

Bård: I Love You, Goodbye

My heart picked up a few notches when I heard the front door open and then lock shut. I smiled knowingly, it would be only another few brief moments before Kate would step inside. My heart, restored to the glory of a teenager, was beating for that moment. I shied in my seat, dropping the book I was reading over my lap, and flickered my gaze towards the hallway.

"Hey," Kate greeted me the moment her eyes landed on me.

"Hey," I echoed, as she neared me. Tucking a strand of hair behind her ear, she leaned down and planted a fleeting kiss on my lips. When she pulled away, there was a smirk on her lips, and then she murmured fondly, "I never saw you as the sort of guy to sit at home and read books in his jammies. Must say – kind of pathetic. Old man."

In the same teasing manner, I responded, "Must say I didn't expect you to be the kind of girl who sends stingy insults at her boyfriend instead of kissing him senseless."

Gasping, she quirked an eyebrow at me. "I wasn't aware my kissing got you senseless. Such a compliment from you, indeed, is entirely surprising."

I couldn't stop myself from snorting. "You are crazy."

"Takes one to know one," she mischievously provided, shaking her jacket and throwing it on the armchair, along with her purse.

She headed towards the couch again, and before I could process her actions, she was stationed in my arms, with her back pressed against my chest and her head tilted to stare at me, resting over my shoulder. "How was your day?"

"It was alright, rather boring without you around," I admitted.

A shy smile crept on her lips, and she murmured, "Did you at least get some work done?"

"Covered more than enough," I provided. "Which is why I decided to grab a book and wait for you."

"Naturally." And, then her lips were pressed on mine, her hand curling in my hair, half resting over my cheek, and half twirling the short strands around my ear.

Shamelessly, I moaned into the kiss, my arm circling her shoulders in an attempt to pull her closer.

She broke the kiss with a gasp for air, and returned to resting on my shoulder. Taking it as a queue I picked up the book and continued where I'd left off. Engrossed in my read, I hadn't even taken notice when she'd fallen asleep; I only became aware of it, when calling her name didn't provide any response. Unwilling to wake her up, I pressed a kiss on her forehead, smiling at my luck in having her, before I returned to the book, allowing its contents and Catherine's relaxed breathing to lull me into sleep, as well.

I woke up with Catherine cradled in my arms, both of us splayed over the sofa, and my book resting on the floor.

Twisting out from underneath her, I got up from the couch and then leaned in to pick her up. Easily, I gripped her tight and lulled her body in my arms. Catherine stirred only enough to snuggle against my shoulder, and then proceeded to remain asleep. Up the stairs, I headed for my room – not missing a beat and oddly feeling domestic – and pushed the door open with my foot.

Catherine's breath was hot and ticklish over my neck, as was her hair dangling over the back of my arm. By some magic, I managed to move the duvet aside before I placed her on the bed. I made sure she was comfortable, allowing myself a moment to observe how beautiful she seemed all relaxed like that.

Shaking the thoughts away, I pulled the duvet over her and tucked her in. Kneeling over the edge of the mattress – my toes digging in the carpet to keep me upright – I tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and pressed a kiss on her temple.

I was about to leave the room when a hand settled around my wrist.

A croaky voice inquired. "Bård?"

"Hm?" I smiled.

"Stay," came the murmur. I couldn't decline.

Catherine's hair was tangled in my fingers when I stirred to awareness. Her breath was hot at the crook of my neck, tingling the skin over my collarbones in a coolness of its delay. And, the length of her body was flushed against my side, her legs strangely intertwined with mine, aligned with my feet outside the extent of the covers.

I couldn't help but smile, before pressing a brief kiss on top of her head. She smelled like cocoa milk, so alluring I didn't fail to breathe in again, my nostrils flaring along the way. Catherine kept teasing me when I did that, and I was glad she was asleep and wouldn't notice this time around.

My hand slid from her hair down to the core between her shoulder blades, tracing the so skin there in an aimless pattern, stopping shy of the edge of her shirt. I loved how light blue looked against her skin, it was an easy color which showed just how lovely her skin tone was.

"You breathing in my hair is still kind of creepy," she suddenly proclaimed, startling me, as I hadn't noticed her waking up. In spite of myself, I did tense underneath Kate, until her hand trailed up my chest and settled reassuring over my pulse point. "The order to land your shampoo still stands if you want to take it this time around."

The hub of breath I released couldn't be helped, and I responded, "I think I like it better on you."

"That's even creepier," she stated, but I could hear the fond amusement in her voice. "What time is it?"

Glancing at the clock on the nightstand, I replied, "Six thirty."

"Good," Kate mused.

A few moments of silence passed, and I thought our conversation was over for the time being, but she seemed to have something additional to say.

"Bård?"

"Hmm?" I inquired.

She raised her head to lock her gaze in mine, and tentatively said, "I love you. You know that, right?"

My heart galloped in my chest unevenly for a couple of moments, and I paused, before reigning in my surprise, and stating, "I know. I love you, too."

Kate smiled at me shyly, adding, "I know. Now, I am gonna go back to sleep, and you keep being the creeper you are, without disturbing that."

I smirked, but provided no retort and she settled back over my shoulder and she led against me, cuddling closer. I did the same in return, smiling at finally having said the words I had longed to say for months. Kate being the one initialized it, gave me that much joy.

Kate's decision to spend the day working in the library, explained with an insult to my inability to allow her some space, was at the same time the best and the absolute worst decision she had made. Worst, mostly because, I indeed spent the whole day pacing up and down and pacing around the house in a fruitless aim to find her. Best, since a mere spending half the day in aimless wander, I decided it would be about time for me to do something.

Something, which allowed me to work and simultaneously think about her, was preparing a surprise, and it ended up being the well enough cooked meal and the neatly decorated dining table I was fussing over during a good portion of my day. It was, in my opinion, decent enough to pass, and I was happy for that. Catherine's reaction was something I had to work on preparing for, in case it turned out to be a negative one.

Deciding on a more romantic theme, I settled on dimming the lights to the minimum and ended setting up a few candles here and there to heighten the mood. I felt ridiculous given I was focused on every little detail a tad too much, but it didn't matter in the end, as I got the design I had in mind done.

Knowing the time Catherine planned on stopping by and her impeccable timing which never faltered, the wine was already poured and the food cooling, when I heard the front door opening.

The distinct thud of Kate's purse falling to the ground reached my ears next and I smirked to myself, picturing her expression of hatred for gravity at the time.

When she stepped in the room her expression carried a discomfort which I recognized as one of a long day of work, and she seemed focused on her feet, her eyebrows scrunched. Upon looking up, her eyes roamed the room hazily for a few brief moments before she seemed to realize her surroundings, and a small, pleased smile eased on her face. Her tiny gasp contained more emotion than what I should had ever imagined to want, "Bård."

"Hey," I greeted.

Her smile spread, reaching for her eyes and making them light up, when she inquired, "For me?"

I nodded, but instead of replying the obvious, I provided, "I would have reenacted our first meet," I shrugged, as to further illustrate my being against the aforementioned idea, "but I didn't think you would appreciate being pushed down on the pavement a mere whole day at the library."

"You were entirely correct," she provided, mocking all honesty behind those words, though the statement was indeed true. At that point I realized it was about time I finally admitted to myself I was too in love with her to stay immune to her English sense of humor. Thus, I cracked a smile.

Picking up the bottle from the table, I shook it midair, and stated, "Come on, I got your favorite."

"Is that so?" she provided, one eyebrow eloquently and elegantly raised.

Nevertheless, she stepped inside the room with a smile plastered on her face. I simply grinned as a response without a moment of delay.

Kate was set on going out with Adela despite my protests. And, I knew she was entitled to it and didn't mind it one bit, except for the part where it ruined my a noon plans. In all fairness, when said plans included lounging on the couch and chatting, I knew Kate would banish them entirely. I also knew I wasn't going to be able to fight her wishes off, the moment Kate said she had been neglecting Adela of late. The friendship meant a lot to her, and in consequence to me as well. So, instead of pouting, I decided to join the company.

Which was how I ended up listening to their chatter and bickering for three hours straight without getting a word in. Not that I minded. They were hilarious, and I got to ogle Kate as much as I wanted without her snarky comments about being annoying in my liking her.

I was enjoying myself, all in all, until –

"So, are you all packed for Monday?" Adela wondered.

Kate was about to reply, "I – uhm," only I didn't allow it.

"Monday?" I inquired, eyes focused on Kate, as I felt my heart lurch in my chest. "What's on Monday?"

My throat went dry when it was Adela who answered. "Well, she is going home." And, as though she took notice of my expression only then, she tumbled on, "Oh, God. You didn't tell him, did you?" I spared a glance at the girl, only to find her looking at Catherine incredulously. At least, I wasn't the only one realizing the wrongfulness of the unsaid.

"Not yet," Kate sarcastically noted, and though usually I would have found it endearing, I now saw it only as provoking.

I headed despite myself.

Kate either missed my attitude, or ignored it in favor of asking, "Could you give us a moment, Adela, please?"

"Yeah," Adela responded, and then just walked away, further down and out of earshot.

"You are going back home on Monday?" I asked almost right away, flickering my eyes from where they had trailed a mere Adela, to lock on Catherine's gaze.

Sighing, she stepped forward slightly, and replied, "I do have a thesis to defend in three weeks, Bård."

It was a calm response, though my mood clouded my judgment enough to force me in perceiving it as reprimanding. So, instead of addressing the fact of my being defensive, I used an attack instead, "Yeah, I am aware," I scolded, "but I still thought you were going to be here for at least two more weeks."

"I can't spare that time, as you well know. You have been in my shoes, and you know the obligations," she replied, hastily.

Shaking my head in the clear disappointment I was reflecting, I inquired, too fueled for my liking, "When were you planning on telling me?"

"I don't exactly know, Bård." She shrugged, tilting her head to the side in the process, and hesitantly providing, "I was just waiting for the right moment, I guess," she paused for a brief moment, flickering her gaze away, before locking it with mine, "just –"

Not letting her finish whatever she had in mind, I snapped, "Just what? Huh, Kate?"

"I just wanted for us to hang out peacefully without that looming over our heads."

Not trying to reign my anger in, for whatever reason, "What you wanted? How about what I wanted in return? Or was it that my desires didn't matter?"

"Bård, please," she pleaded, "I only wanted us to be relaxed for a little while longer."

"And, you thought everything would be alright until the day before the flight –" I waved my hands in the space between us, flexing my fingers, and snarled, "when you'd just boomshare it with me out of the blue?"

She opened her mouth to speak, nothing but a weak syllable of distress slipping past.

In my anger, not good enough of an excuse, but certainly good enough of a drive, I added, "Or, were you just planning on leaving without saying a word like that morning? You can't sneak out of a relationship, Catherine."

I regretted the words immediately, even more so when she drew in a shaky breath lowering her gaze to presumably look at her shoes, and then closed her mouth to swallow around nothing.

I reached out towards her, but she ducked away from the touch, and not meeting my gaze, whispered, "Given your cordiality, maybe it would have been better."

With those words she turned around to walk away, and I reached out again to snare her wrist. I wasn't letting go all that easily. She stopped, never turning around to face me completely, and I croaked, "Kate, I am sorry."

"Forget it, Bård," she provided, tugging her arm free from my grip.

"We both knew this wasn't going to last. You don't have to stick around pretending anymore." Not trying to understand what she meant by it, I was about to move and hug her, when she looked at me.

The defeat I was met with had me stopping mid step, and her words riveted me to the spot completely. "I am sure I will manage to find my way to the airport alone, professor Ylvissaker."

With those words, she turned around again and continued her stride. I couldn't confirm for sure, as I only thought it were my senses which provided the illusion of Kate saying, "Goodbye, Bård."

Nevertheless, I tried calling out one more time, "Kate, please."

She never turned back, and when Adela joined by her side and threw a worried glance over her shoulder in my direction, I knew Kate wasn't planning on waiting for me.

I remained standing there, looking at her retreat, until I lost her in the sea of people – trying to ignore the nagging void in my chest.

We were overAnd, it was my fault.