Catherine: Departure

It was the tenth time my mother knocked on the door in the last half hour. She was really persistent, I have to give her that. I could understand her perfectly, to speak the truth. I could even predict the expression on her face. Indeed, I knew my mother well. As soon as she stepped into the room I realized that my prediction was correct. Her look had the same mix of sadness and anguish that every mother would have when her child is being torn away from her in a period of approximately ten months. My room was a complete mess like always, only this time around, mum didn't seem to mind so much. In fact I don't think she even noticed it. Her gaze was fixed on my face with such precision that made my heart skip a beat. I looked away briskly, afraid that the sight would bring tears to my eyes. There has been a lot of those in the last few days. I just never cried in front of her—she had enough of her own worries already as it is. Hidden in my room, I would place my face on a pillow and just sob quietly, hoping the sounds would be mu led enough for anyone to notice. But not in front of mum. I could not bear to do that to her. She has su ered enough and she was taking it far too hard already. Her voice cut my line of thoughts:

"Are you nearly finished?"

"Yes, mum." - I patiently replied for who knows which time.

"Because your plane leaves in nearly..."

"Four hours." - I whispered a er interrupting her so ly. I felt so crushed to hear the trembling sound of her voice. She was falling apart and although she said nothing of it, I knew that was the case. Her wish was to avoid ruining my trip no matter what it took, and she stuck to it with her best e orts. I knew that as soon as I was gone, she would give in to those taut feelings. I wouldn't feel good, if I didn't try to comfort her somehow. Along the way, of course, I could maybe even somehow ease my own worried mind. We worked that way, mum and me.

I turned towards her, looking her straight in the eyes and said: "Mum, you know, you don't have to worry or anything." I meant to continue. However I was not allowed, since my mum interjected, saying so ly: "I can't notworry, Katie. I am a mother. It basically means that it is my profession to worry. Do you see what I mean?" A gentle smile played with her lips.

I sighed. "Yeah I do. It's just... You know that I am responsible and I will call all the time. I promise. Besides it is not the end of the world. It is just Norway," I kept on rambling, but my words did not quite reach her. Worry furrowed her eyebrows and it was my job to fix it, but I didn't know how. "And I will be in a family, so I will have supervision," I added with a faint smile, as I nothing better would come to my mind.

She just shook her hair slowly, again with those sad eyes. "And you think Norway is close enough for me? Katie..."

"Mum, we talked about this. It is my chance to learn more and expand my horizons. Meeting new people is bound to happen and maybe I will even meet friends who will like me for who I am and not for what I know." She nodded her agreement, and I was well aware she knew all of this. "I thought you wanted me to go," I carried on, my voice barely a whisper.

At these last words she lowered her head, looking at the carpet. I knelt a bit to meet her gaze. And I saw what was expected. Tears. Tears that managed to tear my heart, pierce through my soul. Oh, how much it hurt. No words could express that feeling, not even the heavy, shaky breath that escaped my lips involuntarily. "What is going on now?" I needed to know.

"Well, I uhm... Nothing..." - The reply did not resemble confidence in any way. It was a nice attempt to pass the situation as if everything was perfect, and I genuinely believe that she would have fooled a stranger. Someone that didn't know her would have bought it, but not me. I knew her all too well. Every expression, every move and every tone in her voice. And her tone was a compilation of so many things. Confusion, weakness, di iculty; but mainly sorrow. Sorrow, that I very well mirrored, itched to suppress, and yet failed with every attempt. I had to further pursue my enquiry and just find what was hidden inside my mother's heart.

"Mum, I know you far too well. White lies won't do. You can't fool me no matter how much you try. Therefore—elaborate!" I demanded quite teasingly, although it all sounded wrong.

I was le without any reply. Nothing was being said. Her hesitation was bothering me more than what I would have supposed. I just wanted to know the source of such anxiety. In addition I just wanted to hug her, tightly, and just freeze that moment and live through it forever. I took a step closer and as I did I embraced her, my chin reaching to her ears. I was on heels and therefore as a consequence I was taller, which for a moment made me feel as if our situations are reversed. But only for a moment. When, that instant passed, a tear escaped my lashes. I hurried to ask the question again, before my voice got all shaky, something I in no way wished for my mother to notice.

"So, what's wrong?" I prompted, because she clearly had no intention to begin talking on her own.

My mother stepped out of the hug, placed her hands on my neck fondling my le cheek with her thumb, gazed straight in my eyes and sighed. A er almost a minute of silence, which I estimated that her motherly heart required, she so ly said: "My little girl is all grown up. What will Fred and I do without your companionship?"

Until she mentioned it, I realized I had entirely forgotten about my brother. He was still locked up in his room, protesting against my leaving home for such a long time. I tried to reach to him, make him talk to me. However I wasn't charming enough for him in the last few days since I found out that I was accepted to go in Norway. I knew that he would eventually come out, but I honestly did not expect him to stay consistent until the very last minute.

My mum continued, a er a short pause: "And I wish your dad was here to see this moment."

"Oh, mummy..." - I said, throwing myself in yet another hug. I just needed her strong embrace right now. So, I wrapped my hands around her and squeezed as much as my as my power would allow. Another tear reached my lips. I took my tongue out and collected it. The salty taste in my mouth was nearly the same as the bitter one in this situation. I didn't know whether my object was to make my mother feel better or whether I was trying to comfort myself. Going to a place where I knew nobody and was not familiar with the language didn't strike me as such a great idea as it initially appeared to be. Not at all in this very moment, actually. It actually appeared quite bizarre right then and there. This thought made my heart pound so much that I originally believed it was about to burst out of my chest and bring all hell down on me. And God was my witness that I wouldn't have had the strength to live through yet another hellish devastation. I lowered myself only barely so I could whisper in her ear: "I wish he were here too."

My mum moved away a tread and replied: "He would have been so proud of you and I am sure he would have been so sad to see you leave at the same time." A smile played on my mother's lips and her eyes lit up with the same spark of fire that was always present when she talked of dad. I joined her as my lips slightly moved in a smirk.

"I think that he would just laugh through this entire day, walking up and down the house whistling a tune."

"I don't doubt that. I am sure he would." - My mom replied through tears, which were now starting to flow down her cheeks. - "But deep within, he would still be extremely sad."

A er another heart-warming hug I started to fear that I could no longer avoid joining her, and wanted to have mum out of the room before allowing myself to cry. I saw the opportunity in asking her to provide a ride to the airport so I took it.

"Mum, maybe you should go down and call the cab. I am nearly ready and don't want to be late. It would take some time to pass through all the needed checks." I could have driven us there, but I couldn't sit in the car a er what happened to dad. As those bad memories arose in my mind, I did my best to push them away.

"Yeah, I should do that." - My mum repeated it a few times, more to herself, rather than to me. As if she was trying to convince herself to do it. As she moved towards the door she uttered: "I will miss you, Katie."

My look was fixed on her as she took her steps out of the room. My breaths fastened and my throat started to tighten and I felt as if something was stuck inside, not allowing me to breathe. I noticed my reflection in the mirror and realized I was turning pale. "Get a hold of yourself. Get a hold." - I kept repeating those words to myself, trying to revive my color a bit. But, it wasn't just allowed. Since every little bad moment now came crushing down on my shoulders, I kept feeling worse with every new second. "Come on, just be positive. It will be fine. Calm down. Deep breaths."

A knock on the door of my room forced me to forget the disgust I felt and to focus on regulating the dizziness. Deep breaths always seemed to help me in situations as this one. However, now they were helpless against the tyrant that was taking over my senses, making my head blurry and thoughts disorganized. I sat down on my bed, just to feel a little bit more secure and to minimize the chances of fainting and freaking the hell out of my family.

A few seconds a er the knock my little brother walked in the room, without awaiting the permission from me. His face was all red and his eyes had the traces of a sleepless night. He was probably crying throughout the entire evening. I couldn't say that my night was any better, but at least the little make up I had, covered up the red eyes and neutralized my drowsy expression. Fred ran towards me spreading his arms and reaching for a hug from his big sister without even a fluctuation. His entire happiness was now dependent on this hug. He wouldn't feel good because of his behavior during these last few days, if this didn't happen to be the best possible hug that we have ever shared. Therefore despite the feeling of nausea that was now overtaking my entire being, I returned with the same strength. However I didn't stop at that. When our cuddling was broken I kissed his forehead and said: "Fred, I have a thing or two to charge you with. Do you want to hear them?"

He was puzzled at my words, but nevertheless he gave me the a irmative answer I was seeking. My encouragement raised and I was persuaded that I could make him promise me nearly anything now, so that later I could hold him on that promise: "You will be a good boy, right? And please take care of mum. She will need you next to her more than ever. However do not look at this as an opportunity to neglect school. Continue to study hard and keep up with the good grades. It will make me very happy and satisfied. And in return I swear that I will always be there for you. That we will be constantly in touch and that you will always be able to reach me. Do we have a deal, young man?" I knew that he didn't like the part about helping out, so he paused to think about it as if he was on the verge of signing the most important deal of his life. A er a careful consideration of all the elements in my suggestion, he concluded that he would love to help mum out in everything, as long as I was reachable constantly. We agreed and the bargain was signed.

The cabby who was honking the horn in front of the house was insinuating that it was time to proceed to hardest part – the leaving. I picked up my purse that contained the essential necessities for my trip, including the passport and the plane ticket as well. In addition I took the laptop bag with my computer inside; since I couldn't work without it, seeing that every single one of my projects and even the schedule were on it. And the last but not least, I took my suitcase, which was filled with everything me and my mum could think of as a requirement. I headed downstairs with my luggage and Fred suggested a one last race to the front door. I agreed with a happy grin. He, of course, reached his destination before me. It was understandable, since the only weight he was carrying was his own. My suitcase hit the floor of the hall in our house, when mum came out of the kitchen, wiping the tears o her face.

"Mum…" - I sarcastically said – "If you are planning to continue like this for the next ten months I might as well stay at home. I will be available constantly and Fred promised me a week ago that we will see each other through Skype or something. Have we agreed on this? Will you solemnly swear not to cry anymore?"

"Fine, Katie. We are agreed." – She confirmed through a tiny smile, making me feel a little bit calmer. The cabby honked on the horn once again and we walked out.

While the driver was placing my suitcase in the trunk of the cab, mum locked the door of the house. Fred, however, was an entirely di erent story. He just wanted to be fast enough to manage to grab the seat next to the driver. Mum and I were le to sit on the back seat. As soon as the cabby took his position I addressed him, saying: "Heathrow airport." The two words that decided my future.

The car started to make its way through the foggy part of London. The last thing I recall was that I registered my mother placing her hand on top of mine holding to it quite tightly. I moved to respond to her grip. The rest of the drive to the airport remained blurry. I blankly recall all the streets we went through. Streets that I have seen thousand times before and knew by heart, now seemed unfamiliar and far away. The pressure in my mind and the horrible feeling in my heart made me dri away in a complexity of thoughts that were throwing me far from reality. It was the sense of departure that had me so sick and nervous not only some minutes ago, but in the last few days as well. Going to another country was getting the better of my nerves. The thought of a little bit of adventure I craved, however the idea of loneliness had me realize that this plan was one of the silliest I have ever made and fulfilled. It is not as if I was never lonely. I have been like that most of my life. No friends or fun outside of my family. My best friend were my parents and the best entertainment my brother. I have never connected with many people. It was impossible when everyone was looking at me as a source of information and help; and not who I was. Being a hypocritical when it came to those that behaved like that toward me just wasn't my forte, so I stayed friendless for most of my school years. Still being on my own while being torn away from my family was something that I couldn't bare or understand all together. It seemed that I could bare anything really. Except being parted from my mum and my little brother. This line of thinking lead me towards some memories that now appeared to be priceless; albeit they used to be just ordinary and maybe somewhat painful.

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It happened five years ago, only months before dad le us. It was a sunny Saturday a ernoon, when dad interrupted my studies, by walking into the room. I heard him call me "Kitty cat", as he always did and then he just added: "Sorry, but am I disturbing?" He always asked that question even though he knew very well that the reply was never going to be a 'yes'. Nothing dad ever did could disturb anybody. He was always doing his best to help as much as he could, ease the pain and cheer everyone up. He had a smile on his face, day and night, no matter the circumstances or the moment. Always positive. Always kind and generous. There for everyone. I couldn't help but look up to him.

Back than I had only a page or two le for studying, so the interruption was not unwelcome. I had done most of the work I had that morning, so I thought to myself that a break would be great for both my mind and my body. As much as I was tired of the books, the pain that I felt in my body exceeded every exhaustion. I told my dad that he was not disturbing me at all. So he stepped into the room, leaving the door open, still holding onto its knob. A smile had taken over his features. Than he suggested the best possible idea that could relax me:

"Want to play catch with your old man?"

"I'd love to." – I replied enthusiastically – "I will be outside in a minute."

"We are waiting for you." – He smirked and le , closing the door behind him, before I could ask him who 'we' was. I looked outside the window and I thought I would see someone, but our driveway was empty and I heard no doorbell, so there was no way that we had guests. I was puzzled at my fathers' words, so I hurried outside. Nothing was happening and my dad was nowhere to be seen. The noise and the giggle that was coming from the garage informed me where I could locate the gentleman that was trying to hide. At opening the garage door, I realized that father had some back up. Fred was seven years old then and that suited the childish behavior that a father would appropriate from time to time. Both of them were awaiting my arrival with a silly smile on their faces and water guns in their hands. What followed was not appropriate for me.

I know that when they were done playing games I was soaking wet and a bit disappointed by my dad. I never expected that from him, and I knew that this idea was initialized by Fred. I was not speaking to either one of them for a week or so, just to tease them and their attempts to make me forgive them were silly. The apology at the end was made with a chocolate cake on the counter in the kitchen with my name on it. At least the chocolate cake compensated for the cold I was fighting for three days a er the event. But nothing made me feel better than my father's hug. It was the best cure and the only one I needed.

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I needed him right now. To calm me down, to make me smile and convince me that despite everything else this will all turn out perfectly. To give me his blessing along with my mum. To hug her as I pass through the gate to board my plane. To smile to me as if nothing was gone and as if…

The driver was pulling over in front of the entrance of the airport, pulling me away from the pain I was starting to feel. I sighed and stepped out of the car, as soon as my mum released my hand. I paid the guy, leaving him a modest tip and he began his way onto the next customer.

We walked in the airport, my mother holding my waist and my brother was walking next to us, his eyebrows furrowed. Timed seemed to fly when we were inside. The conversation could cease. It was as if at that moment all the things we never said to one another found their way to our lips. The couple of hours we had passed faster than expected and in no time we heard the announcement that it was the last call for boarding the 3:35 flight to Norway. They walked me up to the gate, we hugged one more time and this round was more painful than any other. I warned them: "Remember what you said. No crying. I love you both and I will call as soon as I land. And few times every day a er that." My brother said nothing further and neither did mum. No elaboration was needed. The looks we shared spoke beyond words. They showed the happiness and the pain, the confusion and the clarity. They showed the path to our hearts and the fact that we would miss each other entirely. I was not boarding my handbag and the laptop in my hands. The suitcase was already on its way to the plane; I had to leave it when I checked in. Before I turned around the corner to enter the plane, I looked at them once again waving for the last time. I felt a warm tear on my cheek rolling down my chin powered by the gravity.

I took my seat and set myself comfortably. Now that I was in the plane I calculated that in less than three hours the 751 miles of distance should be passed and I will arrive in Oslo. I fastened my seat-belt, shut down my phone and a er that everything went black. The lack of sleep finally got to me.

"Miss, miss… We arrived…"- Some unfamiliar voice was travelling through the hallways of my mind, trying to reach to me and wake me up. I opened my eyes and there was the stewardess trying to make me pay some attention to her words. I rubbed my eyes, unlocking the belt and slowly began to pick up my things.

A er I stepped out on the cold Norwegian air, I turned my phone on in order to call my mother. I smiled at the fact that my sleepiness was slowly evaporating. And then 9 calls, while I was on the plane. "Oh, mum" – I thought, while the wind gathered up my hair. No one could see my tears, which started flowing in an instant. The ring of the phone was brief, because my mum was probably standing next to it waiting for me to call. She picked it up with a questionable tone: "Katie?"

I smiled and then just said: "I arrived safe and sound mum…"

Continue reading next part