

(Don't) Let Go

She could feel the chill creeping through the gaps of the thick wooden door. She was alone in the museum, waiting for the old painter – Mr. Walsh.

“Pleasure finally meeting you Mr. Walsh.” The old painter looks closer to his age when one sees him up close: the freckles and wrinkles under his silvery hair.

“My pleasure too, Miss Reinhart.” He replied immediately.

“This way.” Haley led the old painter, walking through the hallways soundless but their eyes scanned through the artworks as Haley could not help but teethe a prideful smile when they arrived.

“Here is where your works would be shown – twelve oil paintings in total.”

“Good choices you made here, Miss Reinhart.” He complimented as Haley nodded to respond.

“But just one last thing, the written description of your collection...” Haley asked.

“Mind if we sit down first? My ankles are not in good condition.” Haley immediately reach out to support the man’s posture as they sat on the resting sofa.

“I am such a clumsy old man.” His face was so tensed up and Haley was concerned, looking at him. She could envision the once youthful painter talking to her.

“You would understand once you become older. Mind if I tell you a story maybe? Miss Reinhart?” asked the old painter. What a strange sudden request she thought.

“So...others called her the “colored girl. The boy was inspired by her beauty. From time to time he would draw portraits of her in his small condo in uptown Brooklyn. Not soon after, their artful collaboration turned into something more romantic.” His eyes stared at the paintings as he continued.

“Yet, their continued their intimate relationship but had to be made secret. Back in the days black doesn’t belong to white and vice versa. Love was still classified by color.”

“She was pregnant with his child and for once they were so happy. But their relationship had to be kept secret, especially from their families.”

Haley looked at the old painter, frowning, unsure why he seemed so sorrowful.

“It was joyful watching the girl and the precious baby growing inside her stomach. They promised each other no matter what, they were going to build their future together.”

He coughed, clearing his voice and continued, “But one day she went missing. She was nowhere to be found. The boy worried and waited and he never heard anything from her since.”

“I guess that's all I got to tell,” the man suddenly stopped, hands clenched together. Yet the questions in Haley's mind were still not answered but left being more baffled before.

The old painter glimpsed at the windows and said, “I ought to go, it's getting late. Is there something I ought to sign before I leave?” The old painter asked Haley.

“Yes I'm sorry,” Haley quickly took out the document. “I was so distracted.”

“It's just a story after all.” He replied as he swiftly signed the letter.

“At some point we all stop nurturing dreams,” he added as he signed the paperwork. “Some things are just better kept in a museum.”

“I has to go, or else these migraines are going to kill me.” He stood up, turning his way to the exit. He seemed determined to leave.

“But Sir, the description of your collection...” Haley quickly inquired.

“Maybe it's better to just leave it blank – leaves more room of imagination.” He interrupted Haley, stopping her further inquisition. His footsteps again echoed in the hallways with an inexplicable weight attached. He left the room without even leaving final glances at “his” collection.

“But...”

“Have yourself a nice evening, Miss Reinhart.”

He was gone.

She was alone in the spacious show room, confused, perplexed yet still wanting to not just getting her job done, but also in search for the answers for the questions yielding in her mind. Is “he” Mr. Walsh? If not, then who? Did Mr. Walsh actually drew these moving paintings?

Haley looked at the last drawing again – dated 25, Dec, 1986. The girl inside the picture was pure joy: arms placing on her full stomach, she looked at her unborn baby as if it was the most amazing thing she had ever experienced. When she turned back the picture, Haley realized the yellowed letter pinned against the back of the frame. Haley gently opened the letter and started to read...

Dear Walsh,

By the time you are reading this letter, I have already told my family about our plan of forming our little family. Walsh, I am simply tired of running and escaping when there's nothing worth hiding for. I want to take a bet on us. I ought to. I loved you and I have always loved you. You know that too well, from all the times we spent together at the cruddy apartment of yours in Brooklyn that I have always made fun of. I could vividly recall that time you kneel down after I told you my pregnancy. I said yes before you even asked me. My answer is always yes. There's one thing in my life that is worth fighting for, and that is us.

P.S Will be back and see you tonight.

Love always,

Michaela

25th December, 1986

Haley was alone in the show room. The paintings, the air, the history, she was overwhelmed. The letter was never discovered and was hidden for 29 years. "Mr. Walsh has to read this." She instantly folded the letter and raced out the museum.

There he was, sitting on the big broad stairs descending from the main entrance with his back facing towards Haley. He was there sitting still, contemplating.

"Mr. Walsh?" she said gently, "I think this belongs to you."

The old painter turned his back, looked up to Haley and said, "That belongs to the museum as well."

Haley sat down beside the old painter on the stairs. Together they overlooked the pedestrians walking on the bleak 53rd street as if they were searching for that long-lost figure.