summary

Even and Isak bond on the flight to London. Isak has his last appointment with Sana before his fight. Isak's coaches have a surprise for him.

Chapter Notes

Welcome back to another update of TPBCMV my amazing readers! This chapter was super fun to write and we've got some more songs added to the playlist as well, unfortunately there were two songs I couldn't find on Spotify, but I'll still be including the YouTube link for them. I'll also be using a YouTube playlist from now on with all the songs in the playlist as the music in this fic is pretty important to me. A nonhyperlinked url is in the endnotes if the one in stuff for fic won't work for some reason. I was really trying to capture the feelings fighter's go through in the ending preparation before a match and I hope I accomplished that. I don't have much else to say honestly hahah. I hope all of you are enjoying your lives and doing well. Onward!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tirsdag

Juni 18th, 2019

33,000 feet above the North Sea

7:28

The plane felt as if it was on shocks. Lightly bouncing every few minutes. Even was laid back, comfortably listening to his iPod. Well, as comfortably as a six foot four man could. He let the middling, English pitch of Robert Smith soothe him into a relaxed state. Upon the next spike of turbulence, he felt fingers grasp his hand. The sensory stimulation rattled the martial artist from his state, his eyelids springing open. Looking down he noticed the hand of an obviously nervous Isak Valtersen covering his own, the fingers clinging o Even's hand in a sideways fashion. The younger of the two met his coach's eyes. He cleared his throat, fighting the small, but growing blush on his face.

“Sorry, dude uh….just….you know, first time flying and everything.”, Isak attempted in justification.

Even's lips parted in a large smile. He held one of the ear buds out to his friend and fighter.

Isak held it, skeptically.
“You're not listening to Daddy Yankee again are you?”

Even gasped, sarcastically.

“No, I am not. But I don’t appreciate you’re judgement young man.”

The fighter rolled his eyes, smiling at his coach. He placed the left bud into his hear, looking over to the tall blonde. Even raised his brows in a silent question. Isak compressed his eyes into slits, slowly nodding his head.

“Ok, it’s not total shit.”

The black belt laughed, making his fighter smile.

“Not shit!? It's The Cure Isak. They’re literally legends.”

Isak shrugged.

“Yeah, I mean, they're whatever.”

It was Even’s turn to roll his eyes now.

“So what do you listen to then, eh Valtersen?”

“I like a lot of nineties hip hop.”

Even pushed hid bottom lip up into his upper one, nodding at the younger man.

“So you must know who Nas is then, right?”

An anticipatory smirk shown over the other’s face.

Isak balked, moving his head backwards into the seat.

“Do I know who Nas is? Uh, duh man. Illmatic is like, one of the best albums of all time.”

Even chuckled, patting his hand on Isak's arm and rubbing it.

“There's hope for you yet Isak.”

The two were silent through a few more songs on Even's iPod, the taller of the pair eventually looking over to his seat partner.

“My aunt gave me this iPod. I used to get anxiety before flights when I was younger. She made a whole playlist for me actually.”

The mixed martial artist didn’t really know what to say.

“Oh cool, um, is she like, still suggesting new music to you? New to you I mean?”

“No, she uh, she passed away when I was nineteen.”

Isak froze, the conversation screeching to a holt.

“Uhh…..fuck, I mean…..man that um…..that sucks…..”

*Nice job Isak, you're a regular grief counsellor.*
Even sighed, tilting his head as he shrugged.

“She had stage four pancreatic cancer. It wasn’t a surprise. Still sucked though.”

“Yeah I imagine so.”

There was a pause of silence between them.

“You’re extended family all still around I take?”, asked Even.

“Yep, the Valtersen clan is going strong.”

“You’re grandparents know you’re fighting and everything?”

Isak laughed humorlessly.

“Oh yeah, should’ve seen how they acted at first. It’s like I told them I was doing porn or something.”

Even chuckled.

“I mean, it is a weird profession, you have to admit. Most people would pay money to not get hit in the face. You’re getting paid for it.”

Isak felt a smirk pull on his lips, trying to tuck them down to hide it. The statement was so cliché; he’d heard it at least a hundred times. It wasn’t until he heard a little snort that the prize fighter realized Even wasn’t being serious. The duo ended up sharing a few chuckles.

“That’s like, the go to right?”, the instructor inquired.

“Oh of course.” Isak affected a slow, lumbering voice.

“Uh…..wait, you mean, you get paid to kick other people's ass!? That sounds awesome dude!”

The two laughed, each grinning at the other. Elias poked his head over the boys seats.

“Hey, we don’t make fun you two, we inform and we educate.”

Isak and Even looked at one another before looking back to Elias and laughing at the man. The head coach made a soft grunt and rolled his eyes, muttering something about ‘being the only adult out of the four of us’. As he was sitting back down, the song changed again; the flowing, piano Jazz of Ryo Fukui transitioning into an indeterminable voice syllable punctuated by an ‘oh!’ set to a beat before the lyrics kicked in.

“Ooh! I’m turning it up!”, said Even excitedly, already beginning to move in his sitting position.

Har store planer om å dra meg ut av soffan
Store planer om å dra meg ut i frisk luft
Har store planer om å rydden denne kåken
Store planer om å bli et uimotsåelig friskt pust
Har store planer å skrive en erklæring som vil si deg eg vil gi deg meg
Har store planer men eg feiler og eg faller når det eneste eg kan e F, G, A og C

Isak shook his head as the older martial artist began dancing in his seat, settling his eyes onto Isak and scoffing at the skeptical face.

“Gabrielle? You're not a fan!?”

Isak blustered a “You are!?” back at him.

“Uh, yeah?”, Even replied. Isak shook his head, his smile not able to be hidden this time.

“It’s shit!”, he argued.

“Ooh, ooh, shut up, I have to sing!”

Så, hvis du var en sang, sku eg skrive deg å synge på deg natten lang

Å, hvis du var en sang, sku eg pugge deg og spille deg som en nattegal

Ja, hvis du var en sang, sku eg skrive deg å synge på deg natten lang

Ja, hvis du var en sang, sku eg pugge deg og spille deg som en nattegal

The shorter blonde leaned over in his seat catching the eye of a middle aged woman in business attire who seemed to be marveling at Even, a grown man with cauliflower ears singing along with a pop star. Isak shrugged in the direction of the woman, but she only smiled at him. The overgrown pop fan now turned his attention back to his friend, singing in his face while touching his fingers to the tip of his nose, matching the rhythm.

Å du sku'sje vert en type sang, sku'sje vert ein oppskrift type sang

Eg skulle skrevet deg på beaten av mitt hjerte med en oppsig type klang, klang, klang

Du skulle vart i flere dager, skrevet deg i flere farger, du sku bare visst

Eg har så altfor store planer, eg sku ønske at aner, eg e bare din, din, din, din

Isak shook his head, but finally started bopping it along with the beat as well. Even rejoiced.

“Ah! See, I knew it man. Gabrielle just has that power dude.”

“Gabrielle?”, Chris questioned from the row behind him, his shock of chocolate hair popping up a few seconds later.

“Nattergal?”

“Oh yeah.” The men shared a ‘nice’ and companionable fist bump before the striking coach turned
his attention to Isak.

“Bro, if you don’t walk out to that song, I’m going to have to seriously reconsider being your coach.”

Isak laughed, smiling at his coaches before craning his head and looking to Elias for backup. He only opened his hands palm up and shrugged.

“It’s a catchy tune my man.”

Even repeated the chorus once more before reciting the bridge.

Så, hvis du var en sang, sku eg skrive deg å syngge på deg natten lang
Å, hvis du var en sang, sku eg pugge deg og spille deg som en nattegal
Ja, hvis du var en sang, sku eg skrive deg å syngge på deg natten lang
Ja, hvis du var en sang, sku eg pugge deg og spille deg som en nattegal
Å søte babba, husk; for meg e du i dur, selv om du av og til kan føle deg i moll
Du e denderre nøkkelen rundt G’en min som får ein baby til å miste all kontroll
Å søte babba, husk; for meg e du i dur, selv om du av og til kan føle deg i moll
Du e denderre nøkkelen rundt G’en min som får ein baby til å miste all kontroll

The fighter rested his head against his pillow, propped against the glass of the window as the song finished. He glanced over at Even, each meeting the other’s eyes. Even smiled brightly at him, his plump lips separating to showcase the pointed canines that sat in his mouth. Isak returned a smile of his own, the smidge of self consciousness he usually had when he smiled fully was gone. It was replaced by a feeling he had become familiar with over the past few months. It was a similar feeling to when he first saw Tobias. Only different. And far, far stronger.

8:55

Even and Isak had each allowed themselves to fall asleep, the men eventually ending up well into each other’s space. Isak roused first, slowly noticing he’d fallen asleep on the older man. He also noticed the miniature trickle of drool that had dripped down from his open mouth and connected to his grappling coach's shirt. Clearing his throat seemed to bring the taller man around as well. The fighter felt some pressure on his head as Even yawned into consciousness. Isak ducked his head down a few inches, escaping the awkward yet pleasant position. Even peered over at him.

“I was going to wake you up earlier, but you looked so peaceful. Just couldn’t bring myself to do it.”

Even explained, inclining his own head back into the headrest, although most of it was supporting
his neck. *Damn. He really does have a long neck.* Isak brought himself back to the present.

“Oh, thanks. Sort of, didn’t sleep the best last night, jitters and everything I guess.”

The other man hummed.

“You still doing the mental coaching with Sana then?”

“On and off yeah. We decided to do a couple for this camp. One in the beginning and one at the end. We're going to Skype once I’m settled in.”, Isak informed his friend.

“Sounds good. You’ll have to tell her I said hey. Oh and to give my love to Yousef and Rahi. I’ve already got a gi ready for the little guy.”

Isak smiled at him.

“What makes you think Sana and Yousef would put their kid in Jiu-Jitsu?”

Even sighed.

“I know Elias thinks his nephew is going to be a striker, but no way are his parents putting him in a boxing ring right out the gate.”

The uncle in question angled his head around the corner of the seat.

“Or maybe we’re all wrong and Rahi will have zero interest in martial arts. Maybe he’s going to train that brain like my dear sister.”

Isak smiled at the black belt.

“It’s a possibility man.”

Even wagged his hand dismissively.

“Possibilities and likelihoods are different things Isak. And there's no reason he can’t be smart and a martial artist Elias.”

The head coach shrugged, retreating into his own chair with a short “True”.

The captain’s voice crackled over the cabin speakers.

“Ladies and gentlemen we'll be beginning our decent and arrival at London City Airport in a few moments, so please buckle your seatbelts and enjoy the ride.”

Even looked to his right, a mischievous grin spread along his face.

“It’s cool if you want to hold my hand again you know.”

Isak scoffed and shook his head.

“I think I’m ok man. Thanks for the offer though.”

Even giggled and nodded. He leaned a bit closer to his fighter, lowering his voice.

“If you wanted to hold my hand just because, that’s cool too you know.”

He settled back into his seat, his hand sitting loosely in invitation on the arm rest. Isak swallowed
as he looked out the window, placing his left arm on the rest and pressing it along the other's. Even noticed the contact and let a tiny smile pull at his lips. Trying his luck, he skirted his pinky over that of his junior and was pleased when the fighter didn’t move his own finger away. Instead, Isak slowly interlocked the digit with Even's, the simple gesture quickening his breath. The two stayed that way, pinky's linked and arms touching, until the first bounce of the plane landing could be felt. A few more shallow ups and downs and the mechanical behemoth began to slow down, until finally the aerial vehicle had come to a full stop. The captain again dinged in over the intercom, first in Norwegian, then again in lightly accented English.

“Welcome to the London City Airport and thank you for flying with Norwegian Air Shuttle. We hope you enjoyed your flight and hope you enjoy your stay!”

Hotel Novotel

West London

9:41

The featherweight swung open the door, propping his foot up to it so it wouldn’t close as he craned his head around to look at the room. He looked back to his coaches, his eyebrows pressed in like a financially concerned father.

“Guys, do we even have enough money to be here?”

Chris patted the younger man on his shoulder, unlocking his own door as Elias stood behind him.

“We do when we double up. Have fun boys! But keep the noise down, yeah? Uncle Chris had one too many vodka sours on the plane.”

The Morrocowegian rolled his eyes and he held the door open, leaning over to address Isak and Even.

“We'll meet you guys for lunch around twelve ok?”

The pair nodded, voicing their agreement before entering their own room. Even made a short sprint up to the bed before leaping onto it and bouncing, letting out a sigh before rolling over and starfishing across the bed. Isak let out a small, but fond chuckle, nudging the coach's legs over as he set his backpack and travel suitcase down onto the mattress. Isak then sat down himself, lightly leaning on the tall norsemen’s legs.

“Can you move your long, lean ass please?”, Isak requested.

Even brought his hand to his chest, throwing his right leg over his left and popping his rear end out. He put his hand on his hip and looked back at his pupil.

“I’ll have you know my rump in pleasantly plump sir!”

Isak laughed out loud, shaking his head at the older man.

“You know, sometimes I forget you’re actually someone’s dad.”
Even repositioned himself and shrugged.

“I’m a millennial dad Isak. I don’t have to be cool……I just…..am.”

The two looked at one another pointedly before cracking up, Isak placing his bags onto the floor before settling onto the bed beside his coach. He unzipped his backpack, removing his laptop and turning the device on. As it was booting up he glanced over to Even to see the man looking down at his phone. His own device buzzed in his pocket. The champion plucked his phone from his pocket before maneuvering to his texts.

Sanasol: Hey boy You in London yet?

Isak: I am

Got here early to finish the weight cut
My wonderful coach’s splurged on the hotel
But I’m not complaining

The fighter couldn't see it, but his friend was smiling, Sana being privy to the real reason Isak was staying at the high end lodging spot.

Sanasol: You ready for our session?
I’ve just got to feed Rahilou then I’ll call you

Isak: Nice I’ll be ready whenever you are

Even turned to Isak.

“And how is Sana?”, he asked.

“Yeah”, the shorter blonde nodded, “She’s good. We’re about to start our session in a bit.”

“Oh, do you need me to leave or…?”

“No, or I mean, you don’t really have to. I know you haven't seen Sana in a while.”, replied Isak.

“True. I don’t want to like…..I don’t know, impose on you guys.”

The featherweight shrugged.

“It’s cool dude. I don’t mind if you sit in. It’ll probably be kind of boring honestly.”
“Oh, alright. Well I actually do have some work to get done. You and Sana can Freud to your hearts content.”

Isak giggled, before looking back down at his phone.

Sanasol: Ready when you are Issy

10:22

The sports psych’s voice held a bit of a tinny quality to it as it came through the speakers.

“What would be the reason behind a walkout song change though Isak? We’ve already established that routine and ritual work for you. Why break away from it?”

The question was asked in an engaging way; designed not to challenge the fighter, but to actually make him understand his own reasoning. He ruminated for a while before responding.

“I guess it’s because I’m……not the same person I was when I started fighting. I’m more confident, my career is in a totally different spot. You remember how at the beginning of this camp we talked about optional changes reflecting circumstantial changes?”

The grad student nodded.

“I do. Would it be presumptuous of me to also suggest this may have something to do with your relationship with Tobias ending?”

Isak released a short, breathy exhalation of laughter.

“I hadn’t really thought of it till right now, but, yeah I think so. That Mobb Deep song represents a different Isak……and I don’t think that Isak is the person or the fighter I want to be anymore. I love what I do. I don’t think a song change is going to impact that.”

Sana shrugged.

“It’s up to you Issy. My job isn’t to dictate your walkout song, it’s to make sure I prepare you the best I can mentally for what you're going to do. Speaking of preparation, how has the rest of your camp gone? Weight cut going smoothly and everything?”

“It is, yeah”, Isak informed his friend, “Chris is really putting that UiO Clinical Dietician degree to work. A lot of lean protein and high carbs this time around. Put on a little muscle too.”

Sana smiled, her eyes shining in the late morning sun peeking through her home office window.

“I suppose I can't say Chris never did anything after Nissen.”

The two chuckled together.

“And I had noticed you beefed up a bit. I was going to mention it, but I didn’t want you to think I was hitting on you. I value our client and professional relationship Mr. Valtersen.”
Isak smiled, looking down and shaking his head.

“Yeah, sorry Bakkoush, you’re just not really my type.”

“I had a feeling I wasn't. Although I do have a feeling you're type might be an adorable, lanky giant of a man who’ll no doubt be shouting instructions to you next Saturday.”

Isak groaned and fell back onto his pillow before popping back up.

“Dude! Why is everyone shipping me and Even? I mean, look, ok yeah I like the guy, but he’s my coach!”

“It’s an understandable excuse, yes. But it’s all risk calculation right? Human emotions are hard to quantify in this kind of situation. My professional advice would be to be cautious, make sure you're state of mind and career aren’t overshadowed by romantic involvement.”

A loud sigh pushed itself from the sports psychologist’s lungs.

“But my advice to you as a friend? If you think there’s a chance it'll work? Go for it. It’s not like he’s your boss And I don't see how you two dating would hinder your relationship as instructor and student either. But, ultimately, the decision is yours. That’s just my opinion.”

The NFC champion sighed, lying down, settling his head onto hid pillow, and placing the laptop on his stomach. He was suddenly glad Even had elected to go to the hotel gym for a while, giving him and Sana some privacy.

“I don’t even know what to do though Sanasol. Like, do we go out on a date or something? Me and Tobi only ever did that a couple times. We more just……kind of hung out. I don’t know that I’m a…….date-y kind of guy.”

Sana rolled her eyes, a smile still present on her lips.

“I don’t think you need to be. I’m going to let you in on a little secret about Even, Isak.”

The woman allowed for a pause.

“He’s pretty much a teenager in a grown man's body if you haven’t noticed. He can adult when he needs to, can be pretty damn good at it actually. The man is a great father after all. But he’s still very connected to the little kid inside him who nerds out on Japanese art and culture. You don’t need to go all out with him ok? Just…..let it go where it goes. Believe me Isak, Even is already smitten.”

Isak felt his lips tug upwards.

“Yeah? So you’re the Even Bech Naesheim expert then?”

Sana scoffed in faux outrage.

“Duh. I’m surprised you haven’t caught the guy staring by now because-”

A loud clatter could be heard in the background followed by a staccato series of giggles belonging to a baby and an adult man. Sana closed her eyes and sighed.

“I hate to cut this short Isak, but I have a sneaking suspicion that both my child and my husband are going to need to be cleaned up. But good luck in your fight, I know it won’t be on the Fight Pass app, but we’re all rooting for you.”
“Hi Isak!”
The blonde could hear his friend's husband in the background, accompanied by a gurgling laughter.
Isak smiled.
“What’s up Yousef!”
“Good luck next Saturday bro! I’m super happy you’re moving up with your career!”
“Thanks! Yeah, so am I. You know me, you, and Sana will have to get together sometime when I get back to Oslo.”
“Sounds like a plan dude.”

Yousef and Rahi appeared on screen from Isak's right side, both covered in some sort of green-yellow mash. Sana shook her head, smiling, but pushing the father and son out of the frame.
“I’ll be saying a prayer for you Issy. And one to give me some more patience with these two as well.”

Isak allowed his laugh to wrap around his words.
“Ok Sana. Thanks for all the advice, by the way.”

She shrugged, taking her baby from his dad and setting him on her hip as she stood, repositioning the camera.
“It’s what I do my friend. Give my brother, Even, and Chris my fond regards.”

“Me too man!”, Yousef shouted from off screen. “
I definitely will, and you guys do the same ok?”

The friend's said their farewells, Even opening the door right as Isak shut the laptop. The men looked at one another, Isak clearing his throat and then walking to the door.
“I uh, I’m just gonna go for a walk around the hotel. Text me for lunch?”

“Yeah, absolutely. I’ve got to take a shower so….” Isak ran his eyes over the older man, noticing how his shirt was damp with sweat from his workout.

“Yeah, sounds good, I’ll see you then.”

Isak moved out into the hall allowing the door to close behind him. He leaned against it and sighed, gathering his thoughts before pushing himself from his position and venturing off to explore the hotel grounds.

Fredag
Juni 21st, 2019
19:41
Emerald orbs flashed over the phone screen, the footage appeared as if it was filmed on a first or second generation digital camcorder. Two figures were embroiled in a grappling match, swiftly changing positions and reacting to flash submission setups. It was hard to tell from the distance that the martial artists were being filmed who they were, but Isak would recognize his Jiu-Jitsu coach anywhere. The adolescents tussled around for a few more minutes Even caught his opponent with a triangle, the other male causing the technique to sink in tighter as he attempted to escape. A text fell down from the top of the featherweight's display.

**Eli B Da Box Man:** Hey man Come upstairs to the 2nd conference room

We need you to collect the rehydration packs for Friday

Also Chris wants to go over a few drills real quick

The blonde sighed as he rolled over to the side of the bed, slipping on his sandals before grabbing his room key and heading out the door. Isak put his hood up, not entirely in the mood to be recognized by a fan, although the likelihood of that happening was low. He opened the door and allowed the heavy piece of reinforced wood to close on it's own. Making his way towards the stairs, a number of thoughts ran through the champion's head. The foremost of which being the fact that today was his twenty second birthday. It wasn’t an age of any real importance to Isak. Not like eighteen had been. But his coaches hadn't even brought it up at breakfast, instead choosing to discuss how they were planning on rehydrating their athlete after the upcoming weigh ins. As he approached the door for the stairs, Even had just rounded the corner, smiling happily at Isak.

“Hey. Mind if I follow you?”

Isak quirked a little smile, his face emitting an amused skepticism.

“You know how weird of a question that is right?”

Even nodded, and shrugged lightly.

“I didn’t hear you say no?”

Isak breathed out an exaggerated sigh.

“Tag along then I suppose. You know you’re like a weird little brother sometimes right?”

Even stopped as the two had reached the access door to the stairwell, gently crowding his student into the wall and standing at his full height. He smiled as he moved his eyes down to meet the other man's.

“ Weird, absolutely. But little?”

The other blonde shook his head as moved to the side, pressing open the door as the pair hiked up the stairs. Both were quiet until they reached the conference room, Isak sharing side glances with his coach on the stroll to the conference space, their hands brushing one another’s as they walked in sync. As the fighter opened the door the lights flashed to life, a plethora of familiar faces appearing in an instant.
“Surprise!”

Isak was surprised, to say the least. It looked as if the whole of Bred Akse was there, as well as Jonas and Eva. The smile that formed on his face couldn’t have been held back if he tried. Magnus was the first to approach him, wrapping his friend up in a big hug as Isak laughed and returned it. Even was grinning behind him. Once the companions had separated, the mixed martial artist took a second to look around the room, immediately noticing a few tables with a delicious looking spread, although it was pretty clear what food was meant for Isak and what food was meant for everyone else. Eva and Jonas came up to him next, the woman letting out a tiny squeal as she engulfed her longtime friend in a tight embrace. Isak giggled as Jonas joined in for a trio.

“I’m so happy to see you!”

“I’m happy to see you! Jonas told me you guys would be here, but I thought it would just be on fight night, maybe a couple days at the most.”

Eva smiled and nodded.

“Yeah, I know. But we’ve both been planning this ever since we found out about. Been going really hard at work so we could get the week off.”

Isak ‘awwed’, but it was genuine. He turned to his best friend, each reflecting the other's happy expression.

“And I suppose I have you to thank for putting everything together?”

Jonas laughed, giving a little shrug a he rubbed his neck.

“Well, yeah, somewhat. It was kind of a joint effort though man. Even here knew you’d probably be in London on your birthday, so even though it was kind of my idea originally, he sort of put all the logistics together. “

Isak's eyes widened as he looked back to his coach who was beaming at him. Chris Schistad had seemingly appeared out of nowhere, wrapping his arm around his fighter’s neck in a sidelong hug.

“Happy birthday bro!”

He smiled back at the kickboxer, letting his appreciation be known. An idea seemed to strike the coach, beer in hand as his eyebrows shot up to his forehead.

“Ooh, I almost forgot, give me just a second.”

Chris extracted himself from the group, jogging lightly across the room to tell something to Elias. The head coach had a similar reaction, exiting the space for a few minutes while Isak caught up with the rest of his friend's. He saw Olmeive out of his periphery, striding over to his friend and training partner, the fighter currently talking to Felicianna, Magnus, and Mahdi.

“Olm!”, Isak supplied loudly before the larger man noticed him, pulling him into a tight clutch. Emma was standing beside the man, Isak giving her a smaller, but just as pleased hug.

“How’ve you been man? I heard you’re training for your second title defense?”

The German born Norwegian nodded, his lips turning up in an acknowledging smile.

“Yep, Mags and Mahdi have been helping me with my wrestling and Jiu-Jitsu. And this one has
been kicking my ass in the ring.”, Olm made a motion to Feliciana. The Muay Thai fighter rolled her eyes, but a grin was set on her lips.

“I give the same treatment to all my sparring partners Mr. Deichtner.”

Emma spoke up from beside Isak.

“We're hoping Olmeive will be joining you in Cage Warriors soon Isak.”

Mahdi and Magnus nodded along with the young woman.

“Definitely dude. Oh, Mags, did you tell Isak about the youth grappling club we’re getting started at the gym?”

The statement seemed to jog the man’s memory as he nodded, smiling brightly at his friend.

“That’s right man. Me and Mahdi are starting a neighborhood grappling league. Already have two students from Nissen and a few from Oslo International signed up as well. Even a few of those weird Elvebakken kids are looking into it.”

“Hey I used to be a weird Elvebakken kid!” Even had gotten Magnus’ attention with the imitated offense, the shorter man instantly being put at ease as he noticed the wide beam on the older's face.

“Even!”, Magnus said in excitement, nearly tackling the taller of the two as he embraced him. Even laughed as he returned to hug. It had been a joke among Isak and some other gym members how…….effected by Even their friend was. The blonde wrestler had stated on a few occasions how handsome he thought the jiu-jitsuka was. Truth be told, Isak hadn’t ever really thought of it much till now, although after the flight with Even he'd be lying to himself if he said he didn’t feel a tiny twinge of jealousy as Magnus shared a prolonged cuddle with his coach.

*What the fuck Isak. You two aren’t even dating and besides, Magnus is dating Vilde and isn’t gay.*

A loud clapping of a solitary pair of hands echoed around the walls of the conference room, Isak's friends’ chatter slowly coming to a halt. Chris Schistad took the center of the front of the room.

“As all of you know, our very own Isak Valtersen will become the first fighter from our gym to compete in Cage Warriors this coming Friday and it just so happens to be his birthday today. So, in honor of that and of a certain Jiu-Jitsu coach being the creative director of one of Norway’s largest sports nutrition and supplements brands, a bunch of us at the gym put down some cash and got you a present Isak.”

The striking coach bent down for a second, coming back up with a garment box with a smaller one on top of it. He smiled at his fighter as he handed the items over, Isak setting his presents down on a table next to him as he pulled his friend in for a short, but heartfelt one armed bro hug. The room was quiet in anticipation as the birthday boy opened the first box, removing some tissue paper before letting out a small, yet entirely pleased breath of air and taking the item out of the packaging. It was a new pair of fight shorts. Brand new. And high quality as well. Isak stretched the material with his hands, being pleased when he saw it easily move back into place. They were a compression style, the mixed martial artist finding he preferred them in his amateur career. It kept his cup in place rather easily and allowed for uninhibited movement.

The trunks were a dark burgundy with a swooping black and grey trim along the center hip and turning down around to the front. The simple yet powerful Bred Akse logo, an elongated, rounded rectangle with an intersecting triangle in the top featured prominently along the left leg. The rectangle was hollow, the words ‘Bred Akse’ and the logo standing out as they were a lighter color
than the rest of the shorts. A number of the fighter's sponsors were dotted along the bottom of the legs of the shorts. Isak had a huge open mouth grin on his face. He set the clothing down, opening up the smaller box to reveal a custom mouthpiece in black, the gym logo laying horizontally in white. He turned to his left, a massive open mouth grin on his face. His coaches had congregated around him.

“As far as the mouthpiece goes Isak, we just used the measurements we already had from your first custom fit so, oof-“, before Elias could finish explaining the protective oral gear, he received a head on snuggle attack from his fighter, laughing as the young man, squeezed him in joy. He opened his arms wider and gathered Even and Chris in a well. The crowd of friends laughed and cheered. Isak hadn’t been this happy in a long time. It was as if seeing the new shorts and mouth guard had made everything real. A visceral product of his hard work and sacrifice. For the first time since Isak Valtersen had become a professional mixed martial artist, he finally felt as if he'd earned what he was being given.

Stuff for the fic

1. **The Cure - Friday I'm in Love**

2. **Ryo Fukui - It Could Happen To You**

3. **Gabrielle - Nattergal**

4. **Cauliflower ear**, medically known as a perichondrial hematoma, is a condition that's rather common in a variety of combat sports that include heavy amounts of grappling. The condition occurs when repeated, blunt trauma to the ear is experienced. If the resulting hematoma isn't treated, eventually the blood that isn't reabsorbed into the surrounding tissue will build up, calcify, and cause the distinctive look. As far Even's ears go, they aren't too bad in this fic. Certainly not as bad as Aelxander Gustaffson's, who is the fighter I've chosen as my example. Although they are noticeably different than an individual who doesn't train. Many fighter's and martial artists view the condition as a sort of badge of honor and ode to their dedication to their particular art form. Cauliflower ear can be easily treated by draining with a clean, hypodermic needle as well as possibly being prevented by wearing headgear while sparring and grappling.

5. **London City Airport** is an international airport located in Royal Docks in the Newham burrough of it's namesake. It was opened in 1987 and developed by the UK engineering company Mowlem.

6. **Norwegian Air Shuttle** was founded in 1993 and is a low cost airline as well as being Norway's largest. The flight services fleet is easily recognizable by their bright red noses and by the portraiture of different Scandinavian figures on the fins of the planes.

7. **Hotel Novotel** is an upscale hotel in West London located in the Hammersmith neighborhood. The hotel features a banquet hall as well as high end dining and 17 conference rooms. The iconic Thames River and other popular destinations are a short walk from the lodging facility. The Hammersmith Apollo, currently known as the Eventim Apollo, is in the same neighborhood and
also the venue where Isak's fight will be being held.

8. **TPBCMV Playlist**

Chapter End Notes

I know the Evak is like, on a molecular level here, but it'll change soon enough. The fight chapter is going to be a little different then before as there will be two short scene before the actually bout itself. I think y'all are going to enjoy it. Oh! So before I forget, I've had this idea for a little while now. It wouldn't be happening for a bit, but I've been considering doing little.....Isak vignettes if you will. In other words, as Isak's reputation and status as a fighter rises, mma news media and public figures would start to notice him and I would be essentially including that in the story. Now mind you, Isak wouldn't he nessarily be in these chapters and they would be considerably shorter than my regular chapters. It would basically be a text break down of YouTube videos. If that's something you guys think you might be interested in, let me know cause I already have a ton of ideas. Hope all of you have an awesome rest of the week!

TPBCMV Playlist: [https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLedxV_sgBkGYN5h9Ls2mjoXEVJj-F8Kx_](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLedxV_sgBkGYN5h9Ls2mjoXEVJj-F8Kx_)
Beads of stinging perspiration ran down from the fighter's hairline into his eyes. He blinked them away as sounds of exertion were involuntarily ripped from his voice box. A vague, far away voice told him to push through. “Only three more Isak!” The blonde had his feet crossed and raised about a foot from the ground, legs bent at the knee. His head and back lifted off as well. A twenty five pound kettle bell sat to his right while he moved his arms over to his left side. He then switched sides, snatching up the weight before moving it across his body. He repeated the movement two more times before collapsing onto his back and releasing a heavy, long breath. Elias and Chris cheered, along with Magnus and Vilde who were also in the conference room. The one forty fiver sat up, resting his arms on his legs and scanning the room. A few other fighters were dotted around the space, getting in some last minute preparation before the weigh ins tomorrow. One fighter in particular stuck out to Isak. He was several inches shorter, but the featherweight knew exactly who he was. His hair was shorn into a buzz cut, a well trimmed and kempt beard covering his face and upper lip. Isak turned to his left to see a sparkly eyed Magnus and Vilde.

“Bro!”, Magnus spoke in a hushed tone, “Is that fucking Mads Burnell!?”

Isak wasn’t able to get an answer out before Vilde was tapping away on here phone, quickly navigating to the Danish superstar’s Instagram account and confirming Magnus inquiry.

“Isak, you should go and say hi.”

They green eyed boy turned his head harshly to stare at his friend.
“What? No Vilde. I mean, why would he care about me? The guy's fought in the UFC!”

The woman shrugged and shook her head.

“I think you’re just making excuses. You know I was reading this article in the Journal for the Norwegian Psychologist Association that Sana sent me, and they said that our generation has a problem with self doubt. Cause we live so much of our lives online that sometimes our real life interactions don’t seem as meaningful, even though they might actually be more so.”

Mags nodded along with his girlfriend's statement.

“She’s right Isak. Plus the guy already follows you on Insta so…..”

The athlete schooled his eyes into skeptical half moons before standing and leaning over, looking at his friend’s phone before a wide, unhindered smile formed on his lips. Magnus knocked shoulders with the other boy.

“Go for it dude!”

The fighter tentatively walked over to the elder mixed martial artist. He appeared to be taking a break, sipping some water while scrolling though his phone. Isak didn’t get a chance to speak before the shorter man looked up from his phone, an open mouth grin greeting him. Mads set his phone down on his gym bag and stood back up, speaking to his fellow fighter in lightly accented English.

“Hello, I don’t think we’ve met before.”

The younger man looked down at the offered appendage before snapping out of his trance and grasping it, shaking the Dane's hand firmly.

“Uh, hi, I am Isak. Uh, Isak Valtersen. Um…”, Isak was searching his brain for the right words, wishing he'd paid more attention in school when studying English.

“Oh yeah, I follow you on Instagram man. Issy viking mma, right? Not so little in person though.” Isak and Mads had a short chuckle before their conversation continued.

“I um…..I'm not uh…I don’t want to annoy you or something…..”, expressed Isak, his familiarity with the English language slowly coming back. Mads’ brows pulled in for a second before he smiled and shook his head.

“No, no, not at all dude. Always happy to meet an up and comer. And a fellow skandi fighter too. In fact”, Mads squatted down quickly popping back up with his phone in hand. “Care if we get a picture?” The taller fighter's eyes widened as he shook his head yes rapidly. Mads chuckled and nodded, scrolling to the Instagram app and tossing an arm around Isak. He smiled broadly as he took the picture, the lesser known mixed martial artist fixed with a large, eye crinkling expression as well. The Danish man removed his arm from Isak and went about posting the picture, including a small description in English as well as Danish and a number of hashtags. The other featherweight turned back to Isak.

“You going to do anything with your hair man?”

The Norwegian shrugged and softly shook his head.

“My hair?”
Mads nodded and grinned.

“Oh yeah, maybe get some top braids going. Keep it out of your eyes. You are the little viking after all.”

“I can do this?”, Isak questioned. Back in NFC, as professional as it had been, it was a pretty nuts and bolts operation.

“Definitely. Just get hair and makeup to set you up.”

Isak nodded, grinning at the other man. Mads smiled as well, giving his new colleague a clap on the shoulder.

“We’ll, I’d love to chat mate, but I have to get back to work. That title isn’t going to win itself.”

“Yes, of course. Um, thank you Mads. I……..it is, it means, a lot.”

“Definitely dude. And good luck on Saturday!”

“Oh, yes, and you too!”

Isak began the short walk back to his friends, all of them with large grins and awe in their eyes. Once the fighter was back in his area of the room, he noticed a light indicating he had a new update on his Instagram. He snagged his phone, unlocking it and bringing up the app. He clicked on the heart button.

@madsburnell mentioned you in a post.

Isak could feel the dopamine hit from the social media recognition. He clicked on the post to see it.

@madsburnell Just met @Issyvikingmma. Excited about this kid. He’s a fresh faced Norwegian lad from Oslo. Check out his match against @cameronrkh this Saturday at #CageWarriors106!

Fredag
Juni 28th, 2019
14:51
Hammersmith Apollo
9 minutes before weigh ins

Even, Elias, and Chris were all standing around the chair their fighter was sitting in. The quartet had been chatting companionably with the hair and makeup team leader; a dark skinned woman who they’d learned had immigrated to England from Nigeria when she was much younger. She
spoke to the four about all the fighters hair she’d styled before. Mentioning the work she’d done for a few UFC events as well as for some smaller organizations. Chris, interested in the process, leaned over to look at the woman's handiwork.

“So, is it different working with…..um….”, the coach wasn’t quite sure how to word his question. Oja, the hairstylist, smiled at him sympathetically.

“Do you mean to ask is it different working with a white person's hair than with a black person's?”, she said in a polite London accent, trying to help the kickboxer out. The four laughed, Isak's striking coach nodding and giving a shrug. Oja smiled and shrugged as well.

“It is. But I wouldn’t say it's necessarily more difficult. Just different. You see, I need to start at the root of the hair in either case, but with Isak here, since he has finer hair, I set it to the side using rubber bands instead of clips like I might with someone who has shorter and curlier hair. Pretty much the same though. Techniques vary, obviously, but you can do many of the same things.”

The stylist continued to work for a few more minutes. She stepped away when she was done, admiring the finished product. Isak had five, tight yet thickly woven braids on top of his head with the side of his hair being pulled taut and up. The top braids met the other hair in a criss cross pattern that secured the hair just below the crown of the fighter's skull. Oja gave him a mirror and spun the chair around so he could examine the back. The fighter’s face held a large smile. He set the mirror down and peered up at the stylist, opening his arms for a hug. She laughed and accepted the fighters embrace, the two separating after a few seconds. Isak got up from the chair, softly touching his new do.

“Dude, you could be an extra in the new season of Vikings!”, exclaimed Chris. The four laughed, Elias noticing that the hair stylist had an expectant look on her face. The head coach switched back to English.

“Chris said Isak could be an extra in Vikings now.”

Oja giggled and nodded, giving a fist bump to the Muay Thai fighter.

“I’ll consider that high praise Mr. Schistad.”

Chris nodded.

“Oh it is. You did an awesome job.”

“Thank you. You lot wanna get going soon? It is five of the hour.”

The coaches and Isak nodded to one another, thanking Oja one more time before waiting for Isak's name to be called. The four could head hear Graham Boylan's deep, Irish accent addressing the media present at the weigh ins.

“So, we’re gonna get started here in a bit ladies and gents. Just pictures for right now, if you have questions, feel free to ask them tomorrow at the individual scrums. If no one has any questions for me, we'll get started with the pro prelims.”

The promotional president waited, confirming there weren’t any questions before kicking off the weigh ins.

“Alright, let’s get it started then. First match, Isak The ‘Little Viking Valtersen’ versus Cameron ‘Party’ Hardy. Isak's up first.”
The blonde stepped onto the platform and jogged the few steps up to the stage. He stepped on the scale, knowing he was on weight, but still feeling a relief as the announcer read out, “Isak Valtersen, sixty five point nine kilos, one hundred and forty five point two pounds.”

“Cameron.”, Graham prompted.

The heavily tattooed opponent stepped onto the stage and the scale as well.

“Cameron Hardy, sixty six kilos, one hundred and forty five point five pounds.”

The collection of media, journalists, and analysts clapped gently as the fighters shook hands, each bowing to the other as they did so. The two stepped back, facing off, each in a calm, relaxed state. Cameron smiled at Isak.

“Saw your picture with Mads mate. Never met the guy. Super nice I hear.”

“Um, yes, he is.”

“Cool. Good luck tomorrow man.”

Giving a final thanks Isak turned, the media snapping a few pictures of the soon to duel pair before each stepped off stage.

Novotel Hotel

22:56

18 hours, 4 minutes till Fight Night

Even had been surprised at how easy Isak was to room with. Had been a little skeptical about sleeping in the same bed as his crush, but the younger blonde had proven him wrong. The fighter and coach had woken up cuddled together more than once over the course of their stay at the hotel, although Isak hadn't made any mention of it. Even was thankful for that. He heard the fighter yawn as he exited the bathroom, his towel thrown over his shoulder and a pair of gym shorts hanging from his hips. He hopped into bed beside Even, turning so he was facing towards the black belt with his eyes closed. The elder martial artist cleared his throat.

“So, getting to meet Mads Burnell? Pretty cool.”

Isak “Mhm”ed in response shifting a little closer to the jiu-jitsu instructor until their legs were pressed into one another underneath the blanket. Even got back to his work on his laptop. He was looking over designs for a new product PurKonchus was developing. A hemp seed derived protein powder. The opinions on the design team of whether or not to include a hemp leaf on the logo itself was the current debate. Even sighed as he read through the notes, clicking on suggested designs and arranging them in ways he liked the most. Time eventually dragged on, the creative director glancing down at the clock in the right corner of his screen and noticing it was nearing midnight. He heard a frustrated exhalation before a tight lipped, scrunch faced Isak Valtersen turned onto his back. He sat up and looked at Even.

“I can’t sleep.”
Even smiled.

“ Want a warm glass of milk?”

The champion rolled his eyes, although the corner of his mouth did pitch up. He shook his head.

“No…..I mean…..this is weird, but I feel…..nervous.”

Even's face pulled in as he turned to look at his friend.

“You mean you're nervous about entering into a competition of physical combat with another highly skilled and well trained athlete? It's jitters Isak. New promotion, new crowd. It'll pass.”

Isak swallowed, nodding, but not looking convinced. He lifted his head before resting it on the side of Even’s pillow and peering over at him.

“And if it doesn't?”

The coach's eyes fell down and away to his left side before an idea made a grin separate his matte ruby lips. He tapped around with his onboard mouse a few times before offering Isak an earphone and motioning him closer. The pugilist took the offered audio emitter, scooting closer until eventually both men's heads were lain upon Even's pillow. Isak looked to his friend.

“Romeo and Juliet?”

Even nodded, his eyes caught in a compression from his smile.

“Yep. The Baz Luhrmann version. It’s super interesting, cause it’s modern day, but the Shakespearean language is the same. I used to watch it when I’d get nervous before jiu-jitsu competitions. My aunt turned me onto Baz Luhrmann actually.”

Isak was skeptical, but nodded anyways. Even turned his hand, palm facing his left as if he was telling his student a secret.

“Plus ninety six Leo was a total babe am I right?”

Isak giggled, and shrugged, seemingly agreeing with his instructor. The boys settled in for the movie. Even was quiet throughout most of it, occasionally commenting on the setup of a scene or giving little details about how a particular shot was staged. Isak appeared to be thoroughly entertained, the light from the laptop and the nightstand lamp reflecting in his eyes. As they were watching, both men had moved closer to one another, their sides meshing into one another. It was nice. Upon the conclusion of the film, Even could see unshed tears in the other's eyes. Isak cleared his throat, sniffling and adjusting himself. His elder closed the price of technology, setting it on the floor beside the bed before turning out the light.

“Thoughts?”, he asked softly.

Isak sighed.

“Weird, but good weird.”

Even let his mouth twitch into a smile, turning over to meet the shorter blonde's gaze, both of their eyes adjusting to the dark. Isak continued.

“It was also……well…..Romeo and Juliet are kind of….like….dumb. Or, I guess impatient. If Romeo was more logical he would've understood what Juliet was doing. In the end his love
blinded and killed him.”

The black belt nodded in agreement, offering up his own opinion.

“True, but what makes it a tragedy is that their love blinded him. He was ready to die if he couldn't be with Juliet. Also, what kids did you know who were patient Isak?”

The fighter chuckled to himself, nodding his head while it laid on the pillow.

“Yeah, you're right. It’s the fact that it didn’t need to be a tragedy that makes it a tragedy. I don’t know, I’m not really into tragedy in real life.”

Even hummed.

“No, me neither really. Though there is something beautiful to it I think. It’s sort of like, the only way to have something is to lose it. To make sure it stays that way forever.”

Isak scooted closer, his face now just a few inches from Even's, their breaths intermingling. Isak gulped.

“Maybe, but then, you deprive yourself of it in the first place. And I don’t think that would really be fair to either person.”

Even closed his eyes, tongue flicking out to pick his lips as he lazily nodded. As he spoke Isak could tell his coach was beginning to drift off.

“Yeah…..you’re right…..”

The pair fell asleep that way, legs pressed together from foot to knee, heads sharing the same pillow, and faces only a couple breaths apart. It was some of the most restful sleep either had gotten in a long time.

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**Stuff for the fic**

1. The exercise Isak is doing with the kettle bell is referred to as a Russian Twist or a modified Russian Twist. The key difference as far as the modification goes is the singular, unweighted rep. This exercise is great for abdominal toning as well a core strengthening.

2. The room Isak and the other fighter's are working out in is the Champagne Terrace, located in the Champagne Suite of the Novotel Hotel.

3. Mads Burnell is a Danish mixed martial artist who competes in the featherweight division. He has previously competed in the UFC and was released from the promotion with a 1-2 (win, loss) record. He will fight Dean Trueman for the Cage Warriors featherweight title on June 29th.
4. The *Journal of the Norwegian Psychologist Association* is a monthly published journal that is distributed and peer reviewed by the *Norwegian Psychologist Association*.

5. The only difference between the hairstyle in the picture I linked and Isak's is the tied hair at the crown. Isak's is woven back into the end of the braids just below the crown of his head instead of being extended out and tied up.

Chapter End Notes

So, a bit more Evak this chapter, we'll likely be seeing more of that here soon. Also I thought it would be important for Isak to meet another fighter in the organization to kind of put his mind at ease, not to mention Mads Burnell is personally one of my favorite fighters, Scandinavian or otherwise. Hope everybody is enjoying the fic! If you're feeling it, drop a kudo or comment. See y'all again soon!
Chapter Summary

Isak "The Little Viking" Valtersen versus Cameron "Party" Hardy.

Chapter Notes

So this thing turned into an absolute beast of a chapter and I don't want to pat myself of the back too hard, but I'm pretty happy with it. Isak is starting to really grow and become more creative in the cage and outside of it, and I wanted this chapter to highlight that. I'm on vacation right now, but I had to get this out for y'all. I don't want to give any spoilers and I don't really have anything left to say, so go forth and enjoy my friends! I'll see you in the endnotes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lørdag

Juni 29th, 2019

Hammersmith Apollo, London

18:53, 7 minutes till Fight Night

Chris rolled his eyes, groaning and sitting back on the couch that was in the dressing room. He crossed his arms, pinning his fighter with a high browed, low lidded look of disappointment as he leaned back in the folding chair.

“Dude, just tell me! I’m gonna find out if you stuck with Shook Ones in like five minutes anyway.”

The fighter in question made a show of zipping his lips, producing some chuckles from his surrounding friends and coaches.

“You’ll know soon enough man, and I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.”

The striking coach shrugged, getting up to retrieve a bottle of water from the mini fridge next to the couch. A soft knock broke the conversations that were being held around the small space. Usually Isak would be working some last minute preparations, but he’d chosen to forgo them this time, instead working in some visualization techniques Sana had taught him. Vilde and Magnus opened the door revealing a politely smiling yet hulking individual adorning the garb of a referee. Even smiled upon seeing the man, walking over to him and exchanging a few words before the goatee sporting official introduced himself to Isak.

“So, your coaches probably already put ya in the loop, but we do unified rules here. That means no
gouging, watching strikes to the mohawk area on the head, no strikes to the spine, no head spikin’, no knees to a downed opponent, no twelve to six elbows, all of that. And a downed opponent is considered three points of contact, right? As far as groin strikes go, one in a round, ya gettin’ a warning, two I will take a point and I’ve told Mr. Hardy the same thing. You can have four people in your corner, with two in the cage. I’m looking forward to reffing ya match and unless you or your coaches have any questions, I’ll get back out there and let you finish up here…..?”

The shaved head ref, not hearing any questions from Isak or anyone else smiled again, shaking the Norwegian’s hand and wishing him good luck before taking his leave from the dressing room. Isak turned his head to look at Even, a wild eyed grin stuck on his face.

“You didn’t tell me you know Leon Roberts dude!”

Even giggled and nodded. Isak felt more relaxed than he had been before any of his previous fights. Maybe it was the great night of rest he got, maybe it was finally starting to realize that Even might be interested in being more than just his coach and friend. Whatever it was, he wasn't going to dwell on it and ruin his mindset. Around two minutes later, an event tech informed the room they were ready. Isak smiled at Chris. Magnus, Vilde, Mahdi, and a couple other of Isak's friends were herded to their cage-side seats in another direction. Isak shook his head at seeing Magnus moving away, motioning the wrestler back over to him. The boy's eyes widened along with a smile on his lips as he nodded and tagged along, being surprised at the seemingly last minute decision.

As soon as two event officials and an Apollo staff member were saddled in front of Isak, the mixed martial artist walk out song began. He laughed as an awareness dawned on Chris; the crooning, catchy lyrics of *Gabrielle’s Five Fine Frøkner* were muffled as the fighter and his instructors began the walk to the cage.

Åh hosiaann, Hevenu shalom
Fem fine frøkner ska aldri dra hjem
Lynden av noe som slipper oss fri
Vi har’sje penger men vi eier allting
Å vi trenger ikke verden, for meg og deg e verden
Vi trenger ikke verden, for meg og deg e verden
Lyden av noe som slipper oss fri
Vi har’sje penger men vi eier allting

As the song picked up, Isak’s pace did as well, the coaches and officials jogging to keep up with him.

Du får meg til å kjøre meg opp
Det e ingenting som kan kjøre meg ned
Du får alt til å spreng i kok

de ingen andre eg heller gjør det her med

Once the main chorus broke in, he’d gotten to the opening of the arena's main atrium, loosely dancing along with the rhythm.

Fem fine frøkner oppi klubber, oppi klubben, vi befaller

Sku det helt opp i himmelen

Om det e fem fine fyrer spiller ingen rolle på det

Ingen andre eg heller gjør det her med

An interspersed wave of cheers and boos filtered into the blonde's ears, but he heard neither, his eyes set on the cage. By the time he’d gotten to the ref station, Isak was in another realm, eyes closed and mouthing the words to the song, his shirt, sandals, and sweatpants coming off first thing as he approached the steps to the cage. The cutman greeted him with a smile as he applied the vaseline to his nose, cheeks, and brows. Isak's eyes opened as a man who he vaguely recognized as Marc Goddard went over his prefight check, running his hands quickly over his arms, legs, chest and ears before inquiring about the young fighter’s mouth guard and cup.

The Norsemen smiled wide, displaying his custom fit, Bred Akse mouthpiece and then rapping his knuckles against his cup to show the longtime ref the protective piece of clothing was in place. He turned around, tightly hugging each of his main coaches and Magnus as well before Goddard instructed him to proceed to the fighting area. Isak did a lap around the cage as his song was brought to an end, keeping the fingers of his left hand on the fence before coming to a stop in the red corner and doing some brief stretching. Just a few seconds after his cornermen had gathered behind the chain link enclosure, the debuting fighter’s opponent's song began. A sweeping guitar overlaid a pitter patterning cymbal tap as an increasingly loud set of vocals broke through the Hammersmith Apollo. Once the titular lyric had been belted out, Cameron Hardy entered the arena to welcoming cheers and woos.

Impatient to get the action started, the Englishman ran to the cage, waving his arms in an upward motion, encouraging more noise from the crowd. Once he’d reached the ref station, the song was about a quarter of the way through. Cameron passed through the vaseline application and check quickly, doing his own heel to heel skip around the cage and bumping fists with Isak. As he came to a stop in his respective corner, the cage announcer stepped into the space, addressing the audience.

“Ladies and gentlemen of London, welcome to Cage Warriors one-o-six at the Eventim Apollo! This is your first match of the pro-prelims before our main card. This event and bout is sanctioned by the London Commission of Boxing and Combat Sports and brought to you by Iso-sport.” The announcer paused, the crowd settling to a low roar. “And now, fighting out of the red corner, this man is a mixed martial artist holding a professional record of four wins against one loss with an undefeated amateur record of four and o. His background is in Muay Thai and Jiu-Jitsu. Fighting out of Oslo, Norway, by way of Bred Akse mma, let's hear it for Isak, The Little Viking, Valtersen!”

The crowd once again levied out a plethora of boos, although a few cheers could be heard as well. The announcer turned, facing Isak's opponent.
“And fighting out of the blue corner is his opponent. This man is a mixed martial artist with a professional record of six wins against one loss. He was also undefeated in his amateur career with three wins and zero losses. Fighting out of Portsmouth England by way of Gym 01, Cameron, Party, Hardy!”

The fans erupted for their countryman as the announcer and cameramen exited the cage, each fighter returning to their corners. Leon Roberts went over the judges and timekeeper, assuring all parties were in their proper places before looking to Isak's adversary.

“Cameron, you ready?”

The shorter fighter nodded, giving a grin and showing his mouth guard.

“Isak, are you ready?”

The taller man gave a relax nod, his arms raised in a loose, easy stance and feet and legs spread wide.

“Fight!”

**Round 1**

The contestants met in the center of the canvas, gloves hands slapping together, signaling the unofficial start of the match. They circled one another for a few seconds before anything happened. Cameron was the first to act, popping in a kick to the inside of Isak's left calf. The other featherweight moved his leg along with the shot, taking the power away from it and cutting an angle to the left. The Englishman fired again, this time with a straight right that came down the middle. Isak ducked off to his right, rolling his left shoulder to his ear and dodging the shot as he landed a left hook to the other fighter's body. This brought him in range for a right elbow, which the Norwegian attempted to land, slicing the heavy shot across his own body. Cameron skillfully moved out of the way, answering with a front kick aimed just above Isak's waistline. The blonde switched stances, easily causing his opponent to miss before throwing a one two; jab, hard left straight.

The Bred Akse fighter wasn’t so concerned with the techniques landing, as they’d brought him just close enough to crack a blistering knee right up the middle and into the other man's midsection. Isak stayed in his now orthodox stance, parrying a job from his fellow fighter with the inside of his forearm. He hadn’t moved his head off the center line though, and caught a right hook across the jaw for it. Isak was backing up, his legs buckled just briefly although his wits were still about him. The blonde fighter's body and brain fully aware of how hard the punch was. As Cameron was preparing to throw a lead left hook, Isak saw an opening, flashing a quick jab to bring up the other's right hand before breaking away to his left and closing distance with a hard right knee. He'd angled the strike around his man's body like Chris had shown him. The left elbow that followed had happened all by itself. Concerned with moving away from follow up strikes, the Portsmouth martial artist had already lowered his back hand, Isak's elbow finding a home on his temple. Now Cameron was wobbled.

Isak steadily walked him backwards, staying calm. Back in orthodox, he struck at the outside calf of the tattooed fighter’s lead leg, attempting to close the distance with a well timed lead left hook. The shorter fighter ducked the shot, blasting a right straight directly at Isak's face. The taller
fighter just barely moved out of the way of the strike, bringing his hands up to protect himself. Cameron shot in, attempting to secure his hands together behind the other's back. As he came in, the Scandinavian was able to get an underhook in on his opponent’s right side, distancing his hips and pushing his head away. Isak went for knee on the break, missing by a few inches. Cameron caught him with a loose left hook, the blonde rolling with the worst of the shot.

Both men circled for a few more seconds, each feinting shots and downloading the other’s reactions and movements. When the time was right, Isak doubled up on his lead left jab, slicing a short angle to right side before swiftly trying for a front kick with his right leg. The strike intentionally landed just behind and to the right of Cameron as he moved to his left side. But the other martial artist had been setting him up. He rapidly shortened the space between his own right leg and the left of his adversary's, his hands rushing to connect behind Cameron's back. Isak sustained a small strike to his right cheek with the point of the other's elbow, but it had been worth it as is put him in position for a take down. Turning his hips to the left and into his colleague's at the same time he sucked his own right leg back up to his body, Isak was on track to taking the other man to the mat. As he tried to finish the technique though, Cameron widened his base significantly, rolling his own hips away from the Northman until the two were locked in a clinch.

It wasn't exactly where Isak wanted to be, but he would try to adapt. As he felt his man trying to break, he allowed him to, anticipating the lead left elbow that followed over the top and weaving his head out of harms way. Or so he thought. The fighter from the UK repositioned the elbow and struck out again, the time in an upwards, reverse fashion. It landed hard and clean, but so did the cracking right straight Isak had shot off, each of the strikes putting the other on unsteady legs for the second time in the round. Both fighters ended up clinching again, Isak coming to settle against the fence with the smaller man pressed against him, primarily to recover. Through the heavy breathing and sensory overload, Isak could hear Cameron acknowledging the strikes.

"Both landed with that one then, eh?"

Isak didn’t give a response, only focusing on drawing in long breaths in and out of his nose. Once the two began to move again, the taller man attempted to break free, knowing his rival would try to stall for more time to get back in the fight. As he clung to him, Isak took the opportunity to move lighting fast around his opponent, getting to his side and locking his hands around his waist. Cameron tried to turn into the man from Oslo, but settled for a controlling kimura grip instead, looping his right arm behind and above the other's elbow while at the same time trapping his right hand to the fence with his left and gripping just above his own left wrist with his right hand. He wasn’t trying to finish the fight with the move, but it may keep him from going for a ride. Isak turned his hips to his right, trying to nullify the brunette’s controlling technique by popping some quick, heavy, pointed knees to the outside right thigh of the English mixed martial artist. After three or four of these, Cameron abandoned the hold, turning back to face Isak.

The crowd rang out at the display of skills. Both men began circling again, this time with the home country fighter being on the outside. Isak jabbed lightly, blitzing in to implement his own reverse elbow. It didn’t land as flush as his opponent's had a minute ago, but it would score with the judges. As he’d been landing the glancing blow, Cameron had countered with right hook to Isak's ribs, the other athlete tightening his muscles and breathing out to absorb the punch. As he was moving to his left side, Isak leaned just out of the way of a tight yet hard overhand right, crowding into his opponent and scoring a short and sweet inside leg kick of his own. A jab setup came after, with Isak sneakily cancelling the distance between him and his temporary enemy. Once the man's hands had gone up, Isak’s turned as fast as he could, going for a heavy spinning elbow with his back arm cocked up. He whiffed it, feeling the tips of hair on Cameron's head as the fighter crashed into him, locking his own hands around Isak's waist.
In his struggle to turn into him and disengage from the position, Isak gave up his back, now hand fighting with the shorter man as he tried to muscle him down to the floor. The two followed along the edge of the cage like this for the better part of a minute, caught in a somewhat of a dud position. Eventually the ref came over, calmly, but professionally instructing the men. “Let's work to improve this position gents. Show me something or I’m separating you.” Each nodded at Leon's words, knowing a stalemate such as the one they were in could only be tolerated for so long. With some hard hipping out as well as going two hands on one, the little viking was able to break Cameron's grip, turning around and into him fast and quickly backing him into the heavy duty chain link.

The fighter’s landed nearly perpendicular, Isak standing with his hips barely off to the backside of his opponent. The blonde threw a few rounded knees into the midsection and ribs of the Englishman, the strikes not being particularly hard, but getting him to move. Just as he appeared to be showing his back and exposing it to Isak, Cameron tried to double back, attempting to rapidly turn back to face Isak from the opposite way. It didn't work, despite the sweat pouring from both men, Isak was able to stick to him, their positions now reversed from before. Looking up at the time and seeing he had less than a minute, the Norwegian decided to use his time wisely and try to deplete the shorter fighter’s energy. He did so by getting into a backpack position, first lacing his right leg over that of his opponent's and hooking the instep of his leg around the achilles of the other man.

Being the taller fighter helped a bit since it allowed Isak to push off from the ground, simultaneously wrapping his right arm between Cameron's right shoulder and neck and connecting it to the hand he'd snaked under the man’s left armpit to let him throw his left leg over and across the left hip and leg of the others fighter's. He intersected his left foot behind the right knee one of his foe, pitching his weight forward and down. Cameron didn’t have much of a recourse, hand fighting with Isak for a little bit, but ultimately ending up strutting around half of the cage while the fans in attendance let their gratitude be heard. Starting to be more serious, the Gym 01 trainee proceeded to try and scrape the leech like Isak off of himself using the fence, but it was to no avail.

Isak was perfectly comfortable snuggled onto the back of his opponent and didn’t really want to waste the few moments left in the round doing anything else. The last ten or so seconds of the stanza, Cameron looked to the ref, his eyes and face asking for help with the gangly, strong, lean Oslovian attached to his back. The closing seconds of the round saw Leon Roberts giving his countrymen a short, upturned palm shrug. As the bell sounded for the end of the first frame, the English fighter reached back, patting Isak on the head good naturedly. Isak dismounted from his position, both men fist bumping the knuckles of their gloves together and returning to their respective corners.

The smile that was on his face quickly evaporated as he saw the disappointment shown on his coaches faces. Even and Chris had entered the cage, each one looking every bit like a stern father. Chris sat the stool down behind his fighter, the cutman applying cold compress to the left side of Isak's face as well as his eyebrow.

“Sit.”, he spoke authoritatively.

“Sip.”

Isak took the offered water, gulping down a few sips before Chris handed it to Elias though the cage.

“Look at me Isak Valtersen.”

The blonde turned his gaze to his striking coach's.
“What happened that round? What happened with your wrestling? The game plan not fun enough for you?”

As Isak went to answer, Even spoke up, dispensing his own wisdom.

“You’re not fighting your fight Isak. I know we haven’t been working together too long, but I’ve never seen you get hit like that. We knew coming into this his weakness was his cardio and his defensive wrestling.”

“They’re right bro”, Elias chimed in, “Most of that should’ve been on the mat. From where I’m standing that round was a draw. I know you loved it, but we’re here to win right?”

Isak swallowed his pride, literally, and nodded.

“Um….maybe, just trying different entries on your takedowns. That front kick to the back reap was sick Isak. Just uh….I don’t now maybe elevate and angle next time.”

Magnus’ input had seemed to come out no where, but it was good advice. Isak had kind of thought his friend would’ve been overwhelmed by the daunting nature of it all, but he appeared not to be.

“I’m not trying to be a dick, ok? I’m trying to win and keep that mug looking pretty. Alright?”

The muscles on the left side of said young man’s mug twitched up just a bit, Chris smiling wide and patting his fighter gently on the right side of the face with a latex gloved hand.

“There he is. Look man, just stick to what we worked on alright? You’re not looking bad on the feet at all. You’ve landed some awesome combos and I’m proud of you for recovering from those shots ok? But don’t take them if you don’t have to right? And I know you don’t have to. Fight to your skill level Isak. Do what I know you can do. Like Mags said, mix up your entries. And follow through ok? That’s the only reason that reap didn’t work. If it can work, we don’t abandon we adjust, remember?”

The student nodded.

“Yes coach.”

“Good. Now let’s go get this round buddy.”

The two members of the corner team retreated from the cage, joining Elias and Magnus behind the fence. Isak took the advice to heart, vowing to himself to adjust and adapt in the following round. Leon Roberts walked to the center of the fighting space, speaking to the man from Norway first.

“Isak, are you ready?”

A determined nod.

“Cameron are you ready?”

A wide smile.

“Gentlemen, round two, fight!”

Round 2
The Gym 01 fighter sprinted across the cage in a long bounding stride, striking at Isak with a beautiful, but ultimately ineffective flying knee. The Bred Akse representative turned an angle and caught the knee with the inside of his left forearm, ducking down to take away any base Cameron might have as he landed. As soon as the shorter fighter's foot hit the floor, Isak took his shot, dropping to one knee while the other man was attempting to reset and hooking the inside of his left knee around the back of his featherweight contemporary's right leg. As expected, the Portsmouth fighter turned his hips into Isak, getting his leg away from the blonde's. But in doing so he'd brought his feet closing together, allowing his opponent, who was already in perfect range, to soundly secure a double leg takedown. He was a bit low on the legs for it, but the end result was the same. The Scandinavian fighter found himself in a half open half butterfly guard, one of Cameron's feet over his hip and resting above his waistline on his back and the other tucked in between Isak's thigh and groin.

Attempting to keep moving, the Englishman tried to elevate with the butterfly hook at the same time he angled and pushed with his other foot. It got Isak to move, but ended up allowing him to pass the other fighter's guard as well. Easily transitioning into side control, the Norwegian grabbed a hold of his foe's left arm and brought it across his own body with his right arm, wrapping his left one around Cameron's head and pulling it towards him as he sat out with his hips. The little viking noticed his opponent trying to move into him to relieve the pressure on his head and answered back, attempting to force the man's left arm between his legs. It took some hand fighting, but he was able to get it done. When Isak laid back to sit his legs over the shorter fighter and complete the submission, he lost control of his head, allowing Cameron to regain position, ultimately sliding into Isak's guard. Isak had tried for a flash triangle choke, quickly maneuvering his hips and legs, but the older fighter had seen it coming and fought out, now trying to land some ground and pound shots on his junior.

The two moved slowly across the floor, the taller featherweight shifting his hips and moving his head with each elbow or punch the fighter from England brought down. Once against the chain link, Isak tried to disengage from Cameron, slyly slipping into butterfly guard before the darker haired man could react. Elevating his legs the blonde forced his adversary to reposition, giving Isak the room he needed to quickly turn his hips away from the advancing martial artist and stand up. As soon as he was up though, Cameron got back to work, cracking a heavy kick against his right leg against Isak's thigh but also getting caught with the end of a straight right punch from the Nordic man. It backed him up and into the center of the hexagonal platform, the pugilists now circling one another, hands moving about and senses locked in. The UK representative feinted a jab with his left, coming over the top of Isak's guard with a laser aimed right shot, but missing when the other man slipped just out of the way, popping out a short but hard kick to the inside of the challenger's calf. A follow up hook rolled off the blonde's shoulder as he continued moving away.

The next punch from Cameron saw Isak on the move again, slipping the shot and rushing into range with an elbow over the top. It was a ruse however, the shorter man getting away from the elbow, but taking a hard forearm strike to the face that forced him backwards and into the fence. Isak kept the pressure on, his hands high as he struck out with a shoveling hook to the other's body with his lead hand. The elder mixed martial artist turned his hips, avoiding most of the sting from the punch. As his man cut away from the cage, Isak threw a heavy, fast right knee directed at the same spot on the opposite side of his antagonist's body. It missed, but just barely.

As Cameron strode sidelong back to the center, he let out a loud “Oooh!”, brushing sweat from his forehead off with the back of his glove in a ‘That was a close one’ fashion. Isak grinned, the combatants knocking fist together in acknowledgement of the other's skills. It was the man from
Oslo who struck first this time, skipping forward before locking on with a front kick to the gut of his fellow martial artist. Using a tactic Isak himself had employed earlier in the match, Cameron moved, switching his stance, this time partially landing with a left uppercut as his man moved to the right. The punch landed across the Bred Akse representative's cheek and brow, adding some swelling to the area, but thankfully no cuts.

A step in knee from the advancing fighter brought him into to clinch range. Isak dodged the knee, getting a good Muay Thai plum around Cameron's head and neck and then trying to yank his opponent's skull down and into the strike. As expected, the slightly more experienced fighter was able to roll his head and body away from the otherwise devastating shot by pushing Isak's arms down and away while at the same time moving his head. The little viking had an answer though, a popping left across and over the British fighter's now lowered arms. He rolled with the punch, but it did land. The crowd was getting into the fight now, only a minute or so left. The taller man found himself on the outside edge of the cage, feinting with his hands, hips, and feet.

A cracking right hand seemed to come out of no where, the punch centimeters away from separating the man from Norway's consciousness from his body. He countered back with a sidestep and digging kick into the other's gut, the audio from the strike sounding like a bat smacking raw meat. The area pinked up quickly on the fighter's complexion. The pair had switches sides, Cameron now with his back against the cage. He cut a sharp angle as Isak was setting up a shot to get into wrestling range. Isak skipped forward fast, finding a home for his jab before jamming the other athlete against the cage in a reversal of a position the men were in earlier.

Grinding his head under the jaw and face of his opponent, the shorter man was able to disrupt the other's balance and turn him against the cage, hooking his right leg into the inside of Isak's and driving forward while pulling him away from the fence. Starting to go down, Isak widened his stance and shifted his hips keeping his left leg between that of Cameron's. Attempting to step around and face the younger fighter proved a mistake though as when he tried to do so, the blonde kept a hold of his opponent's left arm, pulling it across himself and down while at the time dropping to his knees and pulling forward. His arm hadn't been as securely around the Brit's head as he would like, but the result was the same. The other featherweight was sent sprawling across Isak's back and head, swiftly turning over and trying to stand back up, but Isak charged forward knocking him back down to canvas.

As he went to try and move to mount, Isak's hands were low, Cameron snatching a hold of one and placing his heels on Isak's hips. When the taller martial artist went to crowd his legs, Cameron capitalized, keeping a death-grip hold of Isak’s left wrist, he moved his right leg down and behind the younger man's left knee, aligning his shin with the crease. Once this was done, he pushed at an angle on Isak's right hip with his left heel, pulling his right leg into himself, also at an angle, all while still holding Isak's wrist. The movement caused Isak to essentially sit down, with the British man trying to advance position immediately. Noticing this, the other fighter intercepted him, the buzzer for the round echoing out as both men were locked in a clinch on their knees. They stood, slapping their hands together and walking over to their cornermen.

Elias and Magnus were in the cage this time, each with wide eyes and smiles, making room for the cutman who instantly started applying a cold compress to Isak's face. Magnus pressed an ice filled bag to his friend's back, neck, and head.

“Dude! A judo throw!?”, Elias praised his fighter as he sat down on the stool provided, grinning shyly and nodded.

“It was there.”, Isak said.
“So, obviously, way better this round. As far as who won? I don’t really care. This is one of the
craziest fights I’ve ever seen Isak Valtersen. Keep mixing in the takedowns, and keep searching for
setups and submissions when we get there. Let’s start using our reach alright? If we’re clinching
against the cage? Look for wrestling setups and strikes on the break. Coach?”, Chris finished,
looking to Even.

“Oh, man, amazing grappling exchanges Isak. But we can do better. Don’t be afraid to use your
ground and pound. It doesn’t have to be hard shots even, just get him to move so we can implement
our jiu-jitsu. I know you're having fun in there dude, so keep it up.”

Elias smiled.

“Hands are looking crisp my man. Like Chris said, let's land our punches long. Love the Thai
clinch you're using as well, let’s keep it up and go get this one!”

As his corner was preparing to leave the cage, Magnus called back to his friend.

“Isak! If he switches his hips when you shoot for a double, cut the angle and go for an ankle pick,
he’s not moving his back leg far enough away from his body!”

Isak nodded, storing the data in his head for the upcoming and final frame of the fight. Once both
corners had cleared out of the area, the door was shut. The referee stepped back to the center for
the last time.

“Gentlemen, final round. Fight!”

Round 3

The fighters met in the middle, a brief embrace showing their respect for one another. “Been an
honor man!”, Cameron said. “Ditto dude!” The martial artists resumed their stances. The man from
Portsmouth opting for a fleet of foot, high shoulder and hands Muay Thai stance. Isak went with
something he and Chris had come to call Thais upstairs, Japanese downstairs; adopting a wide,
Karate like stance with his legs, while going with a similar hand and shoulder position to his
opponent. The men circled, Isak snapping out a stabbing kick with ball of his right foot. The
Englishman moved to his left, sweeping the strike away with his back hand and trying for a hard
left straight.

The strike bounced off the Norwegian’s shoulder as he rolled the punch over, ducking another
offensive punch and using his position to shoot for a double leg. Just as Magnus had told him,
Cameron hadn’t widened his legs enough, giving Isak the chance to transition to an ankle pick. He
wrapped his inside right forearm around the other fighter's exposed left leg, swiping the instep up
and into his chest. The blonde readjusted his grip lighting fast, scooting his arm up to behind
Cameron's knee and standing while turning his hips to the right and driving his man backwards.
Before they got to the fence and the older man could regain his position, Isak cut a deep angle to
his left, the change in direction leaving the other featherweight without a leg to stand on and
causing the two to tumble onto the canvas.

Try as he might, the Oslo youth wasn’t able to gain position immediately, instead ending up in the
guard of his disserter. Cameron started trying to slice the man on top of him up with some elbows.
Isak moved his head away from the first few, the fourth one bashing across the bridge of his nose.
Another well timed strike landed for the English fighter, this time right below the Norsemen's left eye. On the third attempt, the taller fighter slipped the strike, moving his head down to the mat and trapping the other's right arm against his own neck while at the same time fighting for hand position with his own right hand. His longer reach allowed Isak to whip a few elbows of his own over the top of Cameron's left hand, drawing blood from the other's nose. This also allowed him to slip his right arm underneath and around the shorter man's neck.

Pushing forward with his head, the Bred Akse mixed martial artist began attempting to cinch up the arm triangle. It was tight, but it wasn’t going to get the more experienced fighter to tap. Quickly realizing this, Isak began trying to clear the legs of his opponent, knowing if he could do so the immeasurable amount of pressure he could achieve would get the tap. Doing this meant he had to let go of his own right hand, now only using his head and shoulder pressure to keep the set up in place. He tried to push the English's right leg away from his hips, knowing if he even got half mount the submission was as good as his. Doing so let Cameron press his right arm back to the canvas, eventually popping it under Isak's face and pushing his head across his chest. Isak abandoned the technique, instead sitting high in the other's guard and trying to land bombing punches on him. A few shots were able to get in, but the majority rolled or bounced off the shorter fighter's forearms.

When Isak had been punching, the other man had been moving his hips and head. On the fourth shot, he angled his hips to the left side, scooting his left leg up and behind the blonde's head, reaching across with his right arm and hooking the inside of his arm around his ankle. Isak rolled towards the pressure being put on his head and should, Cameron now using the inside point of his elbow to land some ground and pound to the side of his adversary's head. A small cut opened just above Isak's hairline, blood staining the top braids on his head. The shorter fighter put his left foot on the taller man's hip, popping his hips out from underneath him to the same side. Isak's arm had been caught between his competitor's legs; he moved into him to negate any armbar attempts, hooking his left arm under Cameron's right leg and popping it up and over his head.

The Englishman moved into a kneeling position, turtling up as Isak moved off to his right side, peppering in some punches as he tried to find Cameron's head with the shots. Turning his head made the tall blonde stop, not wanting to land illegal punches on his man. He opted instead, for some hard knees to the body of the grounded fighter. On the third one, the auburn haired fighter moved away from the strike, slicing at Isak with a heavy, uppercut style elbow as he stood to his knee, instinctively using the cage to get up. “Fingers out the cage Cameron!” Leon scolded the fighter. He nodded to the ref, circling back to the meet Isak in the middle of the canvas. Isak landed a long, hard jab, snapping his fellow fighter's head back. He tuned his lead left leg in at around a forty five degree angle, stuffing a leg kick attempt from the advancing fighter. He threw a heavy uppercut, Isak slipping it and stepping to his right, catching a right hand on his forehead before clinching with Cameron.

He tried to go for a left elbow over the top, but the shorter forty fiver ducked it, rushing in and wrapping his hands around Isak's waist. Moving back and to his right, Isak used his left leg to rest on the inside of Cameron's right, yanking his head down and to the right and pulling him in the same direction and knocking his hands down on the break. The distance created let the Norwegian strike out with a hard, high roundhouse kick to the English fighter's head. Barely getting his arm up in time to block the near perfect technique, the tattooed fighter tried to catch the shot on his glove and shoulder. Cameron was wobbled for a second, but his foe remained patient, letting go a few more judging shots before unleashing a hellish right hand. Cameron dodged the punch, getting the worst of it on a shoulder roll and answering back with a long jab, followed by a slice to the left, then a hard kick to the inside of Isak's now lead right leg. The leg buckled momentarily, causing the shorter man to dive in for a try at a takedown.
Getting an undertook, Isak was able to swing the shorter man into the fence, aiming a knee straight into the defined abdominals of the elder fighter. Cameron used the outside edge of his left forearm to defend against the heavy strike, moving his head and body to the right as his opponent went for a whipping elbow that ultimately slammed into the cage. As Isak turned to strike again, he caught a jab hook combo to the head, slipping the third punch, an uppercut, and firing back with an up angled vertical punch thrown from the shoulder. It landed, as did the snapping, long right straight afterward. The Northman had overextended himself just enough for his colleague to blast him with a hooking left hand. Both threw caution to the wind now, only seconds left in the round. A hook from Isak landed, an uppercut from Cameron, a slip and counter from Isak that slammed into his opponent’s right eye, a duck and hard right hook to the body by the English, a step in elbow busting across the nose of the UK fighter, and a final left hook that crashed into the jaw of Isak, the buzzer sounding as both fighters hugged, smiles on their bruised and swelling faces.

The men raised one another's hand, each encouraging the crowd to their feet for a heavy round of cheers and shouts. The competitors turned to one another, Cameron leaning in to speak to Isak. “The fuck are they making you lot out of over there man!” Isak laughed, his head lolling back as he shrugged and leaned back in for his answer. “I can say same for you dude! Your chin is crazy!” The other fighter smiled, nodding. “Epic fucking fight my man! Classic for sure. That’s some viral shit right there!” Isak smiled, nodding his agreement and responding. “Hey I hope. I hope so.” The now former competitors walked back to their cornermen who had been let into the cage. Upon seeing his coaches wide eyes and open mouth grins, Isak felt his own smile break apart his lips. The cutman got to him first, swiftly and deftly applying vaseline to the small cut above the up and comer’s hairline. Some cold compresses were then pressed to Isak's face and the right side of his jaw. Once this was done the doctor checked Isak over, confirming there was no serious damage in regards to breaks in his face or other injuries on his body.

After the check was complete, Magnus was the first to embrace the fighter, the other three gathering around him. Isak smiled, laughing. “Guys I don’t even know if I won yet!” “Dude, who fucking cares!? That fight was insane!” The blush on the fighter's face was hidden by his already sweat reddened cheeks. “Ok, so first of all”, Chris began, “As an Isak Valtersen fan? That fight was incredible. As your coach? Please don't ever do that again.” The group laughed and Isak nodded, grabbing Chris in a one armed hug. “Jesus man”, Even started, “I think I’m in love dude!” The shorter blonde ducked his head and grinned, popping out his mouthpiece and hooking it into his shorts. Elias opened his arms, his smile going ear to ear as he hugged his fighter. “So fucking proud of you dude. So proud!” The ref walked over, Isak noticing he'd already spoke to the announcer and been given the final decision. “Amazing bout sir, a joy to ref this fight, really. If I may lads?”, Leon said, taking Isak's sweaty left hand by the wrist and leading him over to the nexus of the canvas where he grabbed the offered right wrist of the Oslovian’s opponent. The announcer stood behind the ref and spoke into the mic, keeping his voice low to add drama for when he got to the decision.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the Eventim Apollo, after three rounds of exciting action, the judges have come to a decision.” Both Isak and Cameron felt tingles run across their skin and spine. “The first judge has scored this match twenty nine, twenty eight in favor of Isak Valtersen.” Isak's heart was hammering in his chest. “Both of the other judges have scored the bout even at twenty nine twenty nine”, Andy Friedlander's pitch climbed as he spoke, “Ladies and gentlemen, this fight has been judged as a majority draw!” An echoing of boos could be heard throughout the arena, Cameron shaking his head as Josh Palmer, one half of the commentary team, approached him for his post fight interview. He tried to get the first question out, but the fighter beat him to it, reprimanding the crowd for their behavior.

“Hey, hey. Let me tell you all something. All you booing right now? You can fuck off. Me and this man just gave fifteen minutes of our goddamn lives to you and you boo cause there wasn’t a
winner? Yeah, fuck right off. I’m usually respectful Josh, so I’m sorry for the language, but, man, no. You're not gonna fuckin’ boo and be unhappy after that.” Josh Palmer nodded, inclined to agree with the younger man.

“I can’t say I disagree Cameron. That was certainly and incredible performance from both of you. And we'll be talking to Isak in just a minute. First, I’d like to get your thoughts on this fight. Coming into it you said a lot of your focus was going to be on closing distance, landing in the clinch. And you did do that, but you also showed off some pretty high level grappling in this bout as well. Myself and Brad were very impressed with that takedown from guard you got in the second. Did you have to adapt for this fight?”

“Uh, yeah I did you know. Isak was a very game opponent, has a hell of a chin on him. You know it was a lot of adjusting on the fly. We knew one thing wasn’t going to get it done and eventually, you know, it ended up not being quite enough. Um, I think, obviously I felt I did enough to win the fight, but I’d be honored to run it back and I know Isak would as well, so…. ” The crowd now cheered again, the fighter’s professionalism and sportsmanship making them reconsider their previous disagreement with the non-win of their home country fighter. “Well Cameron, you are certainly a great representative of the sport and a true sportsmen and fighter as well. I would be thrilled to call your rematch. Ladies and gentlemen, Cameron Hardy!” The commentator walked over to Isak, the Norwegian gulping down some water before smiling at Josh.

“I’m here with Isak Valtersen. Isak, I think the same can be said for you, the judges ended up scoring a draw for you. What was your game plan for the fight and would you consider a rematch in the future?”

“Thank you London!”, Isak belted out first, endearing himself to the fans before continuing, “Yeah, uh, I am definitely for doing, uh the rematch. For the fight, we did lots of wrestling for my camp. Training um, you know, for entry, setups, and stuff. He’s harder to….get to the mat, than maybe I am thinking?” Isak stated, chuckling as he said so. “But, I do my best for the fight and the result, uh, I am not judging for the fight I’m already in, so yeah. But it was lot of fun, and I loved being here!” Another set of cheers for the foreign combatant rang out around the Apollo, Isak shaking the commentator’s hand as he received more hugs from Magnus and his coaches.

“Well it will certainly be hard to top that. Ladies and gentlemen, let’s give it up for Isak Valtersen!”

Isak's face fell as soon as he stepped out of the cage, his friends noticing his change in demeanor. The four men looked at each other, Isak disappointedly sauntering back to the dressing room, despite the fans congratulating him and clapping him on his back and shoulders. The two coaches and Magnus were confused, Even being the one to chase after the fighter. In his mind, Isak had no reason to be ashamed. He just hoped he could make the fighter see things from his point of view.
1. Leon Roberts is referee of mixed martial arts and considered among the top tier of officials in the sport. He has worked for Cage Warriors, the UFC and several other smaller, regional promotions as well including BAMMA (British Association of Mixed Martial Arts). To my findings he doesn't seem to have any social media although I did find this video which gives a bit of history on him and was done by a close friend and training partner.

2. Marc Goddard is another veteran official as well as a former fighter and widely considered a great referee in his own right. He too has worked for Cage Warriors and the UFC. Some fans and fighter's dislike his reffing style as he does seem to have a tendency to sometimes prioritize or favor the stand up aspect of the sport rather than the grappling and wrestling parts.

3. The elbow Cameron used is a rarely seen strike in MMA, although it can be highly effective. The most glaring example I can think of is when Anderson Silva used it in one of his fights and got a knockout. This is also the gif I've chosen to show the technique as well.

4. The "backpack" position, which Isak employs at the end of round one, is a technique in grappling which can be used on a sitting or standing opponent. It's meant to make setting up chokes easier as well as to force the other fighter to carry your weight and thus tire them out in the case of a standing position. A good example of a fighter who implements this strategy well would be the Brazilian Damian Maia. The gif I've chosen to use shows Korean fighter Chang Sung Jung (aka the Korean Zombie) using the backpack to transition into a rear naked choke attempt.

5. The end of the fight is inspired by a now famous instance between fighter's Max Holloway and Ricardo Llamas in which Max pointed to the canvas in the final seconds of the fight and both men stood and traded blows. It's brutal, I know, but this is one of a wide range of reasons why I love the sport and have so much respect and admiration for the fighters involved in it.

6. Andy Friedlander is one of the announcers for Cage Warriors as well as other man promotions, boxing, and soccer as well.

7. Josh Palmer and Brad Wharton are the commentary team for the promotion, along with former UFC fighter and current UFC commentator Dan Hardy and presenter and UFC partner Layla Anna-Lee.

8. YouTube Playlist

Chapter End Notes

Ok, so first off, there is no way that Five Fine Frøkner was ever NOT gonna be my man's walkout song, but a lot of you probably figured that out. That shit slaps harder than my mom when I tried to steal candy as a kid. Not really, my mother is an amazing and loving woman. Anyways, despite Isak not being thrilled with his performance and the judges giving him a draw, this chapter still marks the beginning of his acceptance of himself and his walkout song if part of that. There's gonna be some.......past stuff in then next chapter that we get into on both Even and Isak's sides.
Isak is definitely a talented fighter and he's kind of starting to realize it, but he still has his insecurities and doubts and I wanted to show that as well. Draws are pretty rare in many combat sports, but particularly so in MMA because there are so many ways to win. This chapter was challenging to write, because I really wanted to convey the frenetic, fun, and wild side of what MMA can be and I hope I've achieved that to some degree. All links are in the chapter text and the playlist will be listed below as well as in the stuff for the fic section along with the secondary links. If you have questions, comments, or criticisms, feel free to leave them below! I'm writing the next chapter and hope to have it up in a week or so. See everyone soon!

YouTube playlist: https://youtube.com/playlist?
list=PLedxV_5gBkGYN5h9Ls2mjoXEVJj-F8Kx_
You're Trending

Chapter Summary

Isak and Even have a heart to heart. Isak's fight trends with some big names noticing him.

Chapter Notes

First off, big, big warning for this chapter. I feel like I've alluded to it a lot, but in this chapter we finally go into what happened to Isak and the decision he made to start fighting as well as some of Even's past as well. You all may have noticed I've updated the tags and this chapter is definitely the reason for that. If you'd like to skip that part of this chapter, I'd recommend starting at the 19:21 scene mark and picking up again at Isak saying "So.....yeah". I know different people have different levels of sensitivity to certain things and descriptions based on their experiences so I definitely want to respect that. Apart from that, as far as warnings go, not much else going on here. Isak's name in mma media is getting more well known, but y'all will read about that soon enough.

Oh, I don't remember if i told you guys, but your boy got promoted! Which is cool, I like money, also means updates are going to likely be a little bit slower, and I have a small business I'm trying to grow as well. Having said all that, this story is still near and dear to me and I'm in this thing for the long haul. Links are in the chapter and at the end as well. Hope y'all enjoy!

A/N : In the original chapter update I got the dates of the scenes wrong, so those have been fixed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Søndag
Juni 29th, 2019
Backstage Eventim Apollo
19:31

Isak had rallied himself for the post fight interview, Layla Anna Lee catching up with the disappointed combatant in the back of the venue. The lights were bright in Isak’s eyes, his face aching from the few seconds he had to squint to adjust. Layla smiled at him, the camera's hadn’t rolled just yet. She leaned over to give Isak some words of encouragement.

“Amazing fight, really. I know it didn’t end up your way, but you’ve really no reason to hang your
head.”

The camera operator gave a countdown with his fingers, pointing at the interviewer and interviewee as the machine began recording live, the conversation in Layla's earpiece finishing up before queuing up to her.

“Thanks Dan, it certainly was an incredible performance and display of skills by both fighters. I'm here with Isak Valtersen. Isak, I understand you're not happy with the result, but I must say, that was an outstanding fight. My main questions are do you think you'll be returning to the Cage Warriors stage and are you interested in a rematch?”

Isak swallowed and nodded.

“Yeah, for sure uh, a rematch for the future? I would like this. Cameron is tough opponent, fight was fun. And you know, my contract has more fights and they keep paying me so…..” He let out a small chuckle as he nodded.

“Well I for one would certainly look forward to that rematch as well as seeing more from you in the future. You know we heard your coach getting a little aggressive with you in between the first and second rounds and then we really saw an amazing showing in that second frame. Does that particular style of coaching seem to help you?”

Isak wavered a little bit, having to work through the translation a little before giving an answer.

“I think, for me, my coach, Chris Schistad, he can be um….like….make me to really get going, yeah? And sometimes, I need it.”, Isak giggled softly, “For my coaches, I want for them to…. be proud, and uh, yes I think for sometimes, this is good thing for me.”

Layla was nodding, absorbing the answer before giving here response.

“Well given what you did in that match your coaches certainly have a lot to be proud of. Thank you for the interview Isak, and we look forward to speaking with you in the future.”

“Thank you!”, The man said, back, shaking the presenter’s hand before making the trek to his dressing room, Even and his team right behind him.

Novotel Hotel
22:43

Even had chased after his fighter, catching up with him in the dressing room after his post fight interview. He’d tried to reason with him, get him to stick around, but Isak's mind was made up, his Uber already waiting outside. He'd told his grappling coach he wanted to be alone, informing him that everyone should proceed with their post fight plans. Isak's other friends were skeptical, but he sent them all personal texts, assuring them he appreciated the support, but needed some time to himself at the moment. Even didn't buy it. Knowing first-hand how upsetting not winning something you'd poured your heart and soul into could be. It was the reason he was outside their shared hotel room, the rest of Isak's friends had tentatively accepted his excuse, staying at the arena for the rest of the professional preliminaries and the main card. Not wanting to barge in, the tall man knocked lightly, not receiving an answer.
Even sighed.

“Isak, you’re in there. I know you are.”

A turning lock could be heard before the door opened to a battered looking Isak Valtersen. The swelling on his right eye had subsided, but his thigh high gym shorts featured the stinging marks of the leg kicks he'd taken. The blood from the small laceration on his head had clotted into his now non-braided hair. He gave his friend a low lidded, defeated set of eyes and motioned for him to enter into the room. Even did so, noticing the two empty bottles of Heineken sitting on the night stand beside the bed. As he looked back to his student, the boy had cracked open another beverage, gulping down about a quarter of it and then sitting back into the bed.

“So, Chris told you to come comfort me then? Make sure I’m not going to hang it up.”

Even shook his head, taking a seat next to the shorter man.

“No, I came alone and because I wanted to. You basically sprinted out of the arena. Everyone wanted to see you and congratulate you, bu-”

Isak snorted, shaking his head and scrunching up his face.

“Congratulate me on what? Getting my ass beat for fifteen minutes with nothing to show for it?”

“Nothing to show?”, Even began. “Obviously you haven't looked at twitter or instagram since the fight. You're trending under the cage warriors one-o-six hashtag and your followers on both have been jumping up.”

“Didn’t get the win though did I? Come Monday there’s gonna be a one where there should be a zero on my record.”

Even laid back, groaning and throwing his arm over hid eyes.

“It’s part of the sport Isak. A rare part, I’ll give you that, but a part of it non the less!”

He scooted closer to his friend.

“It doesn’t make you a bad fighter Isak. It makes you human. Makes you learn and keep going.”

Isak knew his coach was right, but the unsettling disappointment ceased to stop aching in his chest. He let out a long, heavy breath from his nose, rolling his head to rest on the older man's shoulder. Even wrapped a comforting arm around the martial artist, rubbing his shoulder softly.

“It’s stupid. I know it is. Like, intellectually I know it doesn’t make sense…….doesn't change how I feel though.”

Even gave a small hum, nodding. He turned to look to Isak, pulling his vaporizer out from his jeans pocket. The glistening thickness of the oil shone in his pupil's eyes. The shorter blonde's own eyes widened comically.

“You got weed through the airport dude!?”

Even laughed and shook his head no.

“I got the pen through the airport. The weed came later. I have my international connects dude.”

Isak giggled, saying he guessed so.
“Up for a rooftop smoke?”, Even asked.

Isak killed the rest of the Heineken.

“Hey, what the hell.”

19:21

The boys were pleasantly stoned, each leaning against the chest high edge of the building and looking out over the skyline of the Hammersmith neighborhood. Isak took a long draw of air into his nose and then released, swallowing down the saliva in his mouth. Even turned around and leaned against the rooftop border.

“I totally get what you mean about intellectualizing your feelings by the way. It doesn’t really help. I tried to do the same thing when I had my first bipolar episode. Tried to justify things in my own head. Sometimes…..feelings don’t make sense. Sometimes they just suck.”

Isak locked eyes with his friend and nodded, moving closer to him along the edge of the hotel roof.

“Yeah, you’re right. I know you are…..but…..”, he gave a ‘what can you do’ look to his coach as well as a shrug of his shoulders. Even swallowed, debating whether or not to reveal something to Isak. He didn’t really know how to approach the subject, how to get his foot in the door, so he just went for it, hoping it wouldn’t startle the younger man.

“When I was uh……when I was twenty? I had my second episode. Got me this.”

The tall black belt swept his medium length hair up and to the right, separating it with his other hand. A long, silvery line showed through the follicles, starting a couple centimeters above Even’s hairline on his left side and curving back and to the right. Isak appeared concerned, but also intrigued. Even readjusted his mane.

“Got hit by a tram. Um……on purpose. Put me in a coma for a week. During which…..I uh……well, I missed the passing of my aunt and the birth of my daughter. Still…..not……Not really happy with that, but yeah.”

The pair's gaze met again, Isak's eyes wide as he let out a whistle, putting his hands up.

“Ok man, you win.”

“Wha- No that's….”, Even began laughing, tucking his head to his chest and shaking it.

“I’m not trying to have a…..”, the older martial artist searched for the word with his eyes and brain, “A trauma off with you. I’m just saying, if I got through what I got through then….”, he sighed, letting his hands drop down to his side as he stared back into the other's eyes, “You’re going to be fine man. I know you’ve already been through some shit in your own life and probably some stuff I don't know about as well so……it sucks, yes, but you’re gonna be ok.”

He moved to stand in front of Isak now.

“If you want to look at if from a social media aspect, your stock just went way up dude. Mørkve texted me immediately after the fight wanting to do a follow up with you. Luke Thomas tweeted
that he’s got his eye on you and Jessica Andrade Tweeted something in Portuguese that, based on the emojis, I’m pretty sure was a big compliment!”

Isak ducked his head to hide the little smile on his lips, resurfacing with it still on his face.

“I mean, there is a translate function I’m pretty sure.”

Even rolled his eyes.

“The point is……you're going to be fine Isak. You’re an awesome fighter, a great friend, and an amazing guy. People are going to see that and……they’re gonna love you.”

Even rested two reassuring hands on the shorter boy’s shoulders, the fighter taking a chance and stepping in to hug his coach, nestling his head into his neck.

“Thank you.”, he said softly.

When the two broke away their hands met, finger splaying out against one another and running gently along their palms and the back of their hands.

“But, I haven’t been completely honest.”

Even tilted his head as he looked at Isak, a question in his eyebrows.

“Because you're not out? Hey I get it, but coming out is a continual process. If you hadn’t asked about my tattoo or it hadn’t come up then-“

“No, no um…..”, The shorter blonde shook his head as he slowly pulled away from Even, the instructor catching him with his hands and moving closer to him.

Isak swallowed.

“I meant…….I mean……about…..like….what made me want to train. The whole….that party I told you about?”

Even nodded, showing he was listening attentively.

“That's uh…..that's like……half the story.”

The fighter cleared his throat.

“The um, the guy who Jonas bought his weed from? Elias?”

“Different Elias, obviously.”, stated Even trying to help his student along while also interjecting some humor into what he was confident wasn’t going to be a pleasant story. The humorless breath Isak let go from his mouth told him as much.

“Oh definitely. Anyways, uh…..he was like….. I don’t know, always making little remarks. Calling me gay and shit. Asking when I was gonna……” Isak's lips drew together into a line, “Stop being such a pussy and come out. Just…..being a dick really.”

He sighed, squatting down slowly to sit against the rooftop’s edge. Even followed him down, the two pressing their sides together.

“Well, one night, when Jonas, Eva, and me were staying at her cabin…..uh, I was like sixteen I guess, Jonas invited Elias over.”, Isak had given air quotes when he’d said invited. A long stretch
of dead air sat in between the two. The featherweight began slowly nodding his head, almost as if he had to have a physical affirmation to continue the tale.

“We hooked up. And it was…….”, the former champion's eyes squinting as he tried to find the correct words, “Strange. Like really strange. But also, weirdly nice?”

He’d ended the sentence in a question, looking to Even to see a confirming nod. Isak gave an unconscious, subtle nod of his own back, his subconscious appreciating the other's understanding.

Isak chuckled suddenly.

“You know he was actually super sweet? Like asking me if I was ok, kissing me and everything. I remember him telling me how if I was just brave enough to come out there’d be so many boys who'd be lucky to have me.”

Isak scoffed, shaking his head back and forth while picking at his shoes.

“It was weird.”

A short stretch of silence passed over the two. Even broke it.

“Did it happen more than once?”

“Mhmm.”

Isak bit his lip softly.

“Several times actually.”

He sniffled quietly, sitting up straighter and pressing his back to the wall.

“For a few months…..it was kind of nice. He would still make his stupid jokes or whatever. But, when we were alone? He was amazing. It all went to shit though.”

Even turned his full attention to the fighter.

“It was a few weeks before my seventeenth birthday. We were getting high as fuck, per usual. Drinking a bit too.”

The mixed martial artist pulled in a large breath closing his eyes for a few seconds.

“Ran out of weed, right? Because of course we did.”

Isak snorted, shaking his head.

“So, we send Jonas on a run to the neighborhood next to his. His parents were out of town. Me and Elias……..resume our usual arrangement. Up to this point, we hadn’t gone too far. A couple mutual handjobs with our shirts off.”

Isak smacks lips, blinking his eyes more often.

“Wasn’t enough for ole Elias though. Not then. The whole sweet guy bullshit? Yeah well, it was.”

Isak's breath hitches, Even knows he’s in the thick of it now, remembering everything.

“Started out like normal. Like……every other time. And then he starts talking about…… how I
owe him? How he's the reason I'm more confident?”

Even swallowed, almost wanting to stop Isak, but knowing he had to let him continue.

“I move away from him. I’m standing up and……nope he’s just not having it. Before I know what's even happening he's on top of me, turning me over and sinking in a choke. Like candy from a baby I guess.”

The first tear falls, but Isak's voice is strong.

“He yank’s my pants down. Underwear too. Rips it, actually.”

He paused to sniffle and clear his eyes.

“And dude I'm…… stock still. Frozen. Don’t know if he's gonna rape me. Kill me.”

“Jesus Isak.”, says Even.

Isak nods, releasing a puff of laughing air with no mirth in it.

“He doesn't rape me. Doesn't……”, the younger man swallows thickly, “Put it inside me. Gets it out. Rubs it on me. On my…..”

Isak doesn’t need to go into detail, Even grasps his hands as he finishes reliving the experience.

“You know, I still remember exactly what he told me?”

Another humorless laugh.

“He said, we were different. Too different to ever be together. You know why? Because he takes what he wants. And I don't. His exact words? I can do anything I want to you Isak, and I’m choosing not to.”

The men were pressed fully into one another now, back to playing with one another’s hands and fingers. Isak cleared his throat again, rubbing his eyes once more to remove the residual moisture.

“So……yeah. That's the reason I got into fighting. Into…….into mma. The real reason.”

He looked at Even, somberly nodding.

Even let out a long, deep sigh, shrugging.

“I can see why you would think that Isak. But it’s not true. That’s not why you became a fighter.”

The smaller man's face dropped off the face of the Earth.

“Excuse me?”, he said lowly, standing to his feet, fists already clinched. “You're going to tell me why I did something!?”, he reiterated his frustration by harshly poking at his own chest when referring to himself.

“If you let me explain to you why-“, Even started calmly.

“Oh, fuck off Even!”

Isak was already at one hundred.

“You know you think of yourself as like……this fucking bullshit champion for sexual minorities
cause you exist in a space where they’re not always represented or some shit. Well maybe they
don’t want to be man! Maybe they don’t care! Maybe when people see me I want….no, no I
fucking need them to see more than my sexuality! To see more than the fact that I was a victim!
When you were telling your story about trying to kill yourself? Did I comment on it? At all!!?"

“Isak, I understand you’re upset, but you might be saying some things here that-"

“No I know exactly what I’m saying. You’re not going to change what happened to me or how I’ve
come to deal with it Even so just……just don’t try alright dude?”

Isak was running out of steam now, starting to regret blowing up at Even.

“Jonas has been trying to do that ever since it happened and he’s my best friend so…..”

The uncomfortableness had begun to wane now, Even knowing Isak’s anger was directed at what
was done to him and not at him, hurtful words aside.

“Isak I would never try and negate your feelings about what you went through. All I was going to
say is that you shouldn’t be giving that piece of shit any credit. It’s how you reacted to what he did
that makes you so courageous. You made a completely conscious decision that you were never
going to be made to feel like that again. And you did it.”

Even held his arms out in a physical representation of hid words, moving closer to Isak and
encircling his arms behind his head loosely.

“So don’t give that to him, alright. God, if that fucking asshole was here right now, you’d have to
stop me from throwing him off the roof dude. I’m serious I-“

“Hey”, Isak wrestled him from his thoughts, stepping into his space and looking up at him, “He's
not here. It’s just us. Ok? Just us. And I'm sorry about what I said. I know that representation is
important and everything and I just……” he sighed out a deep breath. The pair had placed their
foreheads against one another by now, Isak gulping before taking the risk and pressing his lips
tightly to the taller man's. Even responded for a few seconds before breaking away and shaking his
head.

“Listen, I think it’s clear we both……have some pretty serious feelings for each other, but I don’t
know if either of us is in the right headspace at the moment, and I just…..”

Isak was shaking his head as he fist his hands into the other's shirt.

“No, you're……You're right. Ok, you are. But I have to know. I have to know that if we're doing
this you're down for it, Ok? Cause fuck dude, I am. So fucking much. You gotta be in this with me
though. You have to be alright?”

Even nodded back his eyes half shut.

“ I am. I so fucking am Isak……I……”

His eyes fell shut, opening again just before the newly minted couple began kissing again. It
wasn’t rapid, wasn’t insistant. It was……well…..exactly what it needed to be. What they needed
it to be. On the fifth time their lips had pulled apart and pressed back together, Even had placed one
hand on Isak's still somewhat swollen jaw, the man flinching just slightly as they broke apart.

“Shit, sorry.”
Isak wet his lips, a small giggle involuntarily letting itself out of his throat.  

“Bank accounts fatter, so is my face.”

The two chuckled at the comment before a frustrated, cockney accent fell upon their ears.  

“Doors open and I seen you, so I know yous is up here. Don’t make and old man chase ya down alright?”

The couple looked to each other, deciding to go with forgiveness since asking for permission had never happened. Even saw the aging security guard before he saw them.

“Hello.”, he said, giving the hotel employee the brightest smile he could.

“Well there you are. Listen lads, the beauty of the Hammersmith skyline ain’t lost on me alright? But I’d be heartbroken if two attractive young things like yourself ended up pancaked or as an aftermarket feature of one them cars down below, yeah?”

Even nodded.

“Of course. You're absolutely right.”

The mustachioed guard sighed his relief and nodded.

“Make yous a deal then. I don’t tell my boss bout this little uh……incident here, save myself some paperwork, save you a night in jail and a ticket charge, all I need…..” The guard searched around his pockets for a second cheering shorty when he found his phone. Isak looked to Even briefly before looking back to the guard. Noting the fighter’s reticence, the guard asked a question.

“Ya are that lad that had the mental scrap with that feller from Portsmouth is you not?”

“Uh, yes. I am.”

“Bring it in then. You too if you can manage not to knock ya head on those clouds there.”

Even laughed at the reference to his height. The guard continued talking as he got to the camera on his phone.

“Didn’t mean to uh……bust up ya private moment there by the way. You two are uh….?”, the elder Brit asked, not wanting to offend the young men. Isak shot a glance to Even.

“We are, yes.”

“Well that’s fantastic in my book. Nice you can be open with it now a days. Probably some women who wish you went the other way if I’m honest. Not of the persuasion meself but both of you is quite handsome; say cheese then lads.”

The man had snapped the picture right as Isak and Even had laughed, catching a perfect shot of all of them smiling with wide open mouths. The friendly guard ushered the two back down the stairs for the rooftop access thanking them again. Before he departed he spoke with Isak directly.

“I know them judges scored it a draw for yous, but man, doesn’t matter to me. Nephew follows you on that pictogram app. He’s not gonna believe this. Why I asked for the picture to be honest. Alright you two, I’m off to lie to me boss, hopefully not get fired. You keep your head up there son. Anyone who fights like that ain’t no loser. Till next time gents!”
The guard hustled back down the stairs, the other two following slowly behind him.

“Ok, so, is that guy like the coolest fucking security guard ever?”, expressed Even.

“Right!?” said Isak.

The couple looked at each other and smiled, continuing down the stairs and back to the top floor of the hotel.

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**Tirsdag**

**Juli 2nd**

**9:23**

The coach and student pair were soundly asleep in their bed, Even softly snoring with his right side pressed into Isak's body. The young fighter had an arm thrown over his new boyfriend's back, his palm settled in between his shoulder blades. The sheets were haphazardly strewn over the two, although not because of any activities from the night before. Isak still had some time to recover after all. The whole of Isak's team, including his friend's and other gym members who'd shown up to support him, had elected to stay a few extra days in the city, exploring and taking in the sights, sounds, and culture. They'd visited Big Ben of course, did other touristy things as well. They'd also gone to a Punk Rock venue the night before, allowing Even, Elias, and Chris to relive some of their more wild younger years. It wasn’t Isak’s preferred style of music, but the experience itself was enjoyable and it gave him a chance to take his mind off the draw from Saturday.

A hard, insistent rapping roused Isak. The blonde slowly lifted his head, rolling into Even, his face smushing into his arm and his breath rocketing back into his face. His morning breath combined with the residual alcohol from the night before made his head pop up. He hadn’t even bothered to undress the night before, his shoes thankfully clean. The blonde sauntered over to the door, leaning against it.

“No room service!”, Isak said, trying to get the annoying sound to stop.

“Uh, it's not room service it's your brand new, shiny manager!”, a loud, excited voice replied in Norwegian.

Isak groaned. He unlocked the door and held it open, looking at Eskild as the other smiled widely at him.

“Good morning my gorgeous child! First of all, your fight was amazing, so please don’t be sad. Second of all, have you been on your Instagram account? Seen your Twitter? People are talking Isak. *People* Isak.”

The forty-fiver walked back to the bed, sitting on the edge of it. The former champ scrubbed his hand over his face a few times, running his hand through his hair.

“Oh no, not really. Kind of been trying to stay off it if I’m honest. Even said something about it after the fight.”

“Well, let me tell you Isak, mma media is loving you. Look, Luke Thomas talked about you on After The Beat, and you made it on Fighter and The Kid as well! So, I’m thinking…..”
Eskild trailed off, looking at the sleeping form of Even. He turned back to Isak, a glint in his eye.

“Isak, you dog! You didn’t tell me you-“

“Because I didn’t, dude! Nothing happened alright. We just roomed together cause it was cheaper.”

Eskild hmmed, nodding and waving off the explanation.

“Right, right. But anyways, look at this!”

Isak took the phone from his friend's outstretched hand, rolling his eyes as he saw the Grindr app among the tabs he had up on the device. He selected the first tab in Google chrome, noticing Luke Thomas bearded face and neatly quaffed, grey highlighted hair instantly. He clicked play, the pundits sitting behind the desk began talking about Isak and his fight, Luke starting first.

“So on After The Beat we have a little section we like to call Under the Radar, which is something that was significant, but that we didn’t get to talk about on the first show and today’s is a fight that, kind of flew under the radar, but also kind of didn’t. The highlights blew up on Twitter and Instagram for a little while. Um I don’t know if any of you saw the Cage Warriors one-o-six card, but the opening bout on the pro prelims? Absolutely bonkers dude. I had not even heard of either these guys before and now I’m following both of them. I mean the skills we saw in this fight and the sportsmanship as well, it was phenomenal man. Did any of you catch this one?”

The man sitting to the left of Luke sported a moustache and parted hair swept to the left.

“So I actually did. Uh, like you said I caught the highlights first on Twitter and then I was like ok, wow, let me go back and watch this on Fight Pass and dude, you’re not joking. It ended up being a draw, um, the one cat was a Norwegian guy I believe? Um Isaac…”


“Yeah, Isak Valtersen dude. Pronounce it right cause I’m already, like, totally in love with this guy.”

The panel all laughed.

“And the other fighter was Cameron Hardy, by the way.”

Danny continued.

“Ok, cool, cool. Cause I know I'm gonna get tweets like, what the hell Danny, you don’t even know they’re names?”

Another few chuckles.

“But yeah man, it was an amazing fight. I honestly could’ve seen it going either way, so I think the draw was a pretty fair decision. Um, I guess I could’ve seen.…”

He looked back to Luke.

“Isak right?”

“Yeah. Long e sound my man.”

Danny nodded back at him,

“Ok, gotcha, gotcha. But yeah, man I mean Cameron was right there with him the whole fight. A lot of good wrestling in this one. Lot of good striking exchanges, um at the end the crowd did boo a little when, you know, the British fighter didn’t win, uh, which is kind of uncharacteristic of an English crowd I think. He did turn them around though, gave this short speech just saying like, hey, listen, we just put on this amazing performance for you guys and so you don’t have any reason to act like that and actually turned the crowd around.”


“I thought that was really cool too. Um, apparently Isak Valtersen, even though he was super classy in the cage, was not thrilled with the result, but, holy crap bro, let me be, well, probably like the one thousandth person to tell you cause I’m sure he’s heard it already. Isak, my dude, that fight was nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed by or anything. That fight? It was a draw, because it was literally too difficult to determine who won because you and your opponent put on such a good performance, so, please, if at all possible, don’t be upset with yourself.”

Luke looked down to the third and last man on the panel, a middle aged combat sports journalist wearing a paper boy hat with a checkered design.

“Chucky boy, what you got for me?”

Chuck Mindenhall recoiled shaking his head.

“So first of all, please refrain from referring to me as Chucky boy.”

Luke put his hands up.

“My bad, dog, my bad.”

Chuck smiled at his friend.

“Second of all, you guys know I’m not a hype train kind of guy. I’m not an early….uh…early bandwagoner I guess you’d say? But yeah, I agree with you guys. The fight was amazing, these two have high quality skills. The professionalism and respect for each other they showed in, you know a trash talk era of the sport was nice to see as well. Like Danny was saying, I went back and watched it after seeing the highlights and was very impressed. So yes, they are both on my radar now and I’ll be looking forward to possibly a rematch or their next fight. And particularly Isak’s next fight, I think the adjustments from round to round he made really says a lot about his skill level as well as his ability to think on the fly and implement, uh, creative, but also effective techniques.”


“Definitely dude. I mean that head and arm throw from the Thai clinch Isak got, and the fact he did it moving backwards? Very impressive and shows a lot of, uh, I would say positional and body awareness too. So I think-“

Eskild paused the video. Isak looked up to him, a tired, but happy smile on his lips.

“There’s more, but it’s basically them verbally blowing you and Cameron for the next couple
minutes. You know Danny Segura is actually pretty cute though don’t you think? And Luke has like a silver daddy thing going on. Chuck is like your friend's closeted dad that you hook up with when you're nineteen."

Isak couldn’t help the laughter that broke out of him as he shook his head.

“Eskild! Can we categorize the MMA Beat guys by gayness later? You said I made it on Fighter and The Kid?”

Eskild sighed and nodded.

“Yes sir you did. Check it out.”

The yet to be made official manager brought up the video in question, scrolling to the spot where his friend is spoken about. The hosts were both sitting in two bright red chairs, one in his early fifties the other in his late thirties. The younger man spoke first.

“*You catch any fights this weekend dude?”*

“You know I kind of did, but not really, I uh-“

“Oh, you mean you illegally streamed them like always?”

The older man put on a show of fake outrage.

“What? No, no I didn’t. I definitely did not!”

The two laughed.

**A female’s voice could be heard off screen.**

“Did you guys see the highlights from that one fight on twitter? It was um….what's the British one?”

**An off screen male voice supplied an answer.**

“Oh yeah, I saw that too! Brendan and Bryan did you guys see it? It was like the opening fight on this weekend's cage warrior's card. It trended on Twitter for like, I dunno, at least a few hours.”

Brendan nodded with a smile.

“I did see it dude. Well, I saw the highlights, but yeah, B, apparently this fight was crazy man. Fucking judo throws and jiu-jitsu takedowns. They both landed some Anderson Silva style elbows. I don’t, I don’t know if cage warrior's does fight of the night, but these two got that shit for sure.”

Bryan replied.

“So who were the fighter's Chin?”

The producer responded.

*Um, Isaac Valtersen and Cameron Hardy. Yeah man it was an awesome fight. And it actually went to a draw and the fans were booing, but the British dude was like hey, fuck you guys, like, that was a badass fight.**
“Chin, can we see the fight? Like can you bring it up so we can watch it? On fight pass or whatever?”

Brendan asked.

“Oh yeah, I mean we'll like edit it out, but you guys can watch it.”

“Sweet.”

Said Bryan.

The video went through a short transition, whiting out before coming back into focus, both of the hosts thoroughly impressed.

“Holy shit dude.”

Exclaimed Bryan.

“Right?”

Brendan agrees.

“Also is cage warrior's just hiring GQ models now? Cause both of those guys were a couple of one two mr. steal yo girls!”

The two men along with their producer and intern laugh.

“How bout mr. steal yo man dude? Jesus bro. If that Norwegian adonis dm'ed me and was like, was just like-“

Bryan attempts his best Norwegian accent.

“Hellur Breean, I want ya tah come treen wit me.”

Brendan laughs at his friend's atrocious impersonation.

“What, wait was that…… the worst accent I've ever heard!? He's Norwegian my man, not Swedish. Actually you know what, that wasn't even Swedish bro! That wasn't even a human accent!”

Bryan jokingly defends himself against the friendly ribbing.

“I-, well, ok look, all I'm saying is, all I'm saying is……I would leave the mother of my children to train in the mountain's of Norway with that badass viking twink. That's all I'm saying!”

The room on screen erupts into laughter at the joke and Eskild stops the video, looking to Isak with his eyes blown wide. The fighter chuckles and shakes his head.

“I mean, they are talking about me.”

Eskild laughs as well.

“Am I really a twink though? You know I do have to shave once a week or so.”

The friends enjoy another chuckle and the manager responds.
“Oh Isak, you have much to learn my boy.”

Stuff for the fic

1. **Luke Thomas** is an MMA journalist, analyst, and host of the MMA Beat, the post show After The Beat and hosts his own MMA talk show on Sirius satellite radio. As of earlier this month, the MMA Beat is no more. Instead, Luke and another MMA journalist, Brian Campbell, now cohost a show called Monday Morning Kombat on the Below the Belt youtube channel.

2. **Jessica Andrade** (Procounced Andraj) is the current UFC Women's Strawweight (115 lbs, 52.2 kgs) champion. She defeated the previous title holder, Rose Namajunas at UFC 237 in May of this year.

3. **Danny Segura** is an MMA journalist, former cohost, and usually a panel member of The MMA Beat and After The Beat podcasts. He's just recently moved on from his position as cohost to Luke, but still works for mmafighting.com, which is a vox media outlet.

4. **Chuck Mindenhall** is a combat sports journalist who is often featured on Luke's shows and known to MMA fans as "the man in the hat." He too is a writer for mmafighting.com and covers other combat sports such as boxing and kickboxing.

5. **Brendan Schaub** and **Bryan Callen** are the hosts of the podcast The Fighter And The Kid. Bryan is a 52 year old actor and comedian and Brendan is a 37 year old, retired mixed martial artist who used to compete in the UFC and now does stand up comedy. The podcast was started in part due to Joe Rogan and Brendan having a conversation on air on Joe's podcast about whether Brendan really wanted to keep fighting.

6. Cattien "Cat" Le is an intern for the podcast, largely responsible for greeting and accommodating podcast guests, providing current event topics, and adding to the dynamic of the show.

7. Chin Yi is the producer for TFATK and is in charge of video editing, sound mixing, video transitions, etc. He's also a musician who posts covers as well as his own original work on YouTube.

Chapter End Notes

So, some big bombs got dropped this chapter; Isak's sexual assault and Even's suicide attempt are out there. I've tried to be respectful about these things while still keeping the events true to the way I'm portraying the characters. I've been lucky to have never had anything like what Isak and Even have gone through happen to me, but
unfortunately have had friends who have, so I kept that in mind while writing this. I
didn't want this entire chapter to be about what happened to either character, because
although it is a factor in their development, it doesn't define them. I know the
transition might've seemed kind of abrupt, but that's kind of my reasoning for it. Also
Even and Isak sharing their trauma has brought them closer together.

As far as the podcasts and mma media stuff goes, I'd go with The MMA Beat over
Fighter and The Kid for keeping yourself up to date on the sport. Brendan and Bryan
are like.......mma adjacent. Fair warning to everyone, Fighter and the Kid gets pretty
blue and outright stupid sometimes so yeah, lol. Also Brendan and Bryan are definitely
left leaning dudes, but i wouldn't put either of them into the PC category. Oh, and a big
shout out to stargirlwnchstr, cause bruh, I was lost on how to actually write a YouTube
video hahah. Alright y'all, give me a comment or kudo if you're feeling it, I'll talk to
you fine folks next time!
Keep It Chill

Chapter Summary

Eva and Isak talk. Isak and Even hangout.

Chapter Notes

First off, apologies for being super late on this one. I've been kind of indifferent about writing, but I'm getting back into it now. Anyways, welcome back y'all! This chapter is pretty much entirely Evak fluff, cause I feel like you guys deserve it. Youtube playlist has been updated! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

32,000 Feet Above the North Sea

Onsdag

Juli 3rd

8:32

A low, rumbling hum had lulled Isak to sleep on the aircraft. He had been awoken by the warm sunlight shining onto his face. He yawned softly, blinking his surroundings into focus. A smiling Eva Kviig Mohn met his eyes. Isak returned the smile with a small upturn of his lips.

“Good morning.”, Eva greeted him.

Isak uttered a small hum and nodded.

“Morning.”, he replied, a small yawn interrupting him.

The group had tried get seats close to each other, but a few ended up dotted around the plane. Isak was glad he had been seated beside Eva. They hadn't seen each other since back in December of the previous year. A lot had happened since then.

“Sooo……”, Eva began.

Isak bit down a small smile.

“You still marrying my best friend?”, The green eyed boy asked.

“I am.”, the strawberry blonde answered, herself and Isak turning to look at the best friend in question. He was sitting with Mikael, the older man nodding every so often and responding. Jonas reached for his water trying to guide the straw to his mouth but only succeeding in poking himself
first in the nose, then in the eye, before getting it right on the third attempt. Isak looked back at his friend, smirking in jest.

“You know, there is time to call it off.”

“The woman let out a giggling scoff, lightly slapping her friend's shoulder. The friends chuckled before resuming their conversation.

“What about the developments in your life? Getting to shack up with hot jiu-jitsu guy for a week?” Isak shook his head, but couldn’t shake private little smile on his face.

“You sound like Eskild you know? We just stayed in the same room ok?”

“Oh, ok. I mean, you guys did get pretty close when we were all hanging out the other night?” Isak squinted and cocked his head.

“We were in a mosh pit. I mean, I feel like everyone was pretty close.”

Eva took a sip of her tea and shrugged.

“Do people usually hold hands and sway in mosh pits?”

“It was a slow song!”, Isak countered, lips tugging upward.

The friend's let loose a short volley of laughter. Isak sighed and looked at his friend. Eva smiled at him.

“We've know each other since primary school Isakyaki. I think I know when you like someone.”

“Well, Evamohn2, I guess if we're using instagram handles this conversation is getting pretty serious.”, stated Isak, nodding in faux seriousness.

Eva smiled widely, pausing for a few seconds before meeting her friend's eyes.

“So, since this is a serious conversation……what's going on with you and Even?”

Isak sighed dramatically, tilting his head back against the seat and closing his eyes momentarily. He lifted his head again, leaning in and lowering his voice.

“We're not like, putting a label on it. It just……..kind of is what it is. We're just keeping it chill. But, don’t tell anyone ok?”

Eva gasped happily for her friend and gave few short, quiet claps. Isak chuckled.

“Be quiet ok!?”, Isak said, smile on his lips.

“He's so handsome Isak!”

The fighter looked back to his new love interest, the man was talking with Vilde and Magnus, obviously keeping the pair's attention with his friendly disposition and demeanor. The blonde boy looked back at Eva and nodded.

“He really is.”

“So spending that week together sealed the deal then?”, questioned his friend.
He shrugged, nodding.

“I guess so. I mean, there was definitely already something there. I um….I actually kissed him when me and Tobi were sort of still dating. Actually Tobi kind of encouraged me to go for it with Even.”

The girl's eyes widened. Isak let loose a small chuckle and nodded.

“Yeah, I was surprised too. But at that point we both knew that it was over.”

Eva hummed her understanding.

“How will it work with him being your coach though?”, she asked.

Isak pushed air from his pursed lips.

“Guess I'm trying not to think about it right now. I mean, I'm not moving gym's if it doesn't work out and I don't think he is either, so…."

The featherweight cleared his throat.

“It's a discussion we probably need to have.”, he admitted to himself and to Eva. “I'm not going to let our…..relationship effect our dynamic. Like, we could breakup or whatever and he's still going to be my coach.”

Eva nodded, glancing back at Even and turning to face her friend again.

“Well I'm happy for you both. And you make a very cute couple by the way.”

A rosy flare bloomed on Isak's cheeks as he smiled and thanked his seat partner. He peered back over his shoulder, catching Even's gaze and laughing as he attempted to subtly wink at him, awkwardly half closing one eye while fully closing the other. The younger man turned back around in his seat, settling in for the rest of the flight.

**Grünerløkka**

**Oslo**

**21:23**

The slowly sinking summer sun had bathed the people and buildings in a orange-red hue, causing Even and Isak to squint as they trekked to the taller man's apartment. Upon arriving back in Oslo, the crew had dispersed. Some people going back to the gym or home and others doing their own thing. The girl and boy squads had agreed to meet back up for dinner around twenty thirty. They'd chosen a hip little spot a few block's down from Even and Mikael's apartment. It was newer, with a bright, young smiling wait staff. Even had flirted rather naturally with their servers; a somewhat gangly, freckled girl with light brown skin and a slightly more stout black haired boy with clear blue eyes and a well trimmed beard.

Isak was surprised at the streak of possessiveness he felt course through him. As Even had been talking to the pair about films they'd recently seen, his newly confirmed beau had wrapped his foot around the leg of his significant other. Neither drew attention to it, but admittedly Even did think it was pretty cute. And kind of hot. Isak himself was a bit bewildered. With Tobias he'd never really
felt the way he did with Even. Thinking of Tobi being happy with another boy made him happy. Thinking of Even being happy with someone else made him want to go a few rounds on the heavy bag. The man in question had just chuckled at something he himself had said, but Isak had to ask him what it was.

“I was just saying how you'll give that waiter a run for his money if you don’t shave soon.”

The shorter blonde ran the palm of his right hand over his jaw, feeling the soft prickle of week old stubble. He shrugged, nodding.

“Yeah, I usually stay clean shaven, cause my beard grows in kind of dumb.”

“Nonsense!”, Even exclaimed. “[I bet you'd look dashing with a nice little five o’ clock.”

Removing his hand from his face, the fighter smiled, looked down as he placed his hands in his pockets. He looked to Even, mirroring the smile on his face.

“Maybe, I’ve only ever let it grow out past a few weeks once when I was like nineteen. I didn’t really like it though so I shaved it off.”

“Can't be worse than mine. I only get it on my upper lip and chin. And it's splotchy. You know Sonja and the boys used to say I looked like a giant, twelve year old pirate when I’d let it grow out.”

Isak giggled at his boyfriend's remark, responding with a joke of his own.

“I mean, you already have the whole fun, overgrown kid energy down so it does fit.”

“Chucking a little shade my way there Valtersen?”, asked Even, smiling.

“Nah, the Sun's still out.”, Said Isak.

The men giggled at each other, Even telling Isak his love of puns and wordplay must be rubbing off on him. The smaller boy rolled his eyes, a grin twitching his lips. The two walked for another block or so, eventually coming to the door that opened into the lobby of Even's apartment complex. They leaned against the wall next to the door. Even had settled his hand over Isak's, his long fingers gently stroking the back of the other's hand. The green eyed man turned his hand over, the pair now running their fingers over each other's palms. Even leaned a little closer.

“So, would I be exhibiting my overgrown kid energy if I asked you to come up and chill for a little while?”

Isak smiled at the question, placing his hand in his pocket and popping out his lower lip as he raised his shoulders.

“Maybe. I think it depends more on what we'd be doing.”

“Ah, I see.”, Even replied, leaning back and pocketing his own hand.

“How does getting high and listening to some records sound to you? Adult enough?”

Isak smiled and nodded.

“Adult…..contemporary?”, he’d done a raise of his eyebrows to punctuate the pun, making Even laugh as he punched in the key code and opened the door for Isak.
“At this rate I’ll be giving you your black belt in puns before you get it in jiu-jitsu.”

Isak chuckled at the joke. Even looked around briefly before placing a large, wet kiss on the other's stubbled cheek. The shorter man smiled, pulling his face away as he chased after Even up the stairs.

*Ok……maybe overgrown kid contemporary.*

**21:36**

**Even and Mikael's Apartment**

Even was sorting through his records. The vinyl was kept on a few oak shelves with some more in plastic milk crates on the right. Isak was standing off to the left, titlting his head trying to guess what some of the albums were. The other blonde let out a little ‘ooh!’ as he found the one he was looking for. The student tried to lean around his coach to see what he'd selected, but Even clutched the item to his chest and shook his head.

“Nuh-uh. It's a surprise.”

Isak smiled, trailing a few fingers down the older man's arm and sighing dramatically before he backed up, crossing his own arms now.

“Ok, I guess we'll find out.”

Even grinned, putting the record behind his back as he kept his eyes on his boy.

“And don't try to peak ok?”

The smaller blonde smacked his lips and strained his brows together. Both chuckled as Even kneeled down, setting the turntable up before lifting his head up and tapping the fingers of his right hand against his chin. He shifted his eyes back to Isak.

“You ready?”

“Go for it dude.”

Even gave a big open mouth grin and dropped the needle onto the record.

*Yo mic check 1-2, 1-2*

*We in the house*

*Yeah come on*

*1992 TLC kickin' off in your Mutha...*

*So ya best be duckin' fast*

*Yo T-Boz is ya being a boss*
Chilli what's up wit' dat sauce

Dis is it

To "T" step on that (shhhh)

Even was bobbing his head, swishing his hips back and forth as he strode back to the couch Isak was seated on. The boy was smiling, his eyes slightly wide as he took in the lyrics.

Thinkin' short of what you got

Better get it while it's hot

Ain't no better love than your own

Unmistakin' urge 2 be sexin' with society

How can you be happy alone

The life-long martial artist sat next to his pupil, opening a small drawer underneath the coffee table that was in front of them. Once this was done he pressed a small button on the side causing the back of the drawer to fall open and a decent sized stash set of weed, paper, a small glass pipe and a wood chillum to be revealed. Long fingers retrieved the vacuum seal jar that held the cannabis as well as the rolling papers. Isak watched as the deft digits expertly broke down the flower into bits and distributed it evenly within the paper. A quick repositioning of fingers and a tilt, tuck, and roll was punctuated by a lick. Even held the finished joint out to Isak. The former champion took the offering and snagged the lighter that was sitting on the coffee. Even giggled, shaking his head.

“We have a balcony. Come on.”

Isak followed the other martial artist out to the small balcony adjacent to the living room. Even unlocked a little latch and swung open the door, revealing a beautiful view of the neighborhood and the skyline of Grünerløkka. Pulling the door shut, Even turned around, grasping the athlete's hand lightly and tugging away the lighter. He struck the flint, a blue orange spear erupted out of the object, catching the end of the joint and almost giving Isak a coughing fit. He pulled back coughing a few times before laughing and leaning his head onto Even's shoulder.

“Damn dude.”

Another laugh followed shortly, Even joining his counterpart. The two settled into a smattering of giggles before coming to a stop. The blue eyed man had just taken another drag, leaning into his boyfriend before pressing his face to Isak's and turning into him, the other blonde moving until their mouths had met. Isak kept his slightly open as he inhaled the smoke from Even. They parted before coming back together, kissing softly before separating again, this time letting their bodies lean into each other. Both men were now perfectly high, their eyes reddened and lids dropped low. The jiu-jitsu practitioner rested his arm around Isak and looked to him.

“Wanna go in and listen to some more music?”

“Definitely.”, Isak concurred.
The two sat down on the couch, Even scooting closer to his fighter. He tucked his head into the other man's neck and made him giggle. The emerald green in Isak's eyes seemed to lighten. Taking the hint he laid down, Even snuggling his head into his chest and neck and sighing happily. Isak ran his fingers through his dense locks, smoothing them along his scalp and drawing an odd noise from the older man. Isak closed his eyes, smiling. The two stayed like that for a while. Well, until the album stopped. The sigh Even let out now was one of mild frustration. Isak chuckles. The larger blonde crawls over to the record player, sticking his butt in the air and swaying his hips. Now Isak laughs, Even catching his eyes and laughing along with him.

The younger martial artist had to admit though, his coach was totally right when he said he had a ‘pleasantly plump rump’. He made his way back to Isak, sitting astride his lap and tucking his head into his neck. The younger man smiled, laying back on the couch while Even cuddled into him. They both relaxed into their high, closing their eyes briefly. Isak could feel his instructor slowly moving his head until he was peering up at him. He smiled, slowly closing his lids before pressing his mouth to his student's and pushing their lips together. They made out slowly, angling their heads to deepen the kiss a few times. Isak's hands came up to rest on Even's shoulders as they kept making out. Shifting a little, the jiu-jitsu black belt rose up, separating his lips from his partner's before lightly grasping his hands on his shoulders and moving them down to his waist. He popped his eyebrows at the smaller man and smiled.

“You can touch.”, he said, eyes crinkled in a open mouthed chuckle.

This made Isak giggle as well, tucking his hands underneath Even's shirt and rubbing them over his back. A few seconds later, keys could be heard jostling against the door, neither man caught the sound though. A turn of a knob and shortly there after a buzzed and arguing Mikael and Chris walked into the apartment.

“-ay more into me I think. Like, we just connected more you know?”, said Isak's striking coach, clearly miffed about being turned down by a girl.

“Yeah. She didn’t choose either of us though did she?”, Mikael commented.

The Muay Thai practitioner smiled and shook his head.

“Dude, who knew Linn had serious game, right?”

Laughing the men turned to see their friends, trying to disengage from one another. Chris let out a wolf whistle.

“Oh no boys, by all means please continue.”

Isak was starting freak out a bit, Mikael noticed a bit, assuaging his worries.

“It’s chill Isak. We aren't going to tell anyone.”

Chris nodded.

“Yeah man, we got you. Although I do have to say, I saw this”, He motioned between Isak and Even with a finger, “Coming a few months ago.”

The younger man rolled his eyes, assuring the couple again their relationship wouldn't get out before going to his room with Chris and starting a game of Fifa, the friends discussing how Linn had succeeded where they failed. Even and Isak had disentangled themselves from one another at
this point, sitting beside each other. Green, red tinted eyes darted to the clock on the record player. It was nearing twenty three o’clock. Isak cleared his throat standing up.

“Well I should get going.”

“Oh”, Even started, “You can just stay here if you want.”

“You're sure?”, The shorter man inquired.

His elder looked over into Mikael's room where he and Chris were jokingly trading barbs verbally.

“Yeah but she wouldn't have wanted to hook up with a snaggletooth looking fucker like yourself anyways.”

Chris flapped his lips and shook his head.

“I have prominent canines you dick. The ladies love it. Now as for your prince of persia hair, well….”

“You can sleep in my room.”, Even suggested although it sounded like a statement.

Isak smiled and said thanks. Supplying an extra toothbrush for his boyfriend, Even began brushing his own teeth, his fighter following suit afterwards. The two cuddled up in bed, Even turning the tv on and scrolling to an episode of Seinfeld. The men fell asleep listening to the comedic writing of Larry David, entwined into each other.

**Juli 4th**

8:54

A slow fluttering of eyelids preceded green irises settling into focus and taking in the room around them.

*That's right, I stayed over last night.*

Isak rolled to his right side, settling his feet on the floor and yawing halfway on the bed before fully standing up and making his way into the kitchen. The he found hid boyfriend completely in his element, making some sort of breakfast dish that required eggs, tomato sauce, and what looked like goat cheese to Isak. He popped himself up on the counter, being mindful of the stove that was turned on low.

“What’re you making for me?”, asked the fighter, sleepy grin stretched on his face.

Even flexed his eyebrows up and chuckled.

“Well I'm making enough for everyone, but it's shakshuka, and I'm making it with goat cheese. What do you think, enough pepper? You should taste it, but it shouldn't be too obvious.”

Isak's boyfriend held the mixing spatula out to him, the other martial artist tasting the mixture. It was good. Perfect nearly. He nodded with enthusiasm. The blue eyed man smiled and smooched him on the cheek before getting back to work, cracking open several eggs into the large pan and mixing the tomato sauce and goat cheese mixture around them before adjusting the heat for the
burner. Turning back to his companion, Even leaned into him, making Isak chase his lips for a short kiss before he backed away at his further attempts. The music that had been playing switched. It was a similar style, but clearly a different artist. One that caught the older's attention if his excited “Aww fuck yes!”, was anything to go by. He cranked the volume on his phone up as he talked to Isak.

“Lillian is going through this EDM phase right now, turning me onto a lot of good shit!”, he slowly increased his voice as he turned the music up. The timed, echoing rhythmic punctuation in the background keeping time with the bassy mix that surrounded it. A few lyrics kicked in before the first bridge of the song.

Like a thief in the night
I'm coming for your heart
I'm coming for your heart
This time it's anything goes
I guess I'm just a selfish ghost

A few more seconds allowed for some buildup before a distorted, heavy beat shook the kitchen. By this point Even had begun dancing, no real skills were being exhibited that Isak could tell, but he could see the enjoyment written on his boy's face and that made him smile. Baiting him into dancing with him by essentially rubbing up against him, Isak finally gave in and began giggling as he danced with Even. The two were pretty much just grinding onto each other at this point. Their hands roaming over their bodies and hips and movements matching up with the music. It was a completely improvisational dance, but also completely natural as well. The song continued for a little longer as it began to reach it's second verse.

I know you're scared
Cause somebody told you I was up to no good
But I'll be here
Ready for the chance to take you out this neighborhood
There's a whole wide world for us to see
The only the you gotta do is follow me

The hook then repeated, the sax following the pair's exaggerated movements as they danced against one another. Their bodies moved in sync with one another without any sort of choreography, just riding the rhythm of one another and the song. This lasted up until the final beat dropped, the two now slowing back down and encircling each other in their arms, Isak's going around Even's waist and Even's around Isak's neck. As the piano in the song drifted out and the
music concluded, two pairs of hands clapped from the door frame, making the couple turn their heads. Mikael and Chris were smiling at the two.

“That's some cute shit right there my dudes.”, Chris said to the younger man in full bro-dude jest. The four friends laughed, Isak and Even still entangled. Isak looked up to his boyfriend.

“Yeah, yeah it totally is.”

Stuff for the fic

YouTube playlist

Chapter End Notes

Hope the fluff was to Everyone's liking. I'll definitely be trying to update more often as well. Give your boy a comment or kudo if you'd like. See everyone soon!

End Notes

Well, how was it? Have I piqued anyone's interest? Ya know, if you had told me when I was 14 that in 13 years I'd be using what I was learning to tell a story about a gay character from a Norwegian teen drama, I would've paused and then said ' Eh, sounds about right.' XD
Ooooohh! I don't how I didn't mention it before. The utmost major of props to Jamz24 for making me not only swoon at Evak as sexy soldier boys, but also giving me the confidence to actually go through with this idea. I 'preciate that shit. Well it's 2 am and I have to get up tomorrow to talk to my mom and pops about gap insurance! Yay! Goodnight you gorgeous mofos.

Works inspired by this: [Fanart] Isak ready for a fight by hjertetssunnegalskap (Crazyheart)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!