What It Is Like

by XXXX

They read poetry to each other. They met at the local drugstore, after he spotted Tropic of Cancer jutting from her bag. He asked her if she's finished it. “Nothing like Fifty Shades of Grey,” he said. They laughed. He said: “Come to our book club later. It's at my house, not far from here,” and she said yes.

When he came to her house to pick her up, her father was hammering away at two wooden beams perpendicular one another. He asked for her, and the father said: “I was once young like you. I know what you want from my daughter.” She arrived before her father could finish what he was saying.

His house was dilapidated. While they walked the corridors, she stepped on a puddle. She sat at the dinner table. “I'm sorry,” he said. “The pipes are leaking. We're moving out tomorrow.”

He left to get a towel, but she was already wiping her legs. They were long, and smooth, and he looked at them from the edge of his eyes, while saying: “I'm really glad I met you today. By tomorrow I would be very far from here.” In the room across them, he saw a mirror where he could see her legs as she slowly wiped them. He stared until she looked at the mirror and for a while their gazes were affixed, before he turned his head and blushed.

They read poetry to each other, outside the house, in a porch with pillows and lanterns. The others weren't showing up. They have seen the state of his house and deemed it was not worth the trip, nor the poetry. They would be around to say goodbye tomorrow. He apologized to her, telling her they will be alone. She said it was ok.

He read her his favorite poem. During the third line, she said: “I can't hear you.” He inched closer on the couch, and started again.

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She inched closer. While he read, he could feel her hands on him, climbing up his legs and torso, and his voice shook, until all they heard were the leaking of the pipes and the creaking of the house.

When she got home, her father was waiting for her. “It's late,” he said. “Have you eaten?” She shook her head. Her father motioned for her to sit beside him. There was food on the table.

“Is that boy courting you?” he said.

“No,” she said.

“What happened tonight?” he said.

“Nothing,” she said. “We read poetry.”

“Did you get the medicine I asked you to buy this morning?”

She produced a plastic bag from inside her purse, beside The Tropic of Cancer. Her father opened it, and found inside the medicine and an unopened condom. He looked at it before slapping her across the face.

The following day he waited in front of his house carrying a book. He had already said goodbye to his friends, apart from one. “We're going!” said a voice in a car. He looked at the street that stretched in both directions indefinitely. He placed the book in a box, and carried it to the back of the car, before it headed off with him somewhere far away.