

Bård: Hangover

Somewhere in the misty corridors of my hangover mind I could hear a sound that most people would classify as the doorknob. And so I would have I had just been stretched out on the living room sofa still trying to recover from last night's pain. However the drink had played with my mind, so that even though on some subconscious level I was registering the doorknob entirely, I was completely incapable of processing it as information. Therefore I just dried away again, wishing that the annoyance could simply stop. Covering my head with a pillow was the best idea that came to my mind, a solution that would maybe somehow shield me from the world of reality for a little while longer. And that was what I recall as last.

Soon, or it seemed to be soon as it that, a terrifyingly familiar voice was ringing in my ears and trying to reason with my hypothalamus quite unsuccessfully.

"Bård, Bård damn it, wake up!" - My brother was yelling while leaning over the sofa. His concerned voice was echoing in the room. As a consequence to that I immediately knew the expression that was surely painted across his face. He started shaking my shoulders as I was trying to unlock my eyes. I didn't even have the time to wonder of how it came to be for him to appear so suddenly.

"Bård... Jesus please!" I heard him cry out at one point. Every single of those loud words felt like a needle stuck in my brain.

I rubbed my eyes while trying to address my brother a pleading. At the very first look a beam of light hit my senses and the sharpness of the pain made me shut my eyes quickly. Apparently this was an action that had to be repeated a several times before having the needed effect. As soon as I could register my environment I noticed Vegard's worried face over my head. Just as I had pictured it. His strands of dark hair out of their place as always.

"Oh thank God!" - He shouted as far as his voice could reach. And it could reach large extents. Even though I usually approved of his vocal capabilities, I was in no mood or position to take it in right now.

It was severe blow to my nerve cells so even though my head was splitting and I could barely speak, I forced myself to say: "Oh, man... Vegard not so loud, please..."

My voice came out rusty and husky. Man, I've drunk more than I can bare. How did that happen, when it doesn't happen very often at all? I slowly pulled myself up on the sofa, trying to make as few abrupt moves as possible; since every single one of those hurt more than an arrow through the heart.

However Vegard's worried look soon gave way and he changed it into a serious one.

"Oh my God you're drunk as hell!" - he freaked out. - "And I went home to fetch my keys because I thought some shit happened. Fuck Bård, why the hell would do that?"

His voice was still that loud; unbearably so. I placed my hands on my ears pressing hard trying to somewhat ease the pain Vegard's voice was causing. Even though my throat was sore and it hurt like hell; I had to insist once again, in vain hopes that he would maybe pity me and lower somewhat on the decibels:

"Damn Vegard! Not so loud, I beg you..." - I pleaded while trying to see if I had managed to cause some sort of reaction on my brother. I knew that I had, when he changed his angry look into a gentle one. It showed that the remarks and the fight were less for him. At least I could bare it then. His eyes radiated worry as much as pain and I knew he cared. He always did, hell that was pretty much the job of an older brother. At least, that is what he constantly said. He worriedly shook his head slightly and headed somewhere.

"Where are you going?" - I asked; my voice still robust, trying to turn my head to look at him. I imagine that he realized that I was incapable of turning my head so to fix my gaze on his, since the very next moment he returned back to my sight saying: "I am going to the kitchen to make you the best goddamn cup of coffee you have ever tried in your life. You, on the other hand, are going upstairs to take a shower and sober up."

And he once again moved towards the kitchen; but I stayed put on the sofa. I couldn't move even if I wanted to. Besides, I didn't want to. I was thinking on leaning back in the sofa, when I heard my brother's voice from the kitchen - as if he could predict what I was about to do - shouting:

"Don't even think about it. Do it, Bård. Go and take a shower now. Or I swear to God I will start singing with my full voice."

I rose from the sofa in an instant; grunting at the pain of an ort, whispering to myself: "Damn, he can be really irritatingly persistent sometimes..."

"I heard that..." - Vegard added from the kitchen.

I shook my head at how well we knew one another. I climbed up the stairs slowly, one at a time. It felt as if it had taken me more than 10 minutes to get to the bathroom and enter under the shower. Let the water fall all over me, wetting my hair. At first I was feeling the same pain in my head, but soon it stared to so on. It helped me a lot; even the shower was the last thing I wanted or had in mind to do. I changed my clothes and climbed down the stairs, returning to the living room.

Vegard was already there, waiting for me. Two cups of coffee were laid down on the table. When he noticed my presence he turned his head towards me; his look worried completely as always. Being the older one he was the one that took care of me, helped me in everything so even though we were grown-ups now; the worrying part still came to him naturally. I worry for him as well, but he could be called somewhat overprotective. His words interrupted my thoughts:

"Are you feeling better now?"

I leaned in the armchair, exhaling softly and turned towards Vegard, saying:

"Much better, I think."

Vegard's lips spread in a smile, making me believe that maybe just once we could hang out properly without discussing troubles, problems and work. However the next moment, drowned my thoughts and hopes, Vegard's eyebrows turrowed and he bit his lip.

That was his tell. It meant that he was considering how to begin. I knew that soon enough he would start a conversation which would be inconvenient for both of us and might even end with a heated discussion. Becomes despite all, we never truly fought about anything. It is how we were.

He was my big brother and he cared for me. I understood that and I tried to respect his thoughts. It was just that sometimes he could push my limit somewhat. And given the situation I would either love it or hate it. He has always been there for me about everything and I despised contradicting him, although sometimes it was a requirement. If I didn't he would continue his over-protectiveness.

And that just made me feel sort of incapable of taking care of myself. Yeah, I could slip here or there, make something crazy and stupid from time to time; but hell everyone does that. Why wouldn't I?

Suddenly, my brother's deep voice spread through the room, reaching my ears. Showtime. Again...

"Why did you do it, Bård? What is going on?" - He turned his head, steadying his gaze on mine; concern trembling in every syllable uttered. That worry in his voice and the sadness in his eyes struck me to the inmost depth of my heart. It pained me to see him so distressed and even more so, because I knew it to be my doing. I couldn't bare his look fixed on mine so steadily waiting for an answer, so I turned my head and fixed my eyes on some random tree out the window. And even so I could still feel his eyes fixed on mine, expectant for an explanation. He wasn't going to stop starting until he has received a reply. He was persistent at that.

I took a deep breath, trying to speak. But no words came out. There was nothing I could say, and I sheepishly opened and closed my mouth. He went on in his demanding tone, trying to encourage me as well as force me into an answer: "Answer my questions, Bård. Go on..." - He tried once again, this time around more successfully.

"Nothing is wrong, I just..." - I meant to say that I wished to blow off some steam, but I was interrupted by my brother's voice:

"Nothing? No, no, no... No, we are experts on nothing; this isn't nothing! Bård, what's wrong?"

"Nothing"... I said, keeping to my side of the story, childishly stubborn. Which was true all things considered. I did just want to blow off some steam, having worked on the papers all day long. My body required it and it managed to help, despite the painful ending. I went on to elaborate the reasons for the consequences that my brother witnessed:

"I was working, checking tests and stuff and kind of got pissed... So I went out for a walk, ended up getting drunk..."

But he didn't seem to believe my side of the story since he said:

"Are you sure that was the problem? Bård be honest with me." And here we go again, starting to discuss my past and the ex and who knows what or why... Quite typical.

Just as I could foresee, Vegard then added: "You still think about her, don't you?"

And there it is again. The same question, leading towards the same debate; a debate we have held for over a year constantly. I understood his immense worry, but talking about pain and being reminded of it isn't really the brightest and most effective way of curing it.

"Vegard, we have been through this a thousand times..." - I said, while every recollection of the event stroke me again with the upmost of intensities, bringing it all back to life as if it was yesterday. And her leaving strangely wasn't the worst thing in all of it, it was the loss of my brother. I regretted above all. I lost the person I admired and looked up to, the person that new everything about me and the person that could always make me smile, no matter what. Even though it was only for a little while, it had scarred me beyond repair.

I never, however, told him or anyone about it; because him I didn't want to hurt and other people I simply didn't trust.

"Oh, yes, I know. And we will be pouncing on this subject for as long as it takes you to decide to open up and admit what I already know..." - He expressed himself while waving his hands up in the air as he always did. He just seemed so confident in his right now proud that he had made the right conclusion. If only he knew, I couldn't go through telling him not at that point at least. I just wouldn't be able to do it. I knew that my voice would break at the first line.

Not because of my own feelings; I mostly feared hurting him. Because I knew how hard it was for him as he found out the truth, blaming himself for not being there for me when he should have. It made him miserable - that the big brother he was - that he wasn't there to give support at the most difficult of times. I didn't blame him, he had every right to think what he thought. I could be a really bad partner sometimes.

And he would have been right, had not my relationship with you been so serious. Just it seemed like a horrible idea to open up old wounds and tell him everything; bringing back the pain again. He did care for me; but I cared for him as well. Hell, he might have been the over-protective brother, but I would do anything for him as well. At least, enough to not wanna make him feel worse about himself. I sighed as I said:

"Look Vegard, I got over Maya a month or so ago as she... Just like I told you before. Okay?"

He remained silent and seeing that he wasn't about to start speaking soon, I said:

"It hurt like hell for that month or so; but I am not going to spend my entire life crying over someone who didn't deserve me in the first place..."

I though these words were finally convincing enough and everything seemed to suggest it was correct. I was genuinely persuaded that I had finally managed to do it - explain it all to him. But I jinxed it with such thoughts, since as soon as he spoke I realized that I couldn't be more wrong. As if all the words I uttered just radiated from his ears and evaporated in thin air.

"Bård, you know. You have to get over her. Start dating other people and go back to being your old self. You must promise me that..."

"Jesus, Vegard have you been listening to a word I said? I am over her, goddamn it. So, can we just stop talking about it? It is..."

I was going to continue, but I realized that this argument was heating up way too fast and came to the conclusion that it would be best if I just got up and left the room before it turned into a mess. And that I did, heading towards the kitchen, completely ignoring the glare Vegard undoubtedly shot at me.

When I stepped into the kitchen, I tried to hear whether Vegard was moving at all. I opened a cupboard, taking a glass and reached inside the fridge taking a bottle of water. When I finished pouring the water in the glass, I knew that he was behind me. I could hear him breathe and I could feel his eyes fixed on me. Before I got the chance to turn around toward him, he spoke:

"See, what you just did..." - He said, taking a dramatic pause in the middle of that mess. That hurt, hurts you still..."

He was spot on. It did hurt, but it wasn't the part he thought that did. I turned around, returning the gaze, while leaning on the counter; with the glass of water in my hand. That didn't stop him, he just went on:

"And don't get me wrong. I do think that if you spoke about it to some body, mind you I don't say to be to me, you actually might feel a bit better. That is all I am saying now."

"Good..." - He said, while leaving it at that. Okay?"

"Okay..." - I replied, clearly worried, but at least reluctant to continue fighting a war he couldn't win. This secret was mine and only mine to keep and to carry the burden of.

We got back in the living room, taking our previous positions. We both remained silent, just sitting for quite a while. Who knows what Vegard was thinking, but my mind was blank. It was him that interrupted the silence:

"Your hair is back to normal finally. It is hard to get used to you like that again, as er all that priest look you had going on for a while..."

"Hah, Vegard..." - I burst out in laughter. With irony in my voice I continued: "That is a great conversation starter..."

"Yeah, I thought so too... And, we did start a conversation so I'd say it did the job credibly..." - He said teasingly. - "Wouldn't you agree?"

We both started chuckling at it. Through the chuckle I said: "Yeah, I suppose it is..."

A er out laughter mollified, Vegard went on saying:

"Is that what you were celebrating last night then? Your hair being grown back to normal?"

"No, I haven't done that yet... Wanna do it?"

Vegard nearly rolled his eyes. "A er your flasco from last night, and the waking up from this morning..." Just wouldn't recommend it brother..."

We both started chuckling at this statement and I was glad of it. We haven't done that in a long while and I have really missed that brotherly connection we shared. Hell I missed my brother more than anything. Our conversations and our sharing everything. This year was just us being close, but not as close as we used to be.

This brightened my mood, since it seemed that maybe things were going to get back to normal. That was bound to happen sooner or later and I truly hoped that it would be sooner, rather than later.

Seeing my brother glad of the irony of the drinking flasco outcome and laughing over it seemed like the best thing that has happened to me in over a year. I desperately needed my friend soon. I needed my brother and I needed my support.

I needed the guy that thought me what life meant, that showed me the meaning of love and that managed to solve every one of my problems. That person that was always there for me no matter what and the guy who could understand me no matter what. I needed him badly. I didn't want to feel this dreadful sense of loneliness any longer. Given that it was so hard to focus on anything knowing that he wasn't there to keep my back, my biggest wish was that things cleared up and we got back to normal.

Hell, this entire situation proved to be an amazing distraction, seeing that I completely forgot to ask what brought him here. We didn't have anything planned as long as I could remember and I didn't recall calling him the previous night. I was drunk, but I still remembered every particular moment. I knew that my phone never reached my hands as er got home.

"So what is he doing here?" - This thought swiftly crossed my mind. I took a sip from my cup, while Vegard was sitting silent on the sofa staring out the window. I put the cup back on the table and I asked:

"Anyway, what is it that made you stop by today? We didn't have anything planned, so what is going on?"

Vegard snapped out of his thoughts at my words and turned his head towards me:

"Nothing is going on... Why?"

"There must be a reason why you are here right now..." - I continued to insist, not doubting my own judgment in the slightest.

"No... No particular reason at all..." - He continued, stirring his gaze away from mine, thus confirming my suspicions. - "I just wanted to drop by..."

"No seriously, Vegard. Tell me..." - I insisted.

However Vegard didn't seem to wish to reply. As a mode of escaping this line of conversation, he returned back a question:

"Jesus Bård, why are you being so investigative today? Can't I visit my brother without having a hidden motive or a secret reason to do so? You know simply visit him because I want to say 'hi' or just because I want to see him, check in on him..."

I smiled at his words. I knew what he said wasn't true. He always was a lousy liar, but even if he had been good at it; him directing his gaze away from mine constantly would have been an indication enough. Besides, it is not like it hasn't happened before. It has so many times and it was always the same reason.

He had these questions roaming in his head and he simply didn't know how to ask them. Couldn't get his thoughts out - either because they were far too confusing or shameful for him. Either way he required an encouragement. So I gave him a little nudge to make him feel more comfortable and said:

"Oh, come on, Jesus, Vegard it can't be that bad..."

A er a small break and a deep sigh, he started mumbling like a lost little boy: "Well, look... Bård, I just wanted to... Like, ugh..."

And then he froze in the middle of the sentence, changing his mind again and trying to turn to a completely dissimilar thing, hoping it would be his way out of the situation.

"Ratings from last night show came in..."

I knew that was probably true, but it wasn't the thing that was tormenting him. Kind of skeptically I asked:

"The ratings? Is that what you wanted to tell me?" The disbelief was traceable all over my voice.

"Ahm..."

"No, Vegard... You are not here for the ratings. What's going on?"

"Nothing, I just thought you might be interested in hearing the ratings. Clearly I was wrong..."

He seemed so reluctant to speak about it, that I was genuinely beginning to fear that there might be some enormous problem. My curiosity was so peaked, my nerves so tense that I didn't even realize that the headache I had was long gone.

"I would love to hear the ratings. You know - HICARI!" I loudly emphasized: "You could have done that over the phone, you know? But since this is so not about last night's show..."

My persistence got cut out in the middle of line, Vegard continuing with the masquerade of covering up and concealing the truth, which he initially wanted to share. This was turning into a bizarre situation and that was rather obvious when he said:

"No, but I wanted to do it personally..."

"Vegard..." - I said, staring directly into him, my voice turning into a taunting intonation. - "I have known you long enough. You might be able to fool other people, but I am your brother. I know how you tick. And, something is so... What's troubling you?"

Seemed like my words hit a nerve at last, since Vegard started opening up. Or maybe he got sick of the entire situation as well and realized that he should just spit it out and get it over with. That was a er all the reason for his visit.

"I think that you will consider this to be childish, stupid or maybe insane even..."

The last thing I wanted to do was to interrupt him, since I feared that he might not be willing to continue to interact; but he set that line so perfectly that I just had to make a joke out of it. So, with slight hesitation I said:

"Vegard, have you been absent for the last what, couple of decades? Childish and insane is pretty much our living; maybe even our motivation..."

We both smiled at that, and then he continued without me encouraging him again: "Anniversary with Mary is coming up soon. And I don't know what to buy for her. My ideas are all wasted..."

I smiled at the relief this answer brought to my shoulders. It was so astonishing, considering that I hadn't even noticed it, until it was gone. Since the problem was not of the magnitude I considered it to be, I sighed. It was so typical for my brother to exaggerate such events. All the while Vegard was closely observing my reaction and as soon as I was back to normal, I said:

"Oh, Christ. That was the problem? Vegard you freaked the hell out of me. I thought 'God, who knows what has happened?', so never do that again. Are we clear?"

"Sorry, didn't want to freak you out..."

"It is fine. Now, Mary and the gift thing..." - I said and a er a pause continued: "Have anything in mind?"

"Hell, yeah... But I have given her all that already. I want something new, something like her..."

"Sty and naïve?" - I teased.

"Well, yeah. It is bad to say that my wife is shy and naïve, but that is exactly what I want..."

I paused to consider a suggestion. "Have you considered a trip to a spa center or maybe some remote abandoned romantic little house? Hell, even the cabin would do the job."

He smiled at that and added: "Yes, course I have. I don't know if she would like it..."

"Oh, Vegard, come on. If I can tell that she would love it, then so can you..."

"Are you sure?" - He knew I had a point, but that was him. Overthinking every little detail, as though that would actually change anything.

"I am positive, yeah. But if it makes you feel any better you can throw in a nice necklace and some flowers to the bargain. I am sure she would love those..."

"Yeah, she would. But I have given her both previously..." - He mumbled.

"I know, but they were never accompanied by a romantic trip with just the two of you..."

"What do you mean the two of us? We have to take the kids as well..." A selfless thought came to me. "Sure, you could do that. Or maybe you could just leave them with their uncle. He is lonely enough in this big house and would love to have some visitors at last..."

"Are you sure about that?"

"I am offering, aren't I? Besides it would be a problem solved..."

"Good. Agreed?" - He uttered, a er slight consideration.

"Agreed..." - I confirmed.

"Okay..." - He just stated once again.

We stayed sitting in the silence for a little while, both of us finishing our coffee. Vegard was happy that we came up with a solution for his problem. I was glad that we didn't fight as much as I thought we would. It was a win-win situation.

Then all of the sudden, Vegard placed his hands on his knees, decisively looking at me. A tiny smile crossed his lips, just before saying: "Anyway, I should get going. I stayed for far too long anyways. Mary and I promised the kids that we'd take them to the park together today..."

"Wait, Mary is at home? Why isn't she at work?" - I asked, since I was confused. Mary was waking more than me and she was her mother, always not her hot heels at work as things. I don't find myself asking her to slow down a little worried, but the woman was a workaholic.

"She has the week off. The Physics Institute is closed for the next two weeks. Giving its employees the long deserved holiday, apparently..." - He said mockingly. A er a short break adding: "Not that I am complaining or anything. It is nice to have Mary around home, from early in the morning till late at night. You know now that she is home I realized how much I have missed her..."

He sighed, his gaze lost somewhere in the open thin air, as he went on: "I feel like a teenager again. As if I am in love for the first time, it is strange that I have even forgotten how much I love her. When I woke up this morning, all I wanted was to spend the entire day in her embrace..."

"Oh, man. It's gotten worse..." - I commented softly. Soon a er those words Vegard's confused gaze was fixed on my face and he addressed me a question: "What's gotten worse?"

"You and your love for Mary. It is like when you were telling me you loved her, instead of just telling her. Why didn't you tell her these things?"

"Damn it, Bård. Is it a sin to love my wife?" - Vegard reacted defensively, like he always did when it came to Mary, shooting the question in my direction with an angry tone.

Given that I predicted this outburst long before it happened, without even being taken aback I immediately said:

"No, I didn't say that. But, instead of wasting your time with me here why the hell don't you go and spend your day with your family. We can hang out together some other time. Besides, it is not like we don't spend enough time on the show anyways. And just say 'hi' to Mary and the kids from me..." - I said. His lips were still a bit open. I could see Vegard's face lit up at those words. It is like it was that he waited to hear from the beginning. He hastily got up from the sofa and headed towards the hallway. While he was tying his shoelaces, I asked: "How are the kids by the way?"

"Jane is still playing with the doll you got her for her birthday. She doesn't let her out of her sight and still hasn't even looked at our gifts, which is a bit offensive. Matthew is still as mischievous as ever, waiting for his uncle to stop by and play catch with him. You know Matthew told me that I am horrible at playing catch..."

"He is right..." - I said hastily interrupting Vegard in the middle of his line.

"I know, but it still hurts so much. He wants to play it with you and I kind of hoped that I could play catch with my son one day despite the fact that I am horrible at it. So I suppose, I can't get over the fact that my son prefers you as a team member..." - He added when he got up.

His face went blank for a moment, that it allowed me a free window frame to say: "Oh, just leave that stupid nonsensical talk aside. Course he loves you more as a team member, just not for games. Now go and have fun, before I throw you out of my house!"

He grabbed the door handle and left with a smile. I closed the door behind him. As I stepped back into the now silent living room, I directed my look at the pile of exams spread on the table waiting to be checked.

"I should get to work..." - I mumbled to myself, as I pulled the chair out and took a seat.

I finished checking the exams much sooner than I had planned or even expected. It seemed such an easy task once I was done. I pulled out the results, so that comments could be sent via mail. As a result, some of the tests were rechecked and when the final results were published, each and every one of my students could finish the ending of the new year.

It all went swiftly and it was over with. The worst week of the year ended and the beginning of a new academic year was just around the corner. The last free day was spent in preparation for the long awaited beginning.

On my way to the university, I realized that I was entirely happy that I would finally have something captivating to do. A new academic year for me meant new classes, new work and new distraction. Something I desperately needed. Something that would certainly take my focus.

I could feel my lips stretching into a smile, as I stepped into the amphitheater for the first class of the year.

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