Catherine: Surprise

Irritation was spreading though my nerves the entire morning. Well, actually the morning could be considered as night since I was up at 5 am and woke the entire house along the way. My impatience was going to that extreme as if I was in front of a life changing event. Not that this new beginning wasn't important. It just wasn't that important. My anxiety was so noticeable and obvious that everyone in the house asked me whether I was fine at least three times. Adela was actually so concerned about my state that she kept checking on me every five minutes.

She was kind of getting on my nerves with that. I knew she meant well, but it was just adding up to the frustration I previously felt. Given that she kept on interrupting my already messed up thoughts was blowing away the only few drops of concentration I had in me. And it was what was driving me crazy.

Something about all this was off, since I felt this tension in my back from the moment I had woken up. Not even the half hour conversation on the phone with mum managed to help. I was just trying to make her speak, creating a distraction for myself, but she was not that eager to provide one. She wanted to know my thoughts and feelings, and that didn't help my state. Fred grabbing the phone from mum and trying to share everything that had happened to him while I was gone; somewhat managed to improve the situation and actually to make me smile.

This feeling was most likely due to a new environment and probably somewhat of both the eagerness and the fear of fitting into the group in the university. I was the only one who knew no one there, aside from Adela. However, she wasn't in my group, she was even an entire other section, so the thought that most of the time I would be left alone to find my way for myself was the thing that was clinging over my head. That was the thing that had me on edge. Not knowing anyone and being alone.

Now, I was rerunning the scenes from this tense morning in my head throughout the entire time while I was awaiting for the class to begin. It was the weirdest, the most stressful and most exhausting situation I had ever had to put up with. And it would have all been better had I just bothered to relax and focus on some useful task instead of just going through ridiculous thoughts the entire morning. I recalled how I was all messed up and spent the morning running up and down the room without a pause.

I was even so stressed out that I even asked Adela to draw me a map of the university as a help for finding my way. It was simply a moment of weakness and it was extremely pathetic and I hated myself for it. Adela didn't seem to mind doing it. In fact she did it with much pride. She didn't prove to be a good painter, even though she did try immensely.

Reviving the scenes from this morning made me realize how ridiculous I have been. Worrying over nonsensical things. It is not mandatory to find friends on the first day and besides Adela proved to be a very good possibility. I would have to get to know her better, of course, but for the time being she was quite nice. I honestly hoped that she would prove to be a worthy person and I hoped that we will grow to become great friends. It would be a shame after the great beginning.

The silence in the amphitheater was strange. And that struck me as a thought after I stopped pondering on my behavior from earlier in the day. Quite a lot of students and none of them speaking. Was this a traditional grave moment of silence? A moment of sadness before a beginning of a new school year? Great, I was becoming skeptical. Hell, it was probably the fact that it was eight o'clock on a Monday morning. No one is eager to talk at that point of the day, especially as it was a beginning of a new year. And honestly neither was I. The fact that I had woken up at five was now backfiring on me, as I was beginning to feel sleepy.

When the door of the amphitheater squeaked open, announcing the arrival of the professor and interrupting my thoughts rather sharply, the noise of bags being opened and notebooks taken out and placed on the desks in the room appeared in an instant. I was already prepared, so I directed my gaze to meet my new architecture professor.

The familiarity of the face struck me in only few seconds. I immediately became aware of his identity. The trace of sleepiness I was beginning to feel was gone as soon as I realized that I knew him. I recognized the stranger I met the very first night of my arrival here. Of course I recognized him; one does not forget such a face.

Wearing a black suit combined with a white shirt and a black tie, with a folder in his right hand, he headed towards his desk without stirring his gaze away from the goal. Had he looked in the crowd, he would have noticed two very curious eyes scanning him. Soaking him all in.

My gaze fixed upon his face, eyebrows furrowed in an intrigued manner looking for who knows what. Since I knew everything there was to be known. The random guy I met and asked for help, turned out to be my new professor. God help me. It was such a confusing moment, that I didn't know what to think. Realizing that I was awkwardly ogling my professor, I embarrassingly turned my gaze away. Not that anyone noticed it, or cared; but it still made me feel a tingling in my back. The discomfiture I felt was surely more than obvious on my cheeks, since I sensed that blood was rushing through my face and I knew that it would result in a strong blush.

I couldn't simply keep on staring. It was completely strange. But then again, I couldn't help it either. Not for more than a second. Thank goodness my mouth wasn't full open by the shock. Since it was a shock – without a doubt to be sure.

Of all the things that could have possibly taken place, what happened just now was something I could in no way predict to begin with. The one thing that hadn't crossed my mind and the one thing that was the worst of all. Not that bad, as much as awkward and inconvenient.

He placed his folder on the desk, ran his fingers through his hair, pulling a lock of itbehind his ear and now decisively looked directly in front of him, skipping from one face to another. What was I doing in the second row? Should have sat behind... He wouldn't have seen me that way, but from this perspective he was bound to notice me sooner or later. I couldn't be sure about his reaction. I didn't even know him and considering the level of drunkenness he had reached that particular night we stumbled upon one another, it was a possibility that he didn't remember me at all. But I remembered him all too well and I knew I would blush if our eyes were to lock. Hell, I was already starting to. Just at the thought of it. My inner debates got interrupted by his voice. He was addressing us – the students.

"Okay, class. Let's get started, shall we? For those who got high grades congrats and job nicely done. Those who passed, welcome and those who barely passed I expect more this semester."

He dramatically paused for a while, just so to continue with the words: "Those who failed and are now here, sorry and better luck next time." Light chuckles spread in between the students. And as redundant as this speech seemed, I joined in the chuckle.

He remained entirely serious, however. I was indeed puzzled. But not by his words. I was bothered with something I knew about him. I alone. I was so intrigued as to what could make this professionally successful and handsome guy get so drunk? Wasted to be more exact. He seemed fine now, but that drinking marathon wasn't for no good reason.

Before I could roam away in my thoughts again, he continued: "This year classes will be in English, for a very good reason, since I was earlier informed that we have an exchange student between us. Would you mind introducing yourself to the crowd, please?"

He looked around, scanning the room for a reaction. His gaze hadn't roamed my way yet and now I had to raise my hand. I knew this would be strange and I deeply wished to be anywhere else right now except for here. I shyly raised my hand and said: "That would be me." His eyes now landed on my face, our gazes meeting for the first time.

He didn't move or said anything. Didn't even blink. He was good. And I became certain that he would clean up any poker game. Or that maybe he didn't remember me at all. This last thought gave me hope that maybe he had no recollection of the event and there wouldn't be any tension whatsoever. Cause if he did recall it, it was bound to be weird.

"Welcome to our class. I'm bored." - He uttered, just after twisting his mouth a bit. I didn't know what he was trying to say. It was something I didn't think could happen, but nevertheless my confusion increased. Bored? What did that have to do with anything? And why in the world would he share that with the entire class?

Either he was good at reading people's minds or I must have made some grimace, which I myself hadn't detected, since the very next moment he said: "My name is Bård. Bård Ylvisåker."

That is what he meant - his name. That name wouldn't pass well in Britain. He would be thrown out of every place, just as he would say that he is bored. I smiled, as he continued: "The University has this thing about me letting you guys call me bored all the time. Given your reaction just now, I am beginning to see their point. Anyways, what is your name?"

"I am Catherine Fox." - I said, trying to imagine what kind of face I made. I didn't have much time to think of it, because right after I uttered those words, mumbling and silenced laughter spread all around, until someone from behind me loudly said: "What the Fox say?"

This turned the room into a wild jungle of laughter in a split of a second and different inarticulate noises started spreading through the room - all the way from ringing to screaming. I nervously turned my head both ways, just to see everyone either laughing at those words or making sounds. I was beginning to think it had something to do with the way I said anything. Trying to think of a reason wasn't helping. I had no idea what was happening around me. The professor stood there for a second or two and didn't seem to be bothered with the interruption. In fact he just had a light smile on his face. I fixed my gaze at his, a plea spreading all over my face. He was after the only person that could stop this. My breath started quickening. I swallowed hard as his eyes at last, after what seemed to be an eternity, landed at my gaze. He stared at me for a second sending me one of those looks that spoke that he understood perfectly, or at least that is how it appeared to me and then said: "Okay class that is enough."

Soon after that everything went somewhat back to normal. When he realized his voice could finally be heard, he added: "It is so flattering to see that no one knows the order of the lyrics correctly. Now that I think about it, I see that I should have failed you all."

I was in middle of something I didn't quite understand and I was beginning to think that I didn't even want to. One thing was sure, it was making me uncomfortable. I scratched my neck in a nervous manner, my gaze not knowing where to land. So, I directed it at the professor once again. It seemed as if he wanted this subject closed as just much as I did; so the very next moment he looked at me and said: "Welcome to our class, Miss…”

He bit on his lip, when he got to the part of saying my last name. I stood up a bit, fearing that if he uttered it once again it would embolden another wave of laughter and teasing. Luckily he stopped just in time and as soon as I got the chance I cut in with the words: “Thank you.”

He looked at me once again and then added: “Okay, moving on..."

And the class began properly.

He turned towards the board taking a marker and I readied myself. I took out a pen and opened my notebook, hoping that this would be a good class. It would have been horrible if it wasn't because that would have meant that my coming at the university today was a complete waste of a time. So far it wasn't going amazing and here was hoping it would change.

As soon as he started speaking it was made perfectly clear that if this was the mode in which he held his classes all the time then not visiting the classes would be a waste of time and not the other way around.

Even though it was still early, it was a solid conclusion to say that this year architecture classes will be both interesting and much better that those from back home. My professor back in England was the slowest person in the world. She was smart and understood everything that is from her field. However, notwithstanding that, one could always fall asleep at her lectures. She was one of those people that made you sleepy. And, no matter how hard you'd try, there is no way to withhold yourself from at least yawning.

I could see that this was not going to be the case. It way the other way around. I was sleepy at the beginning and now all that was gone. And the joke on my account that I didn't understood was not the reason. However I hated my classmates for mumbling all the time from the beginning of the lecture. They were so quiet at first and as the time passed it escalated and now it was all whispers and chitchat. While as, it should have been the opposite. The professor didn't seem to mind the noise since he went on with his lecture, not paying attention to what was happening right behind him. He must have noticed it, no way he couldn't, but he still chose to ignore it and I could understand how he was fine with it. How didn't it bother him?

But it bothered me, given that I had difficulty following him since the conditions were such that I couldn't even hear what he was saying. I soon realized that I would miss the entire class, from where I was standing and I seriously didn't want that to happen. He seemed to be quite enthusiastic about the things he was saying and I actually wanted to keep up. I just couldn't understand these people that were in class with me. They were supposed to be interested in the lesson, since they were preparing their PhDs as well. It was quite shocking to see them uninterested to that extent. Annoying, as well.

My nerves were going insane over the fact that nothing could be heard in the second row. Hell, I was so close to shouting at that point, but just before I gathered up the courage and strength to do it I noticed an empty seat in the first row. I had no idea whether it would help and be better, but it was an option and I planned on using it. There was nothing I could lose. Therefore, I closed my notebooks and gathered up my things, and in a swift and silent motion, as silently as I could manage, I took a seat as close as possible to the lecturer.

It seemed that at last it got to him as well, because at a certain point of his line of thinking, he turned around and said: “Okay, it is enough. We had a chat and quite a laugh, but this is overpassing every line. I tried to be patient, given that it is the first class and all that. But I have had enough. Those who want to talk - out. Those who don't want to listen - out. You have ten minutes to clear the amphitheater.”

In just a matter of seconds everything quietened down. The strict voice that decisively spread through the room got the attention of the entire group.

After he closed it, he dropped the marker on the desk, adding: "We will continue after the ten minute break. Decide on which group you belong - those who stay or leave."

He took a seat at the desk and completely ignored the rest of the room. He dived his interest in the notebook that laid open before him and was reading something from it and along the way taking down notes.

The amphitheater started clearing up pretty fast. However, I didn't move from my seat even for an inch, but most of the other students figured it would be nicer to pass the time outside; so at the end only ten of us remained in the room. At least it would be easier to work. That was the advantage. Still, I couldn't understand them. Why in the name of God would they get up at 7 am on a Monday morning just to skip the classes anyway? If I were to do that, I'd stay at home and sleep and not lurk around the hallways of the university thinking of something dumb and pointless to do. However, despite the fact that it didn't appear that attractive to me, many chose to do it.

After the ten minute break, during which I rewrote the things I had missed from the black board, was over, the professor closed the door of the amphitheater and resumed his lecture. Now that only those truly interested remained, it was peaceful and quiet and a pleasure to listen to him.

It is not only that he understood it; it was also the way he spoke. It was as if you could feel his passion in every word and in every move. He loved it and he wasn't afraid to show it. And I appreciated that, it was rare to find a person as passionate about architecture as I was. I didn't even notice that I had been smiling, until I caught myself with a grin on my face.

Despite the horrible start this class had, it turned out to be the best class I have attended in a long time. I couldn't stop thinking that it was the first time I have enjoyed a class so much. The things he told us; not only did I learn them - I also understood them.

"This is going to be everything for today. We'll continue on Thursday. Are there any questions?" – He asked when he finished with his side of the lecture.

I had a question, so I gathered up the courage to ask: “About the literature we could use. Which books are mandatory and where can we find them?”

“Well, generally the lectures are all in ‘Architecture – semester XV’ and you can find it in the library of our university. That is the basics you will need for this class. As to further improvement, it is basically left to your own choice. There are some recommendations in the aforementioned book, so you can check them out as soon as you get it.” – At which point he turned to the other students, saying: “Anything else?”

“Yes, me again. About consultations – when are consultation hours going to be determined and where can we find you? I mean, where is your office?”

“Ahm, consultation hours will be set right after the schedule is confirmed. In the meantime, you can look for me in me in my office whenever you are free. Just check whether I am there. You can't miss after ten tries. My office is on the second floor, below the library. I think that is the best possible explanation with these labyrinth hallways of ours.”

“Thank you.”

“Any other questions?” – He said, shifting his gaze away from mine.

No one, apart from me, seemed to have anything else to ask, since no one raised their hand or voice. He nodded in confirmation that the class has ended and gently said: "See you next time."

We all started packing up our things and since I was incredibly slow, which was no big surprise, I remained amongst the last three in the room. He then out of nowhere abruptly said: "Miss Fox, can I have a word with you?"

I responded to his gaze, nodded and simply said: "Of course.” realizing that he remembered that night despite his drunken state, despite the enormous wish I had for him not to. And that was what I feared – the awkwardness of the situation. I packed my bag, and I headed towards the desk. The room emptied and then he faced me.

He cleared his throat while his hand was closing his folder. His gaze was still fixed on the closed folder under his hand as he hesitantly said: "About, uhm... That night with the..."

He stopped brusquely, taking a deep breath, probably because he was trying to find the right words. Considering what to say. Even though he didn't utter it, I knew exactly what his point was. Secrecy. The last thing he needed at that point was everyone in the university finding out about him being drunk. And at that point, I was well aware that I had not much choice but to go along whatever he'd said. So, instead of waiting for him to express himself, I smiled and said:

“It is okay. Your secret is safe with me. No one knows and no one will find out. I promise you that.” – I said, trying to locate his gaze. He glanced upfrom the desk straight to my face and somewhat surprised said: “You didn't tell anything to anyone?”

I was puzzled by his reaction mainly because of his astonishment, but I nevertheless said: “No, why would I? Random ordinary guy I just happened to meet was kind of drunk. The fact that you turned out to be my teacher isn't going to change things.”

A slight smile spread across his lips, as he approvingly nodded at my words. He bit his lower lip and returning his gaze back to mine, he whispered one: “Thank you.”

“Anytime.” – I answered him.

I was rather reluctant to ask him as to where the small mathematics amphitheater was located, although I thought that this question might seem a bit ridiculous and ironic – since it wouldn't be the first time I'd do it. Ask him for directions. But considering that the map from Adela wasn't going to do me much good and I had no idea which way to go for my next class, it was rather obvious that I had to ask someone and I was here so…

I took out the piece of paper that Adela drew and waved it around in the air, inquiring: “Which way is the other mathematics amphitheater? I have this map of the campus, but as you can guess by now I am not familiar with the way of using a map. If I couldn't find my way around with a proper one, what would I do with this one?”

He looked at me again, with a smile painted across his face, taking the paper out of my hand. He chuckled to himself and then lowered his look at the piece of paper. I knew that it would surely charm a comment out of an architecture professor. It was drawn so disrespectfully that it was bound to make him at least smile.

“It doesn't even classify as one…” – I continued.

“This doesn't classify as a map.” – He swiftly said.

We smiled at the fact that we basically said the same thing at the same time. He then went on:

“Who drew this? Is that person in my class? Cause with this drawing I can easily fail him or her.”

“No, Adela is in the language division, actually.” – I explained, somewhat defensive.

“That explains the drawing. Anyway, if you don't mind me asking, what's with you and directions?”

I could feel my face heat up. “I wish I knew.” – I said, shifting my gaze towards the door. I regretted my asking now. I could feel my blood pumping through my veins, making my cheeks blush. I bit on my lip, nervously shifting from one foot to the other.

“Here” – He said, as he handed me the paper. I took it hastily. – “Turn right as you exit. Go along this wing until you pass the physics laboratory. It is on the left side and there is a sign, so you will notice it right away. Turn right just after it. Then pass the toilets and turn left. Straight ahead you will see the door of the amphitheater. Do you think you can manage?”

I smiled at his question and tried to assure him of my competence in finding my way this time around with the words: “Yeah, I can. Thank you.”

“Anytime.” – He answered with a smirk dancing on his lips.

“Did he just reply the same way I did before? Nah, I am overthinking it now.” – I thought. But he did smile without a reason. Far too much thinking.

I directed him a polite smile and headed towards the door. Just as I reached it I turned my head around throwing back one last glance over my shoulder at the guy who now stood over the desk, exhaling promptly.

And then I left, heading for my next class hoping that I will manage to find its location and wondering if it would be nearly as half as good as this one.

Continue reading next part