

Two weeks ago, Margo called Carl in the Fasco Coffee Shoppe pleading her case that she loved him and didn't want him to leave to go wherever he was headed. But none of that mattered. During this time of the year, Cleveland was nothing more than cold winters and bare thoughts. Carl made up his mind. Somewhere in his soon to be home, he meet a brown eyed, purple colored tights wearing brunette. That dream strung to his heart the way jazz music fills the air in New Orleans and nothing could hold more weight in Carl's world than possibility. He told Margo rather plainly that they were through.

Carl wheeled his last suitcase closer to his bedroom door. Tomorrow was the day he would leave for Raleigh. He opened the door and Tolla stood before him with a stack of books hugged in her arms. In standard form, Tolla's hair covered most of her face, her sweater consumed her hands, and her birkenstocks molded to her feet. She was the only consistency in Carl's ever changing world.

"I have a new book for you!" she exclaimed. Her voice muffled by the weight of the books on her chest.

Knowing fully not a chapter in her hands could fill the the void he no longer had within him Carl laughed and reached out his hands to take her load. Tolla stepped into what was once Carl's bedroom and set the books down on the bare wooden floor. She quickly slid her hands down the spine of the books until she came across the one she wanted most.

"It's called Pride and Prejudice."

"I know that book already. It's a classic and a bit of chick lit."

Carl reached down to pick up his suitcase. Tolla scooped up the stack of books she had been collecting in her search for selections and followed clumsily behind Carl. He waited patiently on the other side of the door for his wayward friend.

"I know you've read Pride and Prejudice. Who hasn't? But this time it's different."

"How can classic literature be different?" Carl asked as he headed down the steps.

"This time you're going somewhere. A book is always different when your own life is different. Think about it. You're moving away to chase a dream. Admirable? Yes. However, Mr. Darcy is no longer just the rich man that shows up on Elizabeth's doorstep and is instantly smitten. He now becomes you. The man in a foreign place with no notion of what's to come."

Carl paused on the stairs causing Tolla to accidentally bump into him. He reflected on the plot line of the book and couldn't recall much other than Margo's fascination with Elizabeth or whatever her name was' temperament. When they reached the bottom of the stairs, Carl set his suitcase down by the front door and took the book from Tolla. The plastic cover felt dusty. Before Carl could turn to look at the spine Tolla steadied the book in his hands.

"It's a library rental. But like, who returns books anyways?" Tolla released the book and Carl shook his head in disbelief.

He skimmed through the pages and nodded. "I think I'd just prefer the e-book than criminal charges."

Tolla took the book back and set it on the pile now on the coffee table. She pulled back her brown hair into a ponytail. "So you're all set but," she hesitated. "What are you going to do about Margo? She's been coming around here all week trying to catch you."

"What? She's not my concern remember. She said it enough," Carl rebuffed. "I've been here packing all week and haven't heard nor seen--"

"She's been sitting in her car down the street from here. You don't go the library as often as I do, so why turn right ya know?" Tolla paused and watched Carl move more hurriedly towards the door. She tapped on the book pile. "You'll enjoy it differently this time around."

Tolla headed back upstairs towards her room.

The next day, Carl hugged Tolla and stepped out the apartment for his last moments under the Cleveland clouds. Before heading for his car, he stopped to look at the neighborhood. Mr. Croner's Hardware shop across the street looked as welcoming as the first day he moved to Cleveland. It was the first place he went after landing a job that only put his degree instead of passion to use. He watched as the people bustled their way through gray streets, covered their faces in scarfs and faux fur, and never stopped to notice one another. It would all be a distant memory soon enough and Carl couldn't be more grateful.

His phone buzzed. This time, Carl answered.

"Just listen to me. I'm not trying to make you stay. I just called to tell you that I wish you all the best and I'm dropping off some of your things before you go. Are you home?" Margo spoke reservedly.

"What things? I mean, yeah, I'm home. But I'd be surprised you didn't already know that."

Margo sighed. "You've been talking to Tolla."

"Of course."

"Listen, I truly am wishing you the best. Just wanted to drop off this box and basically," she paused "be clean of you?"

"Perfect. I'll see you in 10?"

Margo hung up the phone and taped the box of Carl's things closed once and for all. She wanted to cry. She wanted to break his things. But mostly, she wanted to be with Carl. Half of her also knew

there was no point chasing a man that didn't want her. She stepped out of her car and picked up the box.

Margo headed towards Carl's car parked in front of his apartment. He unlocked the door and gestured for her to put the box in the back seat. Once Margo opened the door Carl became caught between wanting her to go but also to stay.

"Get in?" he said just above a whisper.

"For what?" Margo asked and looked away.

Carl pondered for a moment and Margo pulled her out from the car ready to close the door.

"Because you should." slipped from Carl's lips faster than Margo's will to close this chapter of her life. She bit her lip to let the blood boiling in her chest move to a controllable area. She closed the backdoor and moved towards the passenger seat.

Margo stepped inside cautiously and stealthily made sure not to be in too close of proximity to Carl. Carl reached over her and closed the passenger door. At the smell of him, Margo felt the imaginary string between them tighten. And for a moment, Carl was her's again.

"I think--I believe I owe you an apology," Carl lied. It wasn't that he intended to resolve issues between them, he was more concerned with having no burned bridges in his past when he left it all behind. It was a part of his sleeping mechanism. Also, a way to lighten the density of the space they shared.

"That's not true," Margo stated dejectedly. "If I was cheated on—" she halted her speech and said no more.

Carl nodded and let the moment pass between them.

Margo rubbed her hands along her jeans and reached for the door handle. "I should go. I'm not sure what else is left to say. I hope you enjoy wherever it is you're going."

Margo pulled on the handle leaving the door ajar as her emotions.

"Raleigh," Carl said in almost a whisper at first. Then with more strength, "I-I'm going to Raleigh, North Carolina."

Margo clenched her jaw. Dreams she had of buying a home, starting a family, and working in her own boutique hit her hard and fast. At Carl's words those dreams all seemed further away than ever before now. Those puzzling dreams were in Raleigh and soon Carl, a piece of that puzzle, would be too. Blood rushed to Margo's face and she felt her eyes glossing over with tears. She push the door wide open. Prepared to make her final exit.

Carl gently caught the fabric of her coat in his hand and halted her progression.

In that moment, she fell apart. Wiping tears from her eyes as fast as they came did nothing to stop the loud thump of her heart beating in her ears. She felt that at any moment she could burst. Her hands curled into tight balls as she wondered why Carl decided to stampede then lie down on her hurt.

Slowly bringing his thumb to her eyes, Carl wiped away the tears and let Margo cry into his chest. He remembered wishing to see her hurt as he once did. When she left him behind for a cheap thrill. But this tune was not the song he expected.

Carl pulled Margo back from him and gently held her shoulders. He tried to find her eyes but they were welled with tears. Instantly, she became the girl in the polka dot shirt, wide eyed in search of a great book, and terrible at pronouncing the word “chai” that he met two years ago. Carl kissed Margo’s forehead and softly murmured, “I’m sorry.”

Margo pulled back from Carl and headed for the door once more but this time he let her go. For something about the way she felt in his arms couldn’t bring back the joyous emotions he once believed he felt for her. He knew it was only pity. It was pity he felt in the coffee shop those two years ago, and it was certainly pity now. The things Margo wanted were not his issues to deal with any longer.

Carl closed the door and reached back to open the box. Inside was nothing more than a few books, headphones, his We The Kings t-shirt, and a small box no bigger than Carl’s palm.

Margo had placed a small note on top that read, “for someone amazing.”

Carl opened the tiny case and found the bracelet he had made for Margo. He flipped it inside out and read the inscription, “*We are all fools in love.*”

He smiled. “And some of us are crazy enough to love ourselves.”