

Nowhere Fast

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She didn't know much about planes; actually, she didn't know anything about planes. An ounce of excitement filled her entire being knowing Kase could be thousands of feet in the air away from the small-town life that clung to her like humidity with the press of a few buttons and the guidance of a lever. It was a dream that seemed so close to touch yet so far away in reality. She could hear the low rumble of the small plane engine echoing from the barn as her uncle let the small aircraft warm-up before his trip over the fields to spray crops. In such a small town, he only sprayed about 10 people's fields, not including his own. This didn't seem like much to Kase until she realized just how big each field was and the number of fields each farmer had.

At some point during the first year of living with her uncle Chase, he had taken her with him to show her what exactly he did each day. After that, she would go along and "help" spray the crops with him. Kase thought of asking him if she could tag along this time, but thought

better of it, because she really needed to finish her book report before the weekend started.

Maybe another day, after summer has started. Yeah, then.

It was her junior year of high school, and her teacher had thought that a good old fashioned book report was the best way to send the school year off. Any book was allowed to be chosen for the report, as long as it was age-appropriate meaning no Dr. Seuss or the like, more than ten chapters, and wasn't a textbook. They had until the weekend to have the report emailed in. It was the last assignment of the year, and as soon as it was submitted, summer officially began. Kase knew immediately what book she wanted to write over – “The Woman in Cabin 10” by Ruth Ware.

Her taste in literature tended to be a good reason for the students at Marloak High to make fun of her. They thought she was odd for liking novels that strayed down the path of psychological fear and had a hint of murder or kidnapping. Kase didn't care though, what others thought of her, that is. Her mom Jaila had been the perfect example as to why she shouldn't give a fat rat's fuzzy ass about other people's opinions. Jaila tended to say that plenty, fat rat's fuzzy ass. It was a saying that Chase had come up with one day when he was a teenager.

Jaila always told Kase, that no matter what happened, her life was hers alone. Whatever consequences arrived after a decision was hers alone to bear. So, Kase made sure that she thought through each decision carefully and considered the outcomes, good or bad. Jaila made sure that each decision she made herself was one that she would want her daughter to find understanding in, so that she never questioned life. Though, as all people do, Kase did question life. She didn't question her mom because she knew that each path that Jaila selected was one meant to benefit their lives.

As good as it felt to finish the report ahead of schedule, Kase felt that it was a little bittersweet that school was ending already. It was the first week of May, and the year had flown by as if it was a bee moving from one flower to the next, trying to gather as much nectar as possible. It was still weird to Kase to go from one school that didn't start summer until the first week of June to a school that got out a whole month earlier. Sure, she was excited about summer, but it was the first time she wouldn't spend it with her mom and that hurt.

Jaila had decided to move back to Dallas, just as abruptly as she had decided to move home to Kansas, only this time without her daughter. There wasn't a note, or anything for

Kase to find. Just her uncle sitting in the grey leather recliner staring at his shoes getting ready to start his day like nothing had happened. Seeing him like that, it was heartbreak enough. Why did her mom leave without a word? More importantly, without her?

I have Chase, and he's all I need, she thought to herself matter-of-factly.

It was a small funny moment in her life that Kase's uncle was named Chase. Everyone in Marloak called the pair "the Ase's" like it was some great nickname with a play on the word ass. Kase found it just as odd as funny that Chase would be the one to finish raising her when he acted like a kid most times himself. He wasn't fond of kids either, especially teenagers. Yet, he was stuck with one living under his roof until further notice.

Chase is her mom's kid brother by 12 years. A week after he turned 25, a 14-year-old Kase was dropped on his front porch with Jaila, his big sister, trailing not far behind. For the first five or six months, the three of them didn't know how to act around one another. They were always trying to avoid getting in one another's way, which in the end, all anyone did was step on someone else's toes. Eventually, the elephant in the room scurried off and it was

as if the trio lived together forever. That was three years ago.

Kase's dad Micah was killed in a car accident, and Jaila decided to move with her daughter back home to a small town in Kansas. It wasn't long before the pain over her father's death had started to fade. At least fade to the point that it was almost just another scar on their bodies; forever a reminder of what happened. The day of Micah's funeral, Kase had promised herself that she would leave and never turn back. She had no idea where she was going to go, she was just determined to escape. Dallas may have been a pretty big city, but the moment she landed in Marloak, her promise to herself only grew bigger and stronger.

"Chase, I'm going for a walk! I'll be back later." Kase called out to an empty house before remembering that her uncle had taken the plane out. She wrote a note and placed it on the counter next to the back door in the kitchen. It'd be the first thing he saw when he came back. Kase didn't want Chase to think that she had disappeared on him like her mom did them four months ago. He knew that she wouldn't leave without a word because it wasn't in her nature, but then again, they thought the same about her mom. So better safe than sorry, Kase left a note nonetheless. After all, he was the only family she had now.

The sun was high and beating down on Kase's back the moment she stepped outside, which made her decide that instead of a walk, she'd ride her bike into town. That way she wouldn't necessarily get stranded in the heat and it would take a lesser time getting home. For such a small town, Marloak had one thing going for it, it had a Target. This made everything immensely better after Jaila and Kase first moved here from Dallas. It was only a few weeks until Kase had figured out the quickest route into town on her bike and just how much money she needed for a medium coffee and blondie from the cafe inside Target. She tended to take a little extra money with her each time for a bottle of water for the ride home or if a particularly interesting book caught her eye, which four out of five times one did.

Nine minutes later, Kase chained her Cruiser up on the bike rack in front of Target and headed inside for her sweets on a mission. She settled for a window seat and considered her surroundings. She was going to people watch in hopes of inspiration for her next painting. No interesting prospects wandered through in the end and soon grew tired of the task.

Standing up, she tossed the trash into the garbage can and headed for the media racks in

search of a new book or even a vinyl. Ever since she had moved in with her uncle, she found herself at Target almost as much as she was at home. There were so many aisles to get lost in whether it was for new decor to haphazardly display around her room, to find a book to get lost in, or pretend to be a model walking the runway as she tried time and time again to makeover her wardrobe.

As she made her way towards the shelves of books, Kase started to get an idea of how she was going to accomplish her promise to leave. She headed for the nonfiction section of the aisle and began browsing for novels on planes. Much to her surprise, there was an abundance of novels on the basics of flying, maintenance of planes, and aviation regulations. Kase was excited to begin her adventure into fulfilling the seemingly out of reach promise. Piling the books into her arms, she headed to the office section of the store in search for supplies to put her vision in sight.

After a little while, she had accumulated a pile too big for her to carry in just her arms. Defeated, she searched around her for a cart to dump the merchandise in. Luckily, there was an abandoned cart waiting idly by a clearance rack as if by fate. Trying to avoid tripping, Kase hurried over to claim the cart for her own and resumed her quest for supplies. The cart was

full of books, pens, both a cork board and whiteboard, yarn, push pins, and snacks.

You can't compile a mastermind plan without brain fuel, she mused to herself as she began to ring up her treats. By the time that she had reached the bottom of the basket, her total had rung up to \$187.62. As she fed the machine what little cash she brought, her chest slowly tightened as anxiety crept up her skin. Pulling out her wallet, Kase gripped the small plastic rectangle she rarely broke out except for gas or emergencies. Once the receipt was printed and the bags were loaded back into the cart, she headed out of the store and realized a small dilemma that she was now faced with; she rode a bike to the store.

“Shit.”

Kase looked down at her wrist to check the time, only to notice that not enough time had passed for Chase to have finished his rounds of the fields. She couldn’t think of what else to do other than try to somehow settle the bags on her handlebars, but she knew better than to attempt the ride home like that.

“Kase?” A familiar voice sounded from behind her. Turning to look, Mack, a fellow junior at Marloak stood five feet from her. He was looking between her, the bags on the ground, and her bike with a raised eyebrow as

if he was thinking she was insane for considering the ride.

“Need a hand,” Mack asked.

“Uh. Well.”

Kase glanced down at her feet and back at the boy, feeling a flush creep up the back of her neck. She didn’t even want to try riding her bike home with the bags and boards or try to get ahold of Chase when he was working. Then again, she wasn’t so keen on taking a ride from the newly appointed football captain. A scene popped into her head of a jock and nerd falling in love, just like in a fairytale. Shaking the image from her head, she thought to herself *fairytales aren’t real, one ride won’t cause some weird chain reaction.*

Looking back up at Mack, she shrugged, “Sure, thanks.”

She grabbed most of the bags while he took her bike to the back of his truck. Piling the bags into the backseat, Kase became brutally aware that she hadn’t ever really talked to Mack before. It wasn’t because of the whole he’s a jock, she’s a nerd stereotype, but because Kase had kept to herself mostly at school. She had lived in Marloak for almost four years now, but she still felt like the city outsider.

There was nothing wrong with the other students at school, other than the occasional judgement passed against her taste in literature.

The other kids were all normal as could be. Kase just wasn't into getting to know others, she liked being alone. Maybe that's why she and her uncle got along so well.

The ride to her house was quiet except for the radio playing a country station. A hillbilly was singing a song about being someone's honey bee. The driveway came into view, and she almost wanted to ask Mack to stop at the gate but kept silent. He helped her unload her cargo and led her bike to the porch. Chase and the plane were still gone, but that wasn't a surprise. Mack looked at her as if to say something, but thinking better of it, gave a small wave and headed back to the truck. As he started to back out of the drive, Kase yelled thanks to which was received with another wave.

Once she lugged everything to her room, she started to unpack everything and lay it out on her bed. Slowly, she turned around her room looking for the ideal space to start her vision boards. The wall next to her closet and a window became the prime prospect for serving as the new home to the boards. Piece by piece, she slowly found a rhythm at how every item was placed on the board. From the starting point at her label of setting things up followed by a red string twisting in all directions to

different points, the finish line was in bright blue letters stating “Leave.”

From a glance, one would probably think that her vision boards were crafted by a detective trying to track down a lead on a cold case. This thought gave a tingly feeling in her body as she knew that before long, her promise would become a reality.

Not long after summer began and Kase had set up her vision boards, she had started going out in the plane with her uncle. He taught her what each button on the dash was for, how to glide seamlessly through clouds like a bird, and everything a pilot needed to know. Chase had bought a new plane for crop dusting, and it wasn’t long before he started letting Kase fly on her own around their fields in the old plane. About three weeks into summer, Kase had filed to obtain her Private Pilot’s License.

It was June 12th when Kase received a letter stating that she needed to complete a solo flight cross-country at a 150 nautical miles, and she would be finished with her training. The whole process of learning to fly and get her license was like a dream; vivid, fast, daring, and over fast.

The next week, Kase packed a small tote bag with some snacks to take with her on the last leg of her training. She knew that she most likely wouldn’t eat any of the food that she

brought with her, but it felt better to be safe than sorry.

At nine in the morning on a Friday, she climbed into the small plane after completing her pre-flight checklist. The engine sputtered to life and soon hummed a steady song, ready to take flight. She guided the aircraft out of the barn and began flipping switches to start her journey into the sky. Chase stood leaning against a wooden gate to the field the barn sat watching. He was eager for his niece to finish her training, too, if not more so than Kase.

Chase knew that learning to fly wasn't going to be a hobby for his niece, but a passageway into finding her own self. It was obvious by the boards in her room as each bullet got closer and closer to the finish line.

Kase waved to her uncle and pushed the throttle forward to start down the small makeshift runway in the field. As she gathered the speed she needed, Kase signaled for the wings to prepare for lift and soon the aircraft was in the air. Turning the rudder to the left, Kase began to steer the plane towards the west coast. She had to make three stops on her journey, the first, an hour and a half into the flight. The first planned stop was outside of Chicago, followed by a stop in Newark, and a final stop in Chattanooga.

The time sailed by just as fast as the flight did. What felt like only mere minutes was in reality hours. It wasn't long before 150 nautical miles had been reached, and Kase was on the final stretch home with her Pilot's License within grasping distance. It was nearing night when she had made it to the last checkpoint in Chattanooga. After a quick bathroom break, a stretch of her legs, and fueling up the plane, Kase was back in the air heading home. *I wonder if Chase will still be up when I get home*, she wondered to herself.

While the light on the wingtip glowed a steady blue, a light closer to the body of the aircraft blinked red simultaneously to a blinking White light on the rear of the wingtip. The longer a person studied it, the faster the blinks seemed to work. Thousands of feet below the plane, Kase could see the lights of cities and towns start to light up the ground like a million stars. The closer bundles of lights almost resembled galaxies. The galactic bundles meant that she was flying over a city, or at least the business district of a city. She couldn't wait for the stars to dwindle until only a few were scattered across the ground. The fewer stars, the closer to home she was.

Sure enough, as she prepped for landing, a figure waving two orange cone-like poles to help her safely guide the plane to the landing

strip was her uncle. As she touched down, the excitement of knowing she had finally completed her training overtook her soul. Kase started giggling uncontrollably and jumped out of the cockpit once the plane was parked in the barn and shut down. She ran to her uncle, and the two hugged as they both started laughing all that much more once in each other's presence. They locked up the barn and headed to the house arms wrapped around each other with plans for a celebratory drink, waiting for them in the kitchen. The only time Kase was allowed to drink was in celebration or if she was at home and Chase was around, and according to him, this was "a damn good reason for a drink!"

The pair spent the weekend celebrating with a barbecue and some of Chase's friends, other pilots and farmers in town. Among the crowd of partygoers was Mack, but he and Kase never shared anything more than a pair of smiles and waves with one another that weekend. It had been the first time Kase had seen Mack since that day he gave her a ride home from Target, and she wasn't sure what to say to him. So she didn't say anything.

When Monday rolled around, Kase could hardly contain her excitement. When the grandfather finally chimed out that the time was noon, Kase sprinted out of the house with

truck keys in hand. She was finally getting her Pilot's License.

An hour into her drive, she neared Air Associates of Kansas in Olathe, Kansas. Her skin was covered in goosebumps as the reality of the beginning of her summer set in. After all the hours and miles put into her training, she was barely in the school for an hour when it was all said and done. She walked out to the truck with her certificate and pilot wings sealed in a manila envelope. A smile was plastered on her face, and it felt permanent. Heading home, she rolled the windows down. The sun beat down on her left arm as she rested it on the door frame driving down the highway. Nothing was going to ruin her day.

The past two months have been full of whirlwind adventures as Jace trained in flying. Whether it was learning to spray crops with Chase, or completing a goal in her flight training such as delivering a package to another flight school. Days turned into weeks which turned into months. Her pilot's license was in her hand, finally. At least, until Chase would inevitably steal it to be framed and hung in the kitchen. Even though he was just her uncle, he was starting to act and seem more like her dad. It felt good; to both of them.

When she made it home, there was a black truck waiting in the drive with someone sitting

on the tailgate. I know that truck, she thought to herself. Mack hopped down from the tailgate and strode to meet her by the garage. Kase couldn't help but think how strange it was for Mack to be at her house twice in one weekend, let alone at all.

"Hey."

"Hey."

"So, I guess you're officially a pilot now?"

The smile returned to her face, feeling as if it had never left. "Yeah, just picked up my certificate and wings," she answered. They began walking towards the back of the house when Kase started to hear some music playing in the background with laughter echoing to each beat. As they rounded the corner, everyone from the weekend barbecue stood in the yard talking amongst themselves. When they all noticed that Mack and Kase had arrived, they all started cheering.

Kase felt her face heat as her uncle wrapped her in a hug, followed by each guest. They had thrown her a surprise party to congratulate her on her "graduation." Outside beside the barn was the old plane, washed and what appeared to be waxed, a giant red bow was placed on the plane's nose. Chase was giving her the plane as a gift for completing her training. There were no words for what Kase felt, and she hugged her uncle tight as possible

with tears in her eyes. She had a plane, her very own plane.

It was nearly ten at night when the guests started to clear out, and Kase was glad. Three days of celebration was a little too much for her, no matter how excited she was. She waved goodbye to everyone and headed for the front of the house to start for bed.

“Hey Kase, wait up!” She turned to Mack jogging up to her and wondered what it was about. He shoved his hands into his pockets and slowly asked, “I was just wondering if maybe you would want to hang out sometime?” She couldn’t believe what she had just heard and after stuttering the word what out, she agreed upon him repeating the question, surprising them both.

That night was only the beginning of their hangouts and not long after they were nearly inseparable. Kase and Mack started out just going to grab lunch or to see a movie. Soon, the lunches turned into trips to the giant pond on Mack’s grandpa’s land for fishing, to flying around the town in her plane, to parking Mack’s truck in a field to stargaze. Days turned into weeks, and soon the end of summer was nearing. They had three weeks left, and Kase knew they were going to fly by.

“Let’s leave. Let’s just leave and never come back.”

Kase couldn't hide the shock on her face as she propped herself up on her arm. Mack and she were laying in his truck bed after a long hot day of fishing, and she didn't know if she had heard him right. "What are you talking about," she questioned with her eyebrow raised. He looked back at her and shrugged before looking back up at the sky.

"Why do you want to leave? We still have our senior year left."

"Oh, who cares about school? We can just take a test, get our GEDs, pack up a bag, and fly away. Don't you ever just realize you want more than what this town has to offer?"

He was imploring more and more ideas with her the more he talked. She knew precisely what he meant because she did want more. That was all she wanted since she moved to Marloak. The more he rattled on about all the possibilities, the more she wanted to say yes.

"Let me think about it. Okay? Give me the weekend, and I will give you an answer," she stated while sitting up. He sat up too with a nod. It wasn't what he wanted to hear, but it was also more than he expected to get. "Okay."

The weekend came the next day, and Kase didn't know what to think or do. She knew Mack had a point in some of what he was saying, but she also didn't think that leaving school their senior year just to get a GED was

worth much either. The idea of finally leaving and her vision boards becoming a reality of the promise being fulfilled was all it took to convince her. She was going to say yes.

Deciding not to wait until Monday, Kase called Mack to tell him yes before she changed her mind. On the other end of the phone, she could almost hear him jumping up and down in excitement. They started to make plans on when to leave, where they were going to go, and what to pack. It wasn't long until they had the plan all worked out. They were going to head for Seattle on the last day of summer, which was the next week on Sunday. Mack listed his truck for sale, despite his parents' disapproval, and it sold almost immediately. Once the pair had all their orders straightened out concerning belongings and money, they started counting down the days until they would leave.

Tuesday turned to Wednesday which turned to Thursday and so forth and so forth. Sunday finally arrived, and Mack had made his way over to Kase's house. They loaded the plane with their bags and made sure everything was good to go. The plan was to leave at night when no one would expect anything. The hours crept by, and the two could feel each other's anxiety. As nighttime finally arrived, reality began to

set in. They were really going to leave it all behind.

Mack had gone home earlier in the day to tell his family goodbye in not so many words before returning to the farm. Kase had spent most of the day with her uncle on his day off watching television and eating Chinese. He could tell something was up but knew Kase wasn't one for talking about things, like her mom. At eight, Chase headed for bed and Kase headed to her room for one last look. When she was sure that Chase was asleep, she snuck out of the house to meet Mack by the barn. It was time.

They completed the pre-flight checklist, piled into the plane, and with one last shaky breath, started the engine. After a few minutes of humming, Kase started guiding the plane to the runway. When they reached the starting line, she closed her eyes tightly for a moment before opening them again to start down the runway. As the plane gathered speed, memories started flying through her mind of the last four years in Marloak. As the memories started to fade, she realized that she was doing exactly what her mom had done; left without a word. Chase's face appeared in her mind, and that was enough for her.

“I can’t do it!” She cried out into the howling of the wind as she scrambled to stop the plane. Mack jumped out of the plane and caught Kase as she jumped to the ground too. Tears stained her cheeks as she tried to get words to leave her tongue, but no matter how hard she tried, there was no use.

“I can’t do it either,” Mack whispered in her ear.

Kase leaned back from his embrace, and she saw that he was teary-eyed as well. “I can’t leave Chase like how my mom left us. It isn’t fair to me or him. I just can’t do it,” she explained. Mack nodded and hugged her tighter.

They weren’t going to leave. Not yet. They left the plane on the runway and headed back to the house. The night turned to day and the new school year started. Mack and Kase looked at each other through groggy eyes that next morning and knew they made the right decision. They were going to stay, but they were still going to leave. Only the next time, they were going to do it the right way. They weren’t going to go like thieves in the night.