

Bård: I Felt Her Pain

Her eyebrows were slightly furrowed, her eyes closed and her lips parted. She was trying to mumble the reply to the given question, taking her time to phrase it out correctly. I was not pressing her to hurry – as it gave me time to sort my own thoughts, and besides, we had all the time in the world. And, even though I wanted her to answer my question correctly, I wasn't entirely focused on what she was whispering under her breath. I was substantially more focused on examining her face, as she was changing expressions, during her struggle to form a proper sentence.

"Why does she have to be so beautiful? My mind traitorously provided, not parting my gaze from her. I couldn't look away, even if I wanted to. I was under her spell, metaphorically at least. And the urge appeared again. That force which was clouding my judgment, and thus, making me lean in and press my lips against hers. Nothing felt as infatuating as her gaze, as rapturous as her smile, as honest as her innocent, gentle face.

"Stop thinking nonsense, you freak!" wanted to spit out, as I clenched my right hand into a fist, so tightly that my knuckles turned white instantaneously. I hid my hand behind the back of my chair as much as I could, until it disappeared even from my sight, all in order for her to remain oblivious to my crisis. I wanted her to be unaware just as I wanted this tempting feelings to remain under control whenever I was next to her, but nonetheless despite all my resolved thoughts as to not give in to that feeling, I was not overpowering the wish to touch her cheek.

"Nei, nei," A voice of reason reverberated through my head, suspiciously sounding like my patronizing old brother. My free hand pressed onto my shin – anger and desire proving to be a powerful ammunition – as I was trying to figure out a way to force my boiling blood to settle down.

It was pure luck her words reached me when they did. Otherwise, I would have kissed her without thinking twice of the consequences.

And, it would have ended up in me being disappointed at the recklessness of my actions. As I cursed myself – making a mental note to be more focused around her, as to not make something foolish – I followed her hand writing down the words she had pronounced moments ago, "De skal spille fotball."

"Yes, right. That is correct," I mumbled, having a hard time to regain my conscious composure, my gaze not flickering from her face even when she looked up from the notebook directly at me. Those few words I hoarsely mumbled, which even lacked appraisal, still managed to make her smile. And, in all honesty, that blinding smile was the last thing I wished for at that moment. It was equally as shy as it was perfect, making it even harder for me to look away.

"Not that hard, is it?" I wondered.

She shook her head. "Not as much as I thought it would be."

"Okay, what about," I paused considering what to ask next, "'It will rain tomorrow.' Try that one."

Before she could even confirm anything, or in the case voice out her protest, since we had barely begun working on that formulation, her phone rang. She smiled at me, apologetic, before she fixed her gaze at her phone, a smile not lacking to appear when she read the caller's ID.

Despite the action not being my best one, I was sadly also doing my damndest to catch the name being the curious bird on a wall, I always happened to be at the worst of circumstances, but it was too far away for me to be able to read it. She quickly grabbed her phone, the honesty in her apology clear to me, "Sorry, but I have to take this."

She looked at me – her phone halfway and her thumb hovering over the answer button – as if she needed some sort of approval, so I nodded my confirmation. Anyhow, there was no reason for me to deny her silent request, and besides the interruption was already made. It was not like I minded it, since I could use the time to gather my thoughts properly, and start behaving as an actual professor.

Being in the more secluded part of the library also allowed her to take the call inside – as there wasn't anyone close enough to protest. Clearly aware of the same observation, she swiftly got up from the seat, moving a few steps aside before answering. An honest, gentle smile, making it one of the rare occasions in which one could perceive such a smile, decorated her lips as she greeted the recipient with one tiny, "Hey."

However, the person on the other side of the call didn't seem to like it, or appreciate it half as much as I did, since only moments later she was replying a set of questions, "Actually I am not at the house. I am at the university, studying at the library."

Another short interval of silence followed, before she once again stated, "No, I will not be flying home this weekend. Sorry." Her voice was a barely audible whisper, regret clearly present in it – yet, again, I was the only one I who perceived its presence. The smile she had moments ago was gone, her eyes focused on some distant spot out the window, and her hand was once again making its way to her neck. From all I knew about her, which at the time wasn't all that much, she was growing anxious. Yet, under normal circumstances, the smile was always there.

This time around, it was a mere those last words of hers, when the shouting which came from the other side of the call was something even I managed to catch. It was only one simple "What?" exclaimed a bit forcefully, but it was sufficient to make the smile on Kate's face disappear in its entirety, and in but an instant. As hard as I was trying to detect the tone of voice of her correspondent, as to manage to conclude something out of it, I was more occupied with her constantly changing expression.

Her eyebrows furrowed slightly, and she bit her lip in that same unconscious way which can only be classified as Kate, before replying, "Fred, listen to me. I said I would come over if I can. I won't be able to make it."

The guy on the phone, whose voice seemed to be squeakier than what was considered normal, didn't seem to calm down. In fact, his voice was filled with even more fury than previously.

"But you promised me, remember?!" his voice echoed from the phone, making her cringe. "We would be together every second of every free day was your promise. Or did you forget that promise so easily?"

She sighed at the words, flickering her gaze on the floor, her free hand leveling with her face and she pinched the bridge of her nose a few times before lowering her hand back down.

When it came to me, thousand questions raced through my mind. Who was this Fred and why was she letting him speak to her like that? She didn't deserve to be addressed with such a tone, being the angel she was – no one should be allowed to speak to her in such a manner. I could hear her gasp for breath – trying to obscure it quite effortlessly, I could see her eyes watering – though she batted her eyelashes to get rid of them, but I couldn't manage to do or say anything at all.

It was clear those words injured her more than she let on, and I only wished whoever it was who inflicted them knew it as well. What would he do if he saw her like that? And who was he? Was it her boyfriend? I knew I wished it wasn't and besides she had said she didn't have one. Maybe not with those exact words, but it was certainly insinuated. Or was it?

"She had none, or did she?" I mumbled under my breath, as I was trying to figure out why she would be lying to me about it – or, whether it was just her trying to keep her private life what it was supposed to be, private. It was certainly not my place to I asked her, but it was the fact her reply was not supposed to waver what got to me. Telling me shouldn't have made a difference, she should have said she had one. It pained me I was not considered close enough of a friend to be told the truth.

Her trembling voice brought me out of my thoughts for an instant, but only for an instant. For a moment I felt horrible for even surrendering to believing such thoughts, regretting to have allowed my jealousy to cloud my knowledge of her impeccable intent not to inquire.

Then, "Fred, honey," she mumbled and I felt a pang of sting in my chest, as she took a deep breath before continuing, "I am sorry, but I can't be there this weekend."

I swallowed around a lump in my throat. She just called him honey! I was wrong to think that she didn't have a boyfriend, when obviously she did have one. Why did I even care, when it was her life? I was aware that when I heard her call him honey, as I realized I had stood in the shadows of ignorance, a green snake of jealousy slowly snuck up on me and bit into my heart. "Why didn't she tell me?" I thought. "Why would she hide this from me?"

"You said you would manage." The voice was still persistent, pressing forward. "You said so. I hate you."

She took a breath, as she attempted, "Fred come on. Don't do this to me. Please, Fred." Her voice was but a tremble, her gaze was lost somewhere; and that was when I noticed the shivering of her chin. She was more than shaken, she was beyond just upset.

"I haven't seen you in two months, so I do wanna see you. If you can get it. I hate you right now. Don't call me back."

And then, the line went flat. Kate swallowed audibly, as she put the phone down. She turned her back toward me rather quickly, but not before I could see a glistening tear rolling down her cheek.

I swiftly got up from my seat, moving towards her. When I was at an arms distance from her, I stopped and then, I placed my hand on her shoulder, ignoring the jolt the skin on skin contact sent through my spine, as I inquired, "Hey, are you okay?" It was a stupid question, since I knew the answer already and I fully aware she was nowhere near okay, but how else could I go about it really? I couldn't just hug her, despite my wish to do exactly that. I didn't know if the hug would be welcomed, if it'd be comforting – and, causing additional problems would be the last thing he needed.

As if she could read my mind, the very next moment, she turned around and without facing me she embraced me tightly – her hands settling around my waist, her head resting on my shoulder. It took me a moment or so to recover from the surprise, and hug her back, wrapping my hands around her. I heard a muffled sob, and then the grasp on my shirt increased – her labored breathing a fleeting anxiety under my palms.

I remained silent – it was better than giving false reassurances, and allowed the silence to speak for itself, wishing to know above all how to comfort her. There wasn't anything I could do without knowing what was in that conversation that really got to her so. I could feel the radiating warmth of her body glued to mine, and despite the guilt I felt, I couldn't help but wish to have that embrace on daily basis.

The trembling of her frame was nothing in comparison to her struggles to establish her calm state. I could feel her each move, as we stood there in the embrace, and I wanted to be able to make it all go away and to make her smile as she was smiling only moments prior to the call.

We stood there in silence until her breathing returned to normal and I couldn't bring myself to care about being caught embracing a student. I let go, once I realized she was trying to pull away. As much as I wished to prolong the moment further, and enjoy the warmth of the hug which was sending shivers down my spine, I unclasped my interlocked fingers, and she was out of the hug right away.

"I am sorry," she whispered, her eyes avoiding my gaze.

"Hey, look at me," I began as cheerfully as I could manage, placing my hand under her chin and slowly tilting her head, so she would look at me. "Nothing to be sorry about. Okay?"

"Yeah, thanks for that," she trailed off, stepping back.

My hand fell by my side, yet all I could think was about the sweetness of her voice. It had me wondering how anyone would be able to attack her in such a way, making her cry and not feel remorse.

"We should sit down." I gestured towards the table, and moments later we were back in our seats, only nothing was at it had been at the beginning of the study session.

She closed her eyes, her tear-coated eyelashes resting over her cheekbones. Kate took a deep breath to compose herself. Nothing was as nerve-racking as sitting there beside her without the ability to make her feel better in any way. It would have been nice to make her laugh, but the last thing I thought appropriate was a joke at such a moment.

As silence filled the space between us while she was gulping breaths, I couldn't avoid the boiling thoughts, which sounded awfully close to my brother screaming at me, "Do something, you moron!"

However, before I could even mumble anything whatsoever, Kate just asked if it would be okay to simply continue the lesson. "A little worriedly, and maybe slightly indecisively, I enquired, "Are you sure? We can make a break for as long as you need it."

"I am sure," she replied surprisingly steady, nothing about her voice an indication of her distress. I could see the shaking of her fingers, though, as she reached out and picked up her pen again. "So, where were we?"

A little hesitantly, I repeated the request. "It will rain tomorrow."

I could see she was far from being focused on the words, but I was not planning on patronizing her and thus make a bad thing even worse. She didn't need the pity, she wanted no compassion; leaving me just to wonder as to what that conversation held in between the spoken words as to so silently, yet greedily break her frame.

"De kommer," she began, just to cut her sentence off right away, biting on her lower lip. Her hand wound up on her neck, as she calculatedly tried once again, "Der will..."

She began shaking even more, as I detected a whispered, "That's not it."

Her lost gaze, and the evidence of the tears dried on her cheeks, had me convinced an additional class at another moment would be a much better decision than working to no avail.

"Det kommer til å regne i morgen," she finally mumbled the correct reply, yet with a dosage of uncertainty, and facing me – on her own – for the first time since the hug, she asked, "Did I get it right?"

"Yeah, but..." I wasn't sure how to proceed. Insulting her or making her feel worse was something I wouldn't be able to bear, but my consciousness demanded the words which roamed through my mind uttered, "Shouldn't we just work some other day?"

A shaky breath escaped her lips, as she briefly nodded her confirmation, and began packing up her things from the table. "I am sorry for this."

"No need to apologize, I just hope that whatever the problem is – it gets solved quickly."

"Yeah, me too." She looked back at me, sadness overflowing her features. It was unlike her, or any normal human being to behave in such a mere so slight a fight.

"Whatever it is, it is way more than boyfriend troubles." my mind provided.

I accompanied her out of the library, waving goodbye as we headed in different locations, and then allowed myself to be overwhelmed by the occurrences of the day.