

Catherine: A Cabin?

I was in the middle of answering Bård's question when my phone buzzed. Both our gazes landed on the device on my le, and with a small nod as an apology addressed to Bård, I dropped the pen to pick the device up instead. Reading through the e-mail I had just received, I couldn't help but grin at the screen.

It was clear Bård had had his gaze fixed on me, since barely seconds as I smiled, he picked up the change in my expression, which was in all honestly hardly a difficult task, and asked, "What's happened?"

I quickly scanned through the last few lines of the email, just to be sure I wasn't missing anything important, and then looked up to meet Bård's gaze. I tried to pretend my breath didn't hitch upon finding Bård edged closer than he had been a few moments prior.

"No lessons tomorrow. They are canceled due to a seminar," I explained.

He mischievously chuckled, an unexplainable glint in his eyes and his rather familiar crooked smile on his lips, before clearing his throat and saying, "Since when did you start grinning at such news instead of disappointedly listing the cons of such a decision?"

"Don't be mean about it. It is not like I am a bookworm," I stated, at which I received a look full with meaning, which as I interpreted was close to Bård saying "Yeah right" with the highest dose of sarcasm possible to be mastered in so brief a time.

I shook my head at him, sure he'd get the general disapproval in my eye rolls, not so subtly performed, impassively continuing, "I like losing lectures when I want extra free-time to rest. It's not like it is the end of the world when I wish for such a thing."

He smirked. I knew right away, I wouldn't particularly like what he had to say, "Might as well be." However, as I my defiantly deadly glare, he cut the teasing short, and said, "Well, since you are looking at this on the bright side, at least you will have tomorrow to go somewhere and relax."

I ran my fingers through my hair, intending to calm down the wild strands of hair and lock them back in place, only to have my nails catch in them and rake up a few strands even messier. "I wish I had somewhere quiet to go," I sighed.

"I know just the place," he enthusiastically announced, starting me from my wistful state, grabbing me by the wrist gently, yet decisively with no intention of letting go, and practically dragging me out of the library. I knew I would take too long for me to get used to his sudden decisions as a springing marshmallow.

I threw my bag over my shoulder, my free hand holding onto the stripe of the bag with the upmost force I could develop. "Thank goodness I thought of packing it once we were finished. My mind provided as I was trying my best not to stumble over my own feet as Bård dragged me behind him.

"Where are we going?" I wondered out loud, not that I had it in my ability to fight against the relentless grip and escape the situation should I wish it.

"I want to show you something," was the only reply I received from Bård, and though usually mysteriousness was something I'd highly appreciate, this time around the case was not such. Once I was seated in his car, fastening the seatbelt, and he joined me I couldn't help but ask again as to where we were going.

This time around my question was dignified with an answer. Bård looked at me with a beaming smile on his face, and I couldn't help but return with a smile of my own. And, then he spoke, "To my family's cabin. It is my brother's now, but I don't think he will mind."

"What?" I exclaimed. "You are insane."

"You wanted someone peaceful and quiet, and I am taking you to such a place. It's a long way, but we should be back by tonight." He only smirked at me, and at times I'd find that expression irresistible, only now I couldn't help the fact how my heart faltered at the thought of us being alone in his family's cabin, by the few words he had said. It seemed to be secluded. Or maybe the cause of my heart skipping a few beats was me forgetting the fact that I'd be alone with him for the rest of the day. His next that I feared his company every conversation always seemed to flow perfectly between us, but somehow, that was the bad thing. I knew I liked him too much for my own good.

I gulped a mouthful of fresh air, and turned to him, saying, "If you are planning on driving like last time, I am getting o the first stop."

He chuckled, shaking his head, "I assure you, I will be the calmest of drivers."

"Hah," I sarcastically said, at which I received an angry look from him. Wanting to drive him even further, I proceeded, "I find that hard to believe."

"Don't be mean. I can be responsible when I drive." And, with those words he peeled o the parking lot.

The drive to the so called 'Cabin' was longer than I had anticipated, but it was passed either in cheerful conversation or pleasant silence. Somewhere in a er a couple of hours of driving, Bård got the car parked a few meters into a small pathway on the side of the road, informing me we would have to proceed on foot.

"You are aware that the fact I actually have trainers is only a working of pure luck?" I wondered, opening the door and stepping out, just so to be met with the deviant turf I was expecting.

"Or empathically," he quickly cut me o. "Because I sent a message to the subconscious part of your mind and thus made sure you'd wear them today."

I burst out laughing. I couldn't help it, not with the seriousness he was sporting. "That is the single most ridiculous thing I've ever heard of," I exclaimed, suddenly realizing we were all alone in a middle of a forest, with nobody around to hear us. And, then I realized how much I'd wished for a peaceful place where it could be me who would disturb the peace by screaming my lungs out or being from the bottom of my heart without anyone frowning down on my behavior, and suddenly I felt the enormous urge to hug Bård and thank him for finding the perfection of a place I'd been looking all over for.

"No, it is not ridiculous," he complained, stopping in his tracks, and facing me. "There have been cases in which people have been known to communicate across the world."

I cocked an eyebrow at him, skeptically pointing every word out, "With a phone, or through the internet, yes."

"Have faith in the supernatural," he mocked my voice, drawing a defeated sigh from me.

"You are unbelievable." I bypassed him, even though I had no idea about the direction we were headed into. It was just that I couldn't force myself to remain calm and observe his clear non-sensical attempts at making me lose my control.

"Let me tell you something. Next time you come here with someone," I proceeded, flipping my finger in the air and pointing it back at him, while throwing him a chaste glance over my shoulder. "And you decide letting them know about the plan through your psychic connection and clairvoyance, you'll have to end up carrying that person because of the person's inability to walk in their sandals, give me a call so that I can tell you I told you so."

I ended with a chuckle, addressed directly at Bård, since he was now walking next to me. He was completely focused on observing my expression, rather than the path before him, which caused him to stumble upon a collection of branches and quickly descend on the ground with a grunt.

To say I laughed at him with all I had in me would be an understatement. I burst out laughing, so honestly and fully, as though I had suppressed laughter in through months or years, and as though it was only then it managed to come alive, and take on its full strength. I covered my face with my hands, as my whole body was shaking, and each time I thought I'd situated the desire to laugh, my gaze would fall at the man on the ground, who had his arms dropped loosely over his knees and was looking at me as though he held the biggest of grudges against me, and the wave of laughter would start up again on its own.

At a certain point, through my attempts at composing myself and catching a breath, I heard myself exclaim, "You are definitely insane. I can't believe you tripped over a branch."

I locked my gaze with that of Bård, and though he was trying to maintain a pout, I could see a smile springing to life in there somewhere. I stepped closer to him, outstretching my arm, while saying, "Come on, old man. Let me help you up."

I couldn't avoid the relishing of my mind in the sensation of how smooth the touch of his fingerprints against my palm was, nor could I detect anything beyond the firm squeeze his hand gave mine, and then all I could register was me waking up from a trance like state as I fell on the ground next to him. It was his turn to laugh at my wildly belated expression.

"Says the person who fell without any influence, all by herself," he wittily joked.

"Har, har," I mumbled, as I shook my head at him disapprovingly, and before me, even register it, he straightened up and ended standing before me, offering his hand to me, as to help me get up as well. For a second I thought it would be nice to get him back for what he did by pulling him back down, but then I realized that his intentions were to save and admit defeat, or in the worst case scenario, until one of us gave the other a severe injury. So, I ignored the workings of my mind, and simply took his hand, allowing myself to be pulled up.

I shook o the dirt o my trousers, and glanced up to see Bård smiling at me. I mirrored his smile, and as he motioned the path, we continued to walk. I ignored the sudden itch rushing in a trail down my fingers, a necessity to reach and grip Bård's hand as a hold, "How far away are we exactly?"

"Another five minutes and we'll be there," he whispered back.

"Don't you think we should go back?" I asked, looking up at the sky to be greeted by a group of angry looking clouds. "I mean look at the sky. It sure as hell seems set on raining."

He glanced up, as well, shrugging it o in matter of second. "We will be fine. I am sure Vegard has some umbrellas stocked at the cabin, along with some emergency kits, and a list of precautions and activities from every survival camp he's ever attended."

I nodded in return even though Bård wasn't looking at me, fixing my gaze on my feet once again, resisting the urge to start humming a familiar tune.

"Welcome to the family's cabin," Bård voice reached my senses as a er a few silent minutes of walking, and I looked up, only to be greeted by a red cabin, located in the middle of nowhere, basically situated between the boarders of the forest. We walked up to the entrance, and he fished out a key out of somewhere to unlock the door.

He let me pass through the door first, and the one thing which I realized upon stepping inside, was the coldness of the place, and then he closed the door behind us and said, "Don't take your shoes o. It is freezing."

"This place is well maintained," I murmured more to myself rather than to Bård, but he caught it nevertheless, and responded, "This is my brother's sanctuary. He dotes on the place so much, so it is always spick and span, and ready to be used again."

I just gazed at him for about a moment, resisting the urge to arch an eyebrow to rear him my glare, until he caught up with his words and his jaw fell at the attempt to say, "In a uh, um, non-prostitute sense, I mean."

I hummed in agreement, trying to hide my amusement regarding his stuttering as best as I could. "I've observed as much." I mumbled a response, instead, and then I jumped at the sudden collision of an object with the top oop.

I am sure Bård would deny it for as long as he could manage, but I saw him flinch at the sound as well. He moved back a few steps towards the door, before another thud reverberated through the place, disturbing the silence. He snatched the door open, and an object flew right before us, explaining the cause of the two previous thuds. The small piece of ice rolled down the path, stopping a few steps from the porch, where stood a very stunned Bård, who only managed to say, "What the hell. You should have warned me on the halloo-storm."

"I would have commented how his clairvoyant spirits hadn't taken a notice of the weather, but if he felt nearly as annoyed as I was at the mocking ice, it would turn out horribly. So, I settled for stlling the thoughts."

"How are gonna get back?" I wondered, hoping the thing would just wind down, so that we would be able to make it back to the car, and go back. I knew my hopes were not very likely to come true.

Bård's lack of response had me thinking he, as myself, had no response to the question which would result in a solution to the problem, so I only swallowed a lump. Bad joke at an even worse timing as a mechanism for coping somehow le my mouth before I even registered its forming. "I don't think umbrellas are survival, nor, unless they were made on a meteoroid apocalypse survival camp."

He tried for a small, reassuring smile, but it didn't reach beyond a tight-lipped twitch. I appreciated his effort though.

"By the looks of the sky we are going to be stuck here for a while, which is why we need to build up a fire."

The door slammed behind him, as he moved inside, and I ended up trailing a er him inside the living room. Bård was already setting up the fireplace, completely spritless into action, not paying attention to the fidgeting person standing in the middle of the room.

"So, now we are stuck here?" I muttered, trying to get his attention, which worked and he looked up from his work, fixing his gaze on me, and replied, "Yeah, I am sorry, but we are. At least until the storm stops."

I was going to begin to freak out, but then I figured it would be the last thing he would have to deal with, while building up a fire which was supposed to keep us warm in the freezing house. I needed to make myself useful. "What can I do to help?"

He addressed me a chaste smile, before bending down to proceed, as he muttered, "We will need food, and my brother keeps the kitchen stocked, so check if there is something still edible there." I was going to move to obey right away, since it was also my anxiety which required reassurance, except for the small problem of not knowing where the kitchen was. I stood there for but a minute, when he looked up in understanding, and stretched out his arm pointing at the door and said, "Down the corridor on your right, till the back of the house."

I le the room a er those words, looking for the kitchen, and barging in the small room once I found it, only to let out a sigh of relief upon seeing that Bård's presumptions, as to his brother keeping food there, were correct. I grabbed a few packages of the bagged food at the front of the cupboard only to check the expiration date, and was glad it was still within the limits, so I made my way back - to where I had le Bård - to let him know, only to find him leaning against the mantelpiece, a fire already burning.

"You did it," I simply commented, trying to hide how astounded I actually was, and he looked at me, and through a smirk commented, "Send the woman to the kitchen and the job gets done all by itself."

I nodded, humming in slight confirmation of his words, biting my lower lip, before asking, "Is that ok?" I cocked an eyebrow at him, my expression growing completely serious. "You will be happy to know there is food in the kitchen. Hungry?"

"Famished," he confirmed.

I turned back to head to the kitchen again, and I could hear Bård's footsteps right behind me. Unwittingly, an unfamiliar uneasiness set in my veins. Usually, everything with Bård was great, and things at the moment seemed to lead to a situation which could get awkward. I hated myself for not being able to get the thought out of my head, not even when we got around to the cooking part.

Somehow, we managed to skim through every cupboard to find ingredients for a sauce, and in the process made a complete mess out of the place. At a certain point I realized Bård wasn't in the room anymore, having slipped out without my notice and without so much as a word, so I used the time to get the place in order, while the spaghetti were cooking on the stove. It was a silent agreement to choose that for our meal, mostly because there was an abundance of spaghetti and were less likely to be missed.

I washed the dishes we no longer had any need of, took care of cleaning up the counters, and thoughtlessly began swaying as I wiped the dishes clean, before returning them at their original location. The movements on an unfamiliar tune, had me forgetting about the cold atmosphere and the fact I wasn't alone in the place. Unaware of the presence leaned against the doorframe, I jumped in surprise when Bård cleared his throat, immediately snapping my eyes in his direction and irreversibly blushing under his gaze. I ducked my head slightly to hide the blushing of my cheeks flushing with color.

"You cleaned up?" he muttered.

"Send the man out of the kitchen, and the job gets done all by itself," I mirrored his entire posture, alongside the attitude, from earlier.

"Fair enough," he hummed his agreement, shining on his feet, and raising his previously obscured hand from behind the door frame to reveal a bottle of wine, its neck labeled in between his fingers. "I got the wine. It is not the most expensive of vintages, but it will do the job as an appetizer."

As much as I avoided drinking, one glass wouldn't be remis, so I turned around and got two glasses out, placing them on the cabinet, waiting for Bård to approach. He popped the bottle, and poured the content in the glasses, picking up his and allowing me to do the same. We clicked the glasses with a whispered 'cheers', before I took a sip, and put the glass back down with the intention of getting the plates ready.

I moved the presently cooked spaghetti onto the plates, picking up the sauce, and carelessly spouring over and stabbing two forks, one in each plate, before picking up the plates, just as Bård tucked the bottle under his arm and picked up the glasses. Silently, we headed back to the living room, which was yet not warm enough to be pleasant, but was nevertheless giving the signs of becoming such rather soon. Bård dropped the glasses on the mantelpiece, and the bottle on the side of it, and shined two chairs closer to the fire, with the words, "The dinner is gonna have to pass without a table. The room is too small for it to be moved, and it is too tight to sit by the window."

"I don't mind. The knees can do the job credibly enough."

We got settled, and I dug in the plate, realizing how unaware of my own hunger I had been, the doubting, self-righteous thoughts holding my full attention from earlier dissolving as the fire revived my completely frozen fingers.

As I began warming up, I began relaxing, enjoying the silent company of the man sitting opposite me. The dinner was finished, and while I was occupied taking care of the dishes in the kitchen, something I think Bård was at the very least annoyed at me for, he'd arranged the space before the fireplace in a comfortable fortress of cushions and blankets, shining the sofa closer so we would have something to lean against, and was contentedly seated at one side of his creation when I walked back in the room. I approached him, and as I grabbed the glasses of wine and handing Bård his glass, I dropped to seat beside him, a meter still separating us.

I looked up at Bård's first words, only to find him addressing at me, "I don't know if Adela let you in on this," he stopped, looking at me, a swirl smile, not restrained and yet not as warm as his smile usually was. "But I was in a serious relationship until a year or so back."

"No," I whispered, shaking my head, returning with a smile of my own. The uneasiness set on Bård's face, and the inevitable action of him biting on his lip convinced me what he was about to say was in no way pleasant, at least not for him. His smile began to fade, as he looked down in his lap, before beginning, "Her name was Maya."

"I only nodded, my own gaze landing in my lap.

Taking the silence as a clear confirmation, Bård continued, "We were together for nearly three years, and we'd moved in together about half a year before it ended. I loved her very much and truly believed we were happy despite our cramped schedules, occasional fights. I was seriously contemplating on proposing marriage," he voiced out, and my head automatically snapped up, as a thought ran through my mind. Why was he telling me that?

My reaction was unobserved, and Bård simply finished his thought, "When she came out and confessed she was leaving for another man, whose child she was carrying at that moment."

"What?" I squealed out, before I could stop myself, and he glanced up, weakly smiling at my outburst, before looking down again. I somehow was fixed on every movement Bård made, my eyes scanning every sigh of his form, and without any firm intention I also tracked as his tongue darted out to lick his lips.

"It turned out, that while I was thinking we were at a great place, she thought I dedicated more of my time to writing songs with my brother than to her. So, she found herself another guy, who got her pregnant while I was on a tour."

Restrained pain was obvious in every word he said, and yet nothing about his apparel suggested even remotely that he still felt strong towards the matter. His fingers were unclenched, and he brought his hand up to wipe his hand through his hair, while he looked at me.

Apparently he had hidden that from them, and when he asked why she never told them she carried my child, she told them that I was not the father. They met the real father during that visit in the hospital, and besides the child's complexion didn't leave much space for doubts."

"Really?" I couldn't be bothered by my high-pitched voice, or the shock hidden behind that word.

"Yeah," Bård nodded, obviously amused by my bewildered expression.

"But you and your brother are good now, right? Everything seemed fine when I met him."

"Yeah, we are good," Bård confirmed, which had me smile in relief, more glad than what I could express. "He came back to see me as he found out the truth, and when I told him I knew about the child, he asked why I never said anything. I shrugged it o, and it got back to how it used to be in a matter of seconds. I regret losing all that time with him because I was too stupid to speak up, and out of all, which is what pains me the most. Vegard not being next to me for all those months. And I will never get them back."

"And Maya?" I wondered, my eyebrows furrowing at their own accord. Bård shook his head. "I have no idea where she is. I haven't heard from her since the day of the break up, and I never tried to contact her either."

I retreated my hand, leaning back against the couch, now being next to Bård, and since we fell in silence I could hear his every breath, before he spoke again, "You are the first one I told about the bit about Vegard."

"You didn't tell him about that?" I asked at him, yawning expectantly, when Bård whispered a small 'no'. I looked at him, snapping my head sideways, and asked, "Why not?"

"He was blaming himself so much for not being there for me, that I didn't want to make it even worse. So, I shut my mouth and said nothing. He still thinks I am devastated because of what happened with Maya, but I am not, and it is only because he knows I am hiding something from him, that he keeps reopening the topic."

"You should tell him, and coming from the girl who always keeps things to herself, it is a hell of an advice."

Bård smiled. "I will think about it."

"And I know the last thing you need is me saying I am sorry for what happened to you. But, I am truly, and I am glad you found your way back to you."

Bård looked up as though the words were the last thing he expected me to say, and given how close up I usually was, it would have been a reasonable calculation. I picked up my glass, dragging down a gulp of wine, which was already having its best and combined with the fire, made my skin buzz with pleasant warmth, still trying to process the pile of information Bård had but shared with me. I wondered why Adela never mentioned anything, but I suppose she was aware the right to tell me the story was Bård's, or maybe thought I wasn't interested in hearing it. Whatever the reason, I was glad to hear it from Bård, and I was happy he felt comfortable enough to share, even aspects he hadn't shared with his brother.

My gaze got locked in the flickering fire, when Bård paused the silence. "You know, I have been meaning to ask you," Bård persisted, as I glanced at him, only to catch him taking a sip from his glass, the wine which until that moment had remained forgotten by his side, before continuing, "Somehow I never got the chance, but why did you choose Norway? England's educational system is rationally considered much better in preparing the students for the dissertation and work in general."

I looked down at my fingers playing with the glass in my hand, and a moment of thinking made me decide I trusted Bård enough to tell him the truth. With a deep, stabilizing breath, I stated, "I wanted to escape home."