

The Bookstore

The restaurant glowed in the gray atmosphere of the world surrounding it. I could hear thunder booming in the distance. Hopefully, the storm will pass soon, I wouldn't want to walk home in the rain. Maybe my date will be a gentleman and drive me home? Or call me a taxi if he doesn't own a car, I think in delight. I met this man, Michael, on Tinder. We have been talking for two weeks now. He finally asked me out to this restaurant last Tuesday. We couldn't meet until this week because our schedules didn't align, but now I will meet him in person for the first time. It's also my first date in a long time.

He seems so kind and intelligent. His profile described him as a tall man with blonde hair and green eyes. He works as a computer engineer at the University. He didn't seem very interested in my work at the History Museum, but we got along well in other subjects.

My heels clacked up the stairs to the entrance of the restaurant. I heaved open the heavy door as the heat from the building wrapped around my body, fighting the cold wind of the outside world.

The hostess looked up from her phone laying on the hostess stand. "Welcome! Do you have a reservation?"

"Yes, my date said it should be under Prewitt," I smile towards her.

She looks down at the list near her hand, finger running down all the names, "I'm sorry I don't seem to have a reservation under Prewitt, could it be under a different name?"

"No, that was the name he gave me, Michael Prewitt."

"I am sorry, ma'am, but I can't seem to find the name. Are you positive this was where you made the reservation?" She asks while looking through the list once more.

My eyes widen in shock. How could this be? “Maybe he gave me the wrong address. Thank you for looking, though.” She nods her head as I step off to the side and sit on one of the benches in the waiting area.

Opening the dating app, I go to scroll through my and Michael’s conversation, only to see it gone. What! How could it be gone? A whole two weeks of conversation just disappeared. At the top of my screen, I see a red dot telling me there was an unread notification. Tapping on it, I read that Michael has deleted his profile. He ghosted me! He invited me out to a fancy restaurant, only to stand me up.

My vision blurred as I clenched my teeth together. How awful could someone be to do such a thing as this? My lip quivered as I tried to keep a sob from escaping me. Is this Karma for leaving Jack? But he is the one who cheated on me! He is the one who threw four years of our lives down the drain.

Turning off my phone, I stood up and headed towards the entrance of the restaurant. As I opened the door, a large gust of wind ripped the door from my hand. The sound of the hinges being tested is heavily dampened by the sound of pouring rain slamming against the ground. A small scream of surprise erupts from my lips as I start to get soaked. I quickly run out across what looks to be the sidewalk. I rush towards what seems to be the only light source close to me.

I yank the door open and swiftly get my drenched body inside before any more rain hits me. Sighing in relief, I look at my surroundings. It looks to be a small bookstore. Shelves and shelves filled with all kinds of books and small knick-knacks fill the space.

“Welcome!” A voice shouts from the back of the store.

A man peaks his head around the corner as he looks towards me. “Oh wow. You are soaked.” He walks towards me. “You must be cold. If I can, I can take your jacket for you and I will drape it over the chair in the back office to dry.”

“That would be great. Thanks.” I peel the wet jacket off my shoulders and hand it to him.

He smiles at me and walks into a room I must have missed just off to the side of me. I walk into the store more and start perusing down the aisle closest to me. Looking at the sign, it seems to me historical romance. My favorite!

I read the titles closest to me. It looks like they alphabetize the store by book title instead of author name. Straight away, I search for my favorite book, just to see if they have it. I might as well-read something until the storm passes.

As I look, the man from earlier stands near me. “Anything specific you are looking for?”

“Do you have Forever Amber by Kathleen Windsor?”

He thinks about it for a second. Seemingly going through an imaginary catalog only he can see. “If I remember correctly, it should be three books to your right in the shelf above you.”

Looking up, I see the book. Right where he said it would be. “Wow! There it is.” I snatch it carefully from its spot on the shelf and hug it to my chest, “How did you do that?”

He laughed, “I have worked at this bookstore since I was a sophomore in high school. I would be disappointed in myself if I couldn’t do that.”

I smiled, “That was very impressive.”

“Well, I am glad to have impressed.” He introduced himself, “I’m David.”

“I’m Selina,” I say back. “Any other party tricks up your sleeve?”

“I have been known to mystify the mind of partygoers” he responds.

I look down as I feel my face heat up. “So, mister incredible, do you have a favorite book?”

I hear his voice fill with excitement, “Actually, I do, this one here.” He passes by me and sans the shelf just a few feet away. “Here you are. My favorite book of all time.”

He walks back over and hands me the book, “All the Light We Cannot See, by Anthony Doerr. You like this book?” I ask in elation.

“Yeah, I know it may seem feminine, but it is such a good book.”

“I am not judging. It is my second favorite book.”

“Second? Well, at least it made the top three,” he sighed in mock disappointment.

We go on to talk about what our favorite parts were in the book and the character development. All I could think of was how perfect this man was. I realize how much David and I have in common as we move on to other topics of discussion. We like very similar books and music. He even suggested some movies he thought I would like. I could picture our future together, it would be amazing.

“So what brought you here? Get caught in the rain?” He asks as he leads me towards the office.

“Yeah, you could say that. I also got stood up by my date,” I look at the ground as I feel embarrassment creep up.

David lightly knocks his shoulder with mine, “His loss it seems.”

I smile brightly as my cheeks radiate heat. He is so sweet and kind. I can see our kids being just as kind as him. He also seems like a romantic, I can see him taking me out for a picnic at the park and buying me roses after his shift here at the bookstore. It would be the romance I’ve always dreamed of. Jack never did stuff like that. After our first year, he seemed to stop caring

about us being a couple. I should have known he was cheating, but I was too caught up in my love for him, I didn't even notice.

“What are you thinking about so hard over there?” David’s voice interrupted my mental spiral as he lightly placed a hand on my back.

I looked at him, “Sorry, I was a little spaced out,” thinking of an excuse, “I got an email from my boss right before getting off of work yesterday and I haven’t had the chance to read it.”

“I hope everything is okay. You don’t think they’re firing you, do you?”

“No, not at all. I haven’t done anything to cause them to fire me, at least not that I can remember.” I laugh lightly.

“That’s good. I wouldn’t want anything like that to happen to you,” he smiles at me.

Suddenly, a woman’s voice interrupted our conversation.

“Babe, the rain stopped! I came to pick you up,” a woman with red hair and a slender figure walked up to us from the store entrance.

“Brianna, I had no idea you were coming,” David said. “Why didn’t you text me? What if you had gotten into a wreck? No one would have known where you were.”

The woman, Brianna, laughed, “I did, you must have not seen it.”

David pulled his phone from his pants pocket. Turning on the screen, he sees the notification of her text. “So it seems. I must have gotten caught up talking with my new friend.” He turned towards me, “Brianna, I would like you to meet Selena. Selena, meet my beautiful girlfriend Brianna.”

His words struck me. Girlfriend? I didn’t even think of the possibility of him not being single. I smiled slightly at her, “Hi.”

She smiled brightly towards me, teeth and all, “Hello Selena, thank you for keeping my David entertained while he was stuck at work. That rain came out of nowhere!”

I looked down at my lap, “It was more like he entertained me.”

David shook his head lightly before grabbing his jacket and shoving it under his arm, “Well it was fun meeting you Selina, If you are ever nearby don’t hesitate to stop in and say Hi.”

I watched the couple walk out the door with a forced smile on my face as I waved goodbye.

Standing up from my seat on the floor felt like a feat in and of itself. My body was heavy and sluggish as I walked towards the door of the bookstore.

I stared down at the drying concrete of the sidewalk as the hinges swung the door closed behind me. “He has a girlfriend,” I thought. How could I have missed that? I recalled the last three hours we spent talking in the bookstore. My clothes had long since dried from the downpour I had run through earlier. My hair also had dried, causing strands to frizz and curl up.

I looked out into the street, the store's awning blocked the sun from hitting my skin. To think, just a few hours ago I had been running from the rain after having been stood up for a date and now, the sun was shining and not a cloud was in the sky.

I thought my luck had changed once I met him, David. We had conversed for hours waiting for the rain to stop. We got along great! I was falling for him, only to find out he was already with someone.

I sighed, taking a step out from the cover into the clear air. The rain always seems to wash everything away. Even the good things. It left one with a completely blank slate. I felt numb to the world. Maybe I’m not meant to be with someone. Alone for the rest of my life.

Maybe I should look into getting an animal or traveling the world. The last one sounded adventurous. Though I was never very adventurous. That could be why I could never find and keep a partner. I have always wanted to go see Scotland. Maybe I should try being single for once.

I continued walking down the sidewalk with no destination in mind, lost in thought. Finally accepting that maybe dating is just not in the cards right now. I have never allowed myself to focus on who I was and what I wanted in life. This was the perfect time to do it.

Coming out of my thoughts, I looked up and noticed I was in front of the museum. I see an older man leaving the building. It's the museum director, Mr. Scott. He seems to be heading home.

“Selina,” he called out as he juggled his briefcase and keys in his hands. “Just the person I wanted to talk to. I know it is your day off, but I just happened upon an opportunity I think you would be perfect for.” He slid his hand into the front pocket of his briefcase. “Here, look over this pamphlet and letter I was sent.” He hands the paper to me as he adjusts the glasses on his face.

I look down at the papers he handed me, “The British Museum?” I question aloud. I move the pamphlet so I can read the letter.

Dear Mr. Scotts,

We loved working with you and your team on our African Exhibit and would love to work with you again for our Irish history exhibit. We would like you and your team to fly out to London to talk more sometime next month. If you accept our invitation, the trip will be all expenses paid for. Please let us know your answer at your earliest convenience.

The Director of the British Museum,

David Hamburg

My hand covered my mouth in shock once I finished reading. Looking up at him, Mr. Scotts had a large smile on his face.

“This is what I emailed you about yesterday. I didn’t know if you had the time to read it. I know how much you love history, and I was so upset you couldn’t be on the team for the African exhibit, but I would love it if you were on this team.”

I was in shock. After how this day went, I could have never guessed that something like this would happen. “I... I would love to be on the team, Mr. Scotts.”

His smile widened in excitement. “I am so glad you accepted, If it will be anything like the last exhibit, you will need to plan to be gone for a month.”

I would spend an entire month in another country just focusing on my work. This was just what I needed in my life. I am so excited; my face hurts from smiling. I look back at him. “I won’t let you down, Director. Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this team.”

“It is my pleasure, Selina, I look forward to seeing your work in the future. Have a good night.” He turned towards the employee parking lot and walked in the direction of his car.

I shoved the letter and pamphlet into my purse and turned on my heels towards my apartment. I lived only a few blocks from the museum. A new start in life. This would be where I focus on myself, starting at the British Museum in London.