A Common Man by the Name of Frank Brevik

The email read: I’m flattered, Riley! Of course I’ll help—i Can definitely meet on Wednesday at two at Foxy Loxy, if that’s a good time and place for you.

Foxy Loxy, an establishment best known for its afternoon line, was reasonably packed. Professor Brevik’s classes were held at Arnold. He was at most five minutes away. I was a tad early (1:36 p.m.) alternating between bites of lemon bread and sips of black coffee at a corner spot near the window. I pulled out my laptop and opened to the questions. I looked across—no chair.

I asked the woman across from me, “Excuse me. Can I use this seat?” And then I had two.

Closer to 1:55 p.m. the professor strode down the street. I saw him in between the shutters. He looked entranced, perhaps guided by the coffee he was about to savor. He donned a gray suit and a buttoned-down white shirt—the modus vivendi for a man of Shakespeare.

I heard the creak of the door. I waved him over, but he didn’t see me. Instead, he kept going toward the back of the store.

‘Restroom,’ I thought.

I edited some questions on my computer. Before I knew it, my lemon bread was gone, my coffee half empty. I frowned at the crumbs littering the plastic wrap. Yonder, no activity was reported.

I obsessed, observing everyone else’s relaxed conversations, that this was somehow the wrong place to come for an interview. Had he forgotten? No mistake, I knew Professor Brevik as a principled and stoic individual. There’s no way he would have stood me up. But he appeared to me a bit preoccupied, focused elsewhere.

It was around 2:03 p.m. by the time Professor Brevik walked out. I smiled watching him get in line. He wrung his hands together and crossed his arms. His eyes looked everywhere but where I was. Was it something I said?

Out of sight, he ordered something from the counter. I couldn’t wave him down. Again, to the back area. I caught a glimpse of light, and he was gone.

I followed, not about to pass up my chance. There was a hallway, and then a door. I opened it and precariously descended a set of wooden stairs. I was hit with a burst of sunlight as I glanced around the garden area.

There was cheerful clamor and the sound of a fountain stream. I heard a voice pierce through it all. “My good man!” I was able to match a face to the voice immediately. I slowly made my way over. He was in the process of eating a cup of yogurt topped with granola.

“Mind if I…?

He telegraphed. “Go ahead, of course.”

I took out my computer and placed it on my lap. The questions were ready. I got the OK to place my phone on top of his Shakespeare stack. It was an intimidating collection. “I’m pretty new to this,” I said. “You don’t mind if I record you?”

“Not at all.” He looked back at the fan. It was obnoxiously loud. “You know, I’m going to try to turn this thing off.”

“By all means.” I said, having no idea what he was thinking to try.

He started to get up. “Bah, never mind.” He laughed. “Don’t think I’m allowed to touch it anyway.” He went back to his snack.

His name is Frank Wildar Brevik. “From Norway, via Lousiana, Manchester, Alabama, God knows where,” he stated. Currently, he teaches classes in English literature, Foundations of Story and Composition. “And, because I asked very nicely, they let me have Art and Adaptation.”

Art and Adaptation, otherwise known as English 221, is where I first met Professor Brevik. The class deals with analyzing the works of filmmaker David Lynch, along with reading and trying to understand the ramblings of Tristram Shandy. He didn’t expect this sort of class would last.

“I taught a similar course at La Grange College,” Professor Brevik said. “They didn’t come from the art background and thought the films were strange. They were not as conscious as SCAD students.”

Professor Brevik loves being at SCAD and the city of Savannah. He’s been at SCAD for two years, going on three. He came to America in 1997 and didn’t expect to stay any more than a year. Since then, he’s had two kids and has taught statewide for seven years. His family still resides in Norway, and he travels there often for the holidays. As much as he misses it, there’s something about Savannah that’s reliable and comforting. I saw him illuminate as he smiled at the sky.

“The idea that we can sit out in October, commenting that it’s unseasonably cool. I mean, that is, 77 degrees and whatnot. We would eat dogfood for a month in Norway to have this kind of weather in June.” He paused. “It reminds me of Southern Europe, famous for enjoying life very much. Eating outside, drinking coffee like you see in front of you.” He stretched out his hand. A server approached us with a bowl of tomato soup. “Ah, that’s me. Cheers.” He took it and sipped silently. “I imagine at least in New York you can’t do this at this time of year. Maybe I’m wrong but um…”

“It’s a little risky,” I confirmed.

Another sip. “I moved to the south for the weather and the food. I’m trying to eat salads these days and soup. Healthy stuff.”

Professor Brevik speaks about six languages: French, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Neo-Norwegian and German. From a student’s perspective, this may elevate him, create an all too sophisticated portrait in comparison to their paltry selves. He believes the exact opposite, having experienced many meaningful conversations with all sorts of majors.

“We discovered that we like the same material that may not be on the syllabus,” he said. “Then we have a chat afterwards: have you seen film XY&Zed. Or this or that Shakespeare adaptation. Then you’ve wasted half an hour of your life in a wonderful way.” His laugh bellowed.

“You a big Ibsen fan?” I asked.

“I’m not. I like George Bernard Shaw better. I respect Ibsen, I really do, but I haven’t read much. It’s strange because he’s from my part of the country, so he should be intimately familiar,” he said. “Shakespeare feels like my big brother or older uncle. Someone I have conversations with every day, weird as that may sound. He gave me my job.”

If Shakespeare was an uncle, I reckoned David Lynch would be the weird grandpa. Professor Brevik was “spooked real good” when “Twin Peaks” first aired and was influenced immediately.

“It left a mark on my sisters’ souls,” he said. “It is in many ways my devotion and maniacal fanboyness of him and his work that allowed me to look at his films as another form of literature.” He was excited, in awe. “There it was: camouflaged as TV entertainment, but deeper than that.”

On Lynch’s style, he doesn’t think it could be replicated. He appreciates Netflix shows that are slight reminders of why he fell in love in the first place, like “Dark” and “Stranger Things.”

“They are onto something aesthetically. The slowness and the dwelling; story wise and topic wise. David is massively influential,” he said. “But if you try too hard, that’s when you get found out, I think.”

Being in a coffee shop, and having coffee be a motif in Lynch’s films, I couldn’t help but ask whether he was proponent of the mentality: as long as it gets me caffeinated. He was drinking tea at the time.

“They came from elsewhere,” he said. “Coffee and wine came from the Arabs. We did something with it. It ok to steal once you do something valuable with it, the same artists do with someone they admire.” He chuckled. “These pumpkin spice lattes, they’re not for everyone. I’m more like Dale Cooper.

I latched onto the idea of stealing. Professor Brevik stated there is more to it.

“To anyone who wants to be an artist, you must have the passion and suffering and sacrifice. Don’t lie, be honest with what you like. You’re plenty skillful.” He seemed to be talking directly to me. “But you can’t put ideas into young people’s heads without intrusion. You only get to paint this or that. You have to try as you might to be original. You can’t be frozen with it.”

I stopped recording at that moment, and we just talked. The way he had loosened over time was extraordinary. He was visibly attentive. I didn’t think to ask the time or think about homework. There was an exclamation, an edict of a troubled parent, and I remembered my purpose there as well.

“Good God just do what you like!”