Together Forever

by Alexander Taylor

Darkness—then light. Carla blinked profusely, the depths of her eyelids shielding her from the newly born brightness that clawed at her pupils. Her surroundings wavered and became clearer, melting into her vision. The clothes she wore were some of her finest: a long black dress that ran smoothly down her body, curling around the wood upon which she sat. The dark fabric pooled about her feet, and she could feel heavy earrings tugging at the lobes of her ears. She put a hand up to stop the ringing in her head and found her hair was pulled tightly back. She traced the jet black strands with her fingers until they came to rest upon a large bun. Sighing, she placed her shaky fingers upon her brow. She could not remember. She could not remember.

The floor beneath her lurched suddenly, and a movement from the other side of the room in which she sat startled her. Her green eyes flashed upwards. Across from her sat a man upon a sort of wooden bench similar to hers. He too wore high quality clothing, a rich black suit over a crisp white shirt and a pair of black trousers. His shifty blue eyes bored into hers, and a new wave of pain racked the inside of her head. The man seemed to choke for a moment, and he wiped the inside of his palms along the lengths of his pants. He looked down, and Carla could see the nervous beads of sweat lining the edge of his brow. She took a quick glance around the room. It was small; apart from the two who sat inside, it was clear. The floor was painted metal. Dappled light that drifted in through a small window at the edge of the room cast shadows upon the man, adding to his already shifty appearance. A roof of the same material as the floor lay
above their heads. From its appearance, as well as the continual swaying that rocked the room, she decided that they were in the bed of a truck. The man choked again.

“I—I,” he managed in a guttural tone before Carla turned her eyes upon him, more curious than anything. A tear shone from the corner of the man’s right eye, a glistening bead that caught the light, shining as it slowly ran down his pale cheek. Suddenly, Carla doubled over as a wave of emotion filled her. At first she could not place it; but then, as her brow furrowed and hands clenched, she knew. It was rage. It soon subsided. She knew not why this man awakened such a terrible anger inside of her, and soon it turned into confusion.

“Why?” she asked sharply. For a moment she did not realize that the voice was her own. Her response seemed to devastate the man, and he shrunk back and huddled over, muttering to himself softly as another tear fell from his chin. She reached across to take his shoulder in her hand, and the wood beneath her creaked like so many insects being crushed under the heel of one ignorant even of their presence. The man stopped mumbling and his head rose slowly, meeting her eyes.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered, and the feel of his breath upon her arm sent shivers crawling down her back. His face was wet from crying, his eyes puffy and red. Carla withdrew her hand. He had hurt her. This she knew. This she felt.

“Why?” she repeated, in a much softer tone. He seemed to struggle to respond. He looked around, biting his lip as new tears formed in his eyes before he looked down at his lap and muttered an inaudible response. She did not speak, instead focusing her gaze upon him. When he finally looked up, she looked at him expectantly.
“Love,” he choked out before he hung his head and wept once more. His answer did nothing to sate the seething mass of questions that whirled about her mind. The answer could mean anything, for she did not know the object of his love.

“What?” she asked. He looked at her and cocked his head as if he did not understand. She could feel his eyes searching hers for a response. “What did you love?” she added. The man almost laughed, she could see it on his face, but it caught in his throat. He looked to the floor and brought his hands together, picking at his nails nervously.

“You know as well as I,” he said softly. Carla did know. She could feel it. However, when she tried to grasp it, rage filled her once more and blocked the memory from her reach. She paused a moment, closing her eyes and taking a breath. Her hands were shaking. She tried once more to push through the red fog that clouded her mind, but she could not. It was just on the other side, if only she could see past it. Her teeth were clenched. Calming herself, she released the pressure and opened her eyes. A strand of hair fell into her face and she brushed it away, tucking it behind her ear.

“Tell me,” she whispered. “Please.” His expression turned to that of pain. She could see the hurt that filled his teary eyes.

“Love of you,” he said quietly. “I only wanted us to be together . . .” Before she could react, a peal of thunder broke across the sky outside, and the sound seemed to shake the shell of the truck. A soft rain began to fall upon the roof, not the downpour of divine punishment, but rather a gentle reminder that God was watching them from above. The sound was comforting and helped to slow the frantic beating of her heart.
“Love of me,” she said, soft enough that he could not hear her. He had hurt her because he loved her. She supposed men often wronged one another for less noble reasons. A sudden question rose to her mind.

“Did I . . . love you too?” she asked sincerely. He searched her eyes desperately, obviously hoping she was pulling some kind of trick on him.

“I don’t . . .” he started. He swallowed. “I don’t know.” He shook his head. “No. I don’t think so.” She bit the inside of her cheek.

“Why?” she asked. He looked even more confused than he had already been. She knew it wasn’t for lack of looks; his dark hair and thick jaw made him pleasant enough to look at. The urge to know overwhelmed her. She needed to know why she hadn’t loved him back, why it had all happened. Carla frowned. She did know. She knew, but her conscious still waded lost through the fog, and she could not remember. The man before her opened his mouth to speak, but shut it quickly. He only shrugged as more sobs began to rack his body. She wanted so badly to reach out and comfort him, but she held back. Something inside her still distrusted the man; some part of her knew what he had done.

She kept her gaze on him, but he looked away and refused to meet her eyes. Her eyes stayed on him for a while, but he shifted in his seat, taking deep breaths and looking out the window to his left. She felt confused. The way he had looked at her, as if he was hurt . . . she was unsure now of who had hurt whom.

Before long, she too found herself looking outside of the rain-spotted window to her right. Something about the landscape seemed familiar, seemed comforting. It felt familiar to her,
but she still could not tell where she was. Rolling hills stretched out to the distance, wildflowers occasionally dotting the countryside with hues of purple and yellow. The smell of rain and fresh life filled her nostrils, and despite herself, she smiled. She took a deep breath, filling her lungs with the cool air. She allowed it to swirl about before she released it in a long sigh. The man shifted behind her, but she did not turn around. The fog swirled before her and cleared slightly. She smiled as it came to her.

“David,” she said giddily. She could almost hear the man behind her freeze. The sound of his ragged breathing ceased and she could hear only the rain. She swiveled in her seat until she was facing forward once more. The man turned as well, and though his face still appeared saddened, his eyes betrayed his hope. “That’s your name isn’t it?” Carla almost giggled.

“David?” The edges of the man’s lips twitched. She could see him holding back, but soon a grin spread across his face in contrast to his wet, searching eyes.

“Yes,” he said, and new tears filled his eyes, though Carla suspected they were not those of sadness but rather those of hope and joy. She began to laugh, and soon David joined her. Tears came to her eyes as well and they began to laugh and cry together. When finally their laughs subsided, she found herself leaning upon David’s shoulder. She looked and met his eyes, and there she found naught but love, and despite the rage that still gripped her mind, she decided she loved him back.

And with that the memories came flooding back. She remembered everything that had happened, everything he had done. She smiled. And then she forgot. It didn’t matter. None of it
mattered. She loved him and he loved her. She leaned forward and they embraced, and they held one another. The truck beneath them suddenly ceased. They drew apart, hand in hand.

“Are you ready?” he asked gently. She smiled brightly and nodded.

“Always,” she whispered back to him. The back of the truck opened, and a ramp was put up against it. Two holes lay in the ground outside, gaping, calling. David squeezed her hand as they stood from their coffins. They walked down the ramp together, hand in hand, until they were both swallowed up by the earth, and though the ground separated their embrace, their souls and their love reconciled in the peace and forgiveness and togetherness of death. And there they lay, together forever.