

Spring Rain

Wait a second. Wait just one second. Is this my first date? Does this count? I think it counts. No, hold on, no, please tell me it doesn't. Pleasepleaseplease! DAMN! It probably counts. *Lame*. Who the hell goes to Value Village on a date?

An unfamiliar bus conveys me to the far north—Oslo, Asgard, or maybe Newmarket. Huh, it's actually kinda warm up here. Is this really her street? Why's it so steep? Pause, Luke, pause, you don't wanna be sweating when you arrive. Look up at the sky. A single cloud wanders lonely as Wordsworth. I feel aimless; which one's her house? Oh, great, is that her dad in the driveway... Wonderful.

I make it through with only a non-fatal hello. Is it really gonna be this easy? I ring the bell. The door folds into the house and reveals Jaclyn, Christian name Sarah, standing with more poise than the Statue of Liberty, and even less sexily dressed. Her mum moves behind her. Neither of us drives, there's nowhere cool nearby, and we're both kinda dorky, so we opt to just go for a walk. "Don't worry, they'll be gone when we get back," she assures me as she picks up a black umbrella, turns it over in her hands, and puts it back down again.

As we descend that Mount Olympus of a street I just scaled, a few dark grey whales swim around the sun. Where our road joins the level one, we choose a dirt path that winds away to a footbridge and a shady gravel road along a brook. "Shall we visit your cousin," she commands. "She's working right now."

"Where?" Huh. I should really know this.

"Value Village. Come on, it's this way. We'll pass the tannery, too."

"There's a tannery? Where'd you get a tannery?"

"It's abandoned, silly," she says, smiling serenely.

On the gravel lane the rain breaks free of the sky, one of those odd rains where the sun looks on, and splashes into the stones and mud. I know Jaclyn's glad she didn't bring the umbrella. She loves the rain, and would only have brought it for the sun. The gravel abruptly ends at the mouth of an empty parking lot, rainbows strewn across it like leaves. The tannery stands lopsided before us, and we shelter under it and hug. I suppress the doubt that this is actually a date.

At Value Village, I spot my cousin Matty. Her faded red vest is slipping off her shoulders. We stand awkwardly and watch her put old clothes on hangers. She tells us we're cute together. We aren't. Her shift ends in an hour; do we wanna hang around? I wince and Jaclyn says yes. In the next aisle a man shouts into his phone: "They got—they got clothes... there's no kidney beans at this goddamn store." I sigh and look over at Jaclyn; she pulls something red and corduroy off the rack. This is *so* not a date. The man's phone has angered him: "White beans... your goddamn white beans." I catch

Jaclyn stealing a glance at me.

Suddenly I hate this place. “Actually, let’s go,” I say. As we walk to the door, our hands meet. Matty puts the red corduroy thing back and watches us.

We take the longer way back to Jaclyn’s place. At least one of us is trying to forget that neither of us likes the other all that much. After a last ascent of the street, we find her family has evacuated, as she predicted. We shuffle around the rooms, ending up in the kitchen in the middle. A magnet of a fruit tree sticks to the fridge, quite alone—there’ve been no kids here for a long time. My stomach rumbles, and even though I refuse, Jaclyn makes me eat. “I think there’s one good apple,” she says, peering into the fridge. It’s delicious; I eat it with hatred.

As I digest, we settle on her couch, but not close enough to touch. Instead we talk, mostly about us. Her three cats parade into the room. We give them brand new ancient Hebrew names: Eve, Abiathar, Ahazael. We’re still wet from the rain.

Silence falls after a while. Without the faintest doubt, I am not on a date. I feel the couch shift and turn only my eyes. She leans against her side of the couch, her knees drawn up, her body concave, her eyes focussing on or near mine. A part of me does want to kiss her, if that’s what this position means. Probably that is not the case. I pull my socked feet up onto the couch and incline my body to face hers. She shakes her head, still smiling. I think this might actually be a date; it’s just the worst one in all history and mythology.

A synth arrangement of Vivaldi’s *Spring* plays. Jaclyn silently unfolds and floats over to the phone in the kitchen. My eyes drift over to Abiathar, who chooses to occupy his time in dragging his tongue over his long white fur. Jaclyn reappears and announces that my parents will be here in ten minutes. She assumes her place on the couch and faces me, expectant.

I bite my lip and wait for my mind to give me something to say. “I think we…” the angle between my chin and my neck becomes acute, “I think both of us are only in this because we think the other likes us.”

She nods sagely.

“You wanna go to prom with me?”

She nods.