

THE SILENT OBSERVER – THE SHORT LIFE OF MY PROMISED FOREVER

They say my life won't begin until someone stoops down, presses their face and finger to the glass case where I reside, smiles, and says, "That one. May I please see that one?" That's where it all starts, supposedly. Having lived both inside and out of this glass case now, I both agree and disagree with this supposed truth.

I remember my day rather clearly, as the store wasn't particularly busy on the morning I was chosen. I watched a younger-looking couple make their way around the other glass cases until they stopped at mine – a routine I had seen hundreds of times. The girl bent down, looked right past me, then her eyes darted quickly back, narrowing in on my biggest emerald-cut diamond. "Me? Really, me?" I thought hopefully, as she studied me further. And then I saw it – the point, smile, and ask. "Today could be the day...the one where my life begins!" I recall thinking. I held onto her finger with hopeful anticipation.

I watched and walked with them as they perused the store for a while longer, the woman holding onto me the entire time. After some time and much debate, she looked between me and the one other contender, gave me one last smile, and her decision was made. I had a home, a couple, a promise of forever, and so my life began with Nathan and Margo. The three of us, Nathan, Margo, and myself, the ring that would forever symbolize their love, made a perfect team. I was going home.

I'm starting to realize though that the finger I now live on is an interesting and complex one. Margo stares at me often. She looks down at me in her lap, on the steering wheel headed to work, and slips me on and off to examine me further, my big and small diamonds, and my intricate inlay. I didn't quite fit her finger at the store and thus was resized, but even still, I slip

off easily, sometimes spinning around to the inside of her palm. Perhaps I'm being too sensitive but, I'm beginning to think I don't fit here...in more ways than one.

At the beginning of their engagement, I listened to the planning of the shower, wedding, and reception, and went everywhere with Margo and Nathan. The wedding date was set, save-the-dates had been purchased, and the venue had been booked. It was an exciting time, a once-in-a-lifetime event that I got to be a part of and I couldn't wait until the big day, until another ring was fused to my side. Margo was happy, I think. She wasn't one for showing much emotion or wearing her heart on her sleeve, and while I knew she cared for Nathan deeply, some days things simply didn't feel quite right. I wish I knew more of their backstory, and how they came to be. Perhaps then I could understand this weird sensation that something is moving below the surface of my home – some kind of unrest in Margo. Sadly, I only have pictures and their present words to go off of instead.

Now, we're several months into the planning phase and Margo is starting to leave me places. At home on the kitchen counter, by the bathroom sink, and sometimes she slips me off before heading into a work meeting, stowing me away in her car console. I can't fully comprehend the look on her face as she reaches down with her other hand to take me from what should be my forever home. I was built mainly to understand the love, happiness, devotion, and care that goes into a marriage; I was forged to symbolize such things. But lately, I'm beginning to see something else entirely. She looks pained and saddened, confused, unfocused, and simply somewhere else. This contradictory behavior leaves me baffled as well. I've heard from her friends and family that I'm beautiful, classic and elegant too. So why would she want to hide me from everyone? That's not what beautiful things are made for.

From my new-normal perch on the ring holder in the bathroom, I watch her pace her apartment, talk with herself, and cry. Sometimes when Nathan is here with us, late at night she locks herself in the bathroom, and does all three of these things while staring at me, her face contorting in some deep, maddening pain, with Nathan fast asleep on the other side of the wall. I want to help, make it better, and take some of the pain away... if only a ring could complete such a feat! I can't identify wholly with her pain and I feel helpless, much like she is feeling, I believe.

As the days pass, Margo continues on in silent anguish, smiling, and playing the part of a happily engaged woman when Nathan is around, when she discusses wedding plans with her friends and family, and with her coworkers. But to me, she doesn't mask it well. When we are alone the first thing she does upon arriving home is remove me from her finger, and begins pacing the hall once more. The other day she broke down talking to Nathan, saying that she was feeling things, emotions she was still trying to figure out, dissect, and make sense of. He nodded, not absorbing half of what she was feeling in the way that I was beginning to, saying that what she was experiencing was normal, part of the process, that she was getting "cold feet", and that it all would subside. I didn't agree. I can't possibly tell you what having cold feet has to do with pending nuptials, but I don't think it's Margo's feet that are cold.

Things instead, have gotten much worse. Margo has developed a shaking in her hands and a tightness in her chest that is rather relentless, especially on the days she's consumed by thinking, pacing, and going down the darkening rabbit hole of difficult decisions. When I do rest on her finger, I tremble too as a result of her shivering hand, yet again spinning to face the inside of her palm. I listen to her pray, watch her type endless questions on relationships, marriage, and happiness into her laptop, clinging to the final fragment of hope she has left that what she's feeling is in fact only this odd notion of cold feet as Nathan had suggested.

On one of the rare days she chooses to take me to work, after staring out the window for quite some time, she pulls out a piece of paper from her desk and starts writing. She fills pages detailing all of what she is feeling, what she needs to do to make the pain stop, and the lessons learned within her restless, quivering reality. After she stops writing, she sits the pen down reviewing her work. As she stares at the paper, I suddenly feel odd and unlike myself. Then I notice I am no longer trembling on her hand; instead, I now sit here calm and steady. It's a sensation I have long forgotten. At that moment, I begin to observe a different expression adorn Margo's face – acceptance. Pained acceptance.

It's now only a couple months out from the wedding date and Margo asks Nathan for space and time after her writing revelation. Space for several days away from one another, and time to think. Between you and me, I think she already knows what she's going to do...she simply isn't ready to fully come to terms with the facts yet. I wonder anxiously what this means for me. We're all in uncharted marital waters.

Upon this request for space and time, a piece of me wishes to be mad, livid, fuming with hate towards a girl who's so far cheated me out of pre-wedding happiness, and a time when I should be shone off to everyone Margo knows, have pictures taken of me, and never for a second should I slip from her finger to be concealed from all. In spite of this wish, I cannot find it in my platinum nor in my diamonds to hate Margo. Even though I seldom sit upon my supposed forever home these days, I still witness it all from whatever countertop, ring holder, or purse pocket where I was last left. The anguish, the internal battle, the tremors, the hate she holds for herself in feeling the way she does. I know this dark and deep sea of sensation is one that she never wished for or imagined she'd experience, as her eyes are much different now compared to

the first day we met. And so, it is not in me to hate the girl who is trying desperately to hold onto my idea of forever, as I understand it is her idea as well.

We spend the day before Margo is to meet with Nate at her parent's house. I've occupied enough time with her now to understand that this is a place of great comfort to her...something that she's needing more and more of in these joyless times. Even still, proper rest doesn't find her that night. She looks out the window, rolls over, and adjusts the pillows several times before rolling back over to look at me sitting on the bedside table. After this futile attempt at sleep, Margo sits up and looks at me with a million different emotions moving across her face.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I tried...I've been trying, you know." She says in a tormented whisper.

It's the first time she's spoken directly to me, and yet I've always understood her empathetic nature. You see, as badly as I want to I cannot hate her because I know. I know she's tried. And I know she's tired. I recognize she's currently a deep well of agony, upset at what she knows and feels, and simultaneously enraged at herself for all that she does not feel towards Nathan. I know neither one of us will find dream-like sleep tonight.

Despite our best efforts, the morning finds us, the day has arrived, the week is up, and Margo and Nathan find themselves sitting on the couch in Margo's apartment. She's asked him to sit down so that they can have a long overdue conversation. I shake uncontrollably on her finger once more, as she struggles with the words I, and Nathan most assuredly, have dreaded. Before she utters a single syllable, I feel I already know what's coming. This is the culmination of months' worth of torment that Margo can no longer carry. After a minute or two of uncontrollable sobbing, she finally composes herself enough to utter several sentences: "I can't

do this anymore. ...I don't want to get married. Nathan, I'm so, so sorry. I truly am." Margo cries.

And there it is - there will be no wedding, no forever love, no Mr. and Mrs. to Death Do Us Part. Any hope I had at a forever family is now gone with the wounded whispers of a few sentences. I begin to feel utterly lost. I figure both Nathan and Margo will experience the same feeling as well...our team is no longer, my home now foreign. My life had indeed started, then stopped abruptly. No one had ever even so much as whispered this route to me while on the inside of the glass case. Had I known about this path, perhaps I would have wiggled around to face the inside of my navy-blue velvet box in the same way I spun around Margo's finger - cautious and hidden.

For the last time, I am slipped off her finger and put back into the velvet box from which I came - a ring's life in reverse. I sit on the coffee table listening to the rest of the conversation. Through eyes that overflow with tears, Nathan, motioning to me says, "If you ever change your mind, this will always be yours." Margo looks over at me and begins crying all over again.

For a moment, I wish I could go with her, wherever she is headed next. To see if she finds happiness, and what her new life will encompass. But I cannot. I must go with Nathan now and spend some time with him, as it's our stories that intertwine from here. My bet is that I'll go back to the dresser drawer underneath his socks where he kept me before he officially proposed. I sincerely doubt Nathan will want to stare at me too much from this point forward, and I can accept that. It'll be dark, lonely, and quiet, and I'll wait until the day he finds a different finger where I better fit. Perhaps I'll be returned to my home inside the glass case, waiting for my rebirth; a different couple, a different life, and hopefully, a much longer one.

They say my life will begin the day I'm found residing in my case and some stranger does the point, smile, and ask. I suppose in some ways that's true, but in other's I'd say my life was over before it ever began. Maybe, it still hasn't started. I can't help but to wonder how many of my sisters and brothers will meet a similar fate, currently unaware of an abrupt ending while they sit safe and naïve on the inside of the glass case. If I end up going back, I will tell them the truth – I will tell them my story. Nevertheless, I do hope I get a second chance. I pray Margo and Nathan do too in finding others who are a better fit for them as well.

Hours have now passed, and they're both still sitting in the same place, discussing a different life. Before Nathan closes the lid on my once-again home, I see it – what I've been hoping to see from Margo for months. A smile. It's a small, Mona Lisa-esque, still ever-pained smile as she wipes the tears from her cheeks, but there's hope in that smile for a fresh start, and the outline of a life she was always meant to live.

And then I know: she's going to be okay; she's going to be just fine. Actually, it's more than that - someday, a day far from this one, she's going to be happy again. I believe we all will.