

#5

Photographer, Librarian, Hardware Store Owner

PHOTOGRAPHER. She thinks about the future. Their colleges are not so far away. Weekends together. Maybe some weeknights. And then, graduation, marriage, children. She thinks of names for their kids.

LIBRARIAN. Sophie. Liz. Margaret.

PHOTOGRAPHER. He thinks about later that night. He must be careful. There is a basketball scholarship on the line. College is the way out, the way to say no to the family business. What does he know about screws, drills, viscosity. He thinks about later that night. He presses against her.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Nuts and bolts.

PHOTOGRAPHER. Many other boys wish they were dancing with her. Many would like to clean his clock, knock his block off, sock his jaw. Many girls, me included, want to get lost in his arms.

They want to shame her. Erase her. Stuff her in a well. But these two - they are blissfully unaware.

LIBRARIAN. This night is perfect.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Yes.

LIBRARIAN. I can't wait for everything that comes next and also I want it to just be now forever, you know what I mean?

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Yes.

PHOTOGRAPHER. He does know what she means. She hugs him tighter. He smells her hair. It seems like maybe, just maybe this moment will last forever.

(PHOTOGRAPHER takes a photo of them which is projected.)

But it doesn't.

(The lights change. The HARDWARE STORE OWNER and the LIBRARIAN move away from one another. The present day awkwardness returns.)

LIBRARIAN. Hello.

Hardware Store Owner

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Long time no see.

LIBRARIAN. Busy over there at the library.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Here too. You know how it is.

LIBRARIAN. I sure do. Busy.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Busy. You wake up and wonder what day it is.

LIBRARIAN. What month.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. What year.

LIBRARIAN. Right.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Exactly. What can I do for you?

PHOTOGRAPHER. Immediately he feels like he said too much.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. I meant, what can I do for you?

PHOTOGRAPHER. That's not it either.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. I mean, you need something?

LIBRARIAN. Me? What would I need?

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. I didn't mean to imply. I thought. You were here. Maybe you want. A drill? A socket wrench? Nuts and bolts?

LIBRARIAN. Oh! Oh. Light bulbs. For the library.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Of course. Light bulbs. Light bulbs.

PHOTOGRAPHER. The Hardware Store Owner goes to the computer and looks up the type of lightbulbs the library usually orders. He knows where they are and what kind but he goes through the motions.

LIBRARIAN. Do you want the account number?

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Sure.

PHOTOGRAPHER. He says, even though he has the account number memorized.

LIBRARIAN. Zero Six Four One Five, Eight Six Zero, Two Zero Three, Eight, Six Seven Six Seven Seven, Two Two One Five Three Eight Seven Two Three Nine One One Seven Six.

(You don't have to memorize this number. Keep saying numbers. If they laugh, say one more number after the laugh. If not, just stop eventually. Always end on one.)

LIBRARIAN. One.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Got it.

LIBRARIAN. I like those light bulbs.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. They're really good. We sell them a lot.

PHOTOGRAPHER. This isn't really the conversation either of them wish they were having right now. How did we get here? Two weeks after the prom there was a fight.

(Lights change. The LIBRARIAN and the HARDWARE STORE OWNER fight.)

Who can say what it was really about? Fear of the future. Loss of control. Worry. The problem of independent personalities.

LIBRARIAN. You're just like your father!

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. You're like your mother!

LIBRARIAN. You're a stubborn jerk!

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. You're mean!

LIBRARIAN. Stop looking at me with those stupid eyes in that stupid face.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. What do you know about it?

LIBRARIAN. You're a selfish slob!

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. You don't ever understand me!

LIBRARIAN. You don't understand me.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. I wish I never had to deal with you ever again.

LIBRARIAN. Then maybe we should break up.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Maybe we should.

(Lights change.)

PHOTOGRAPHER. It was never supposed to happen. Or it was never supposed to last long. When I asked him

out, he said yes to make her mad. Probably. I wasn't supposed to get pregnant. Definitely. We got married right away. Quickly, quietly. Days turned to weeks. Weeks turned to love.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Love.

PHOTOGRAPHER. He turned down his scholarship. He took over the family business. The future Librarian went to college. And then my baby came and she was stillborn. We mourned. Instead of driving us apart, we grew closer together. After two more miscarriages, we stopped trying. The future Librarian came back from college and got a job at the library. And then life and life and life. Until four years ago when I came down with bone cancer and then two years ago when I stopped being alive.

(Lights. Back to present.)

LIBRARIAN. You find it?

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Incandescent. I'll have them for you in a minute.

LIBRARIAN. I've been meaning to stop by and say hi anyway.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Sure. Hi.

LIBRARIAN. Hi.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. How you doing?

LIBRARIAN. Good. You?

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Good.

PHOTOGRAPHER. He can't find the words he needs because two years in the grave, I still have a hold on him.

(The LIBRARIAN points at photo in frame on wall.)

LIBRARIAN. What's that?

PHOTOGRAPHER. She notices a photo of mine hanging behind him.

LIBRARIAN. That's a real nice shot.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Yes.

LIBRARIAN. She was talented.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Yes.

LIBRARIAN. I like how everyone's personality always comes through.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Yeah.

LIBRARIAN. And the personality of the buildings too.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Yeah.

LIBRARIAN. They all feel alive.

PHOTOGRAPHER. Even now that I'm dead. But she doesn't say that. She shouldn't have pointed out the photograph.

LIBRARIAN. So dumb.

PHOTOGRAPHER. She thinks of leaving the store, the state, the country. Instead she walks towards the fear. Steels herself. And she says -

LIBRARIAN. I was going to - tomorrow are you - might you want to have dinner with me?

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Oh. You mean?

LIBRARIAN. The new Italian place? Just dinner.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. I know but -

PHOTOGRAPHER. In the silence, everything they can't say is said.

(Light shift.)

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. I can't disrespect her memory. No matter what you think, it was love.

LIBRARIAN. There has never been anyone but you. Not really. Not anyone.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. It wouldn't be right. Even if it's only dinner.

LIBRARIAN. I feel terrible but I was a little happy, just a little happy when I heard she died. I felt bad right after, but for a second -

(Light shift.)

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. I'm sorry. I can't. It wouldn't be - not that - things are just really busy now. Maybe another time.

LIBRARIAN. Sure. Of course.

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Busy.

LIBRARIAN. Busy. That's fine. I just thought -

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Another time.

PHOTOGRAPHER. The Librarian leaves, trying to not let him see her face.

(The LIBRARIAN exits.)

HARDWARE STORE OWNER. Wait! Your light bulbs.

PHOTOGRAPHER. But she has gone. I stay. I stay. He cannot see me but I stay. It hurts me to look at him but I stay, even as his edges blur. I stay.

END