

Sunny with a Chance of Showers

Gina Reitenauer

I first saw her waiting by the bus stop. She was clad in a pink-and-white checkered dress, and an umbrella leaned against her leg despite that fact that it was probably the most beautiful day of the year so far. The umbrella had cherries all over it and there was nothing but the sun in the sky. Maybe it was the unruly copper curls that billowed about her head - maybe not - but there was something about her that made her look sunny too.

I was wearing a worn-out blazer and an old pair of grey jeans. Despite the typical formality associated with a blazer, I probably looked disheveled. The inner lining of my pants pocket hung out of my jeans in agreement. It's funny - I had no recollection of buying them. Either my roommate's pair somehow ended up in my drawer or they were so faded that the blue dye had disappeared entirely. Either way, in comparison to the woman in pink, I thought I probably looked pretty cloudy.

It was a Tuesday, I was tired because of the insomnia that always seemed to keep me company in the night, and I was on my way to a chemistry course I was failing. My usual route didn't involve the bus stop, but I'd changed it up a bit when I heard the Food Science folks were giving away free tacos. When I walked by the woman in pink, her upper lip twitched up in what I took to be a smile. Maybe she was just being polite, but it chased the tacos and everything else out of my head and made room for her instead. I couldn't remember if I'd smiled back, but I know I did afterwards. The mere sight of her had erased the cloud that had been following me that day. I felt more partly sunny then.

I found myself thinking about her in class, and then more once I got home too. I wondered whether her hair was naturally that color, where she came from, whether she made a good lab partner; but mostly, I wondered if I'd see her again.

That Wednesday I got a call from my roommate, Blake.

“Did you steal my pants?”

Damn. “Sorry man, they were in my drawer for some reason.”

“Why the hell were they in there?”

“I don't know, is that all you called for?”

“Oh right, no. I called 'cause Bella got out again.”

“Shit.” Bella was my fluffy white cat. I wasn't supposed to have her. The dorms weren't pet-friendly, but the advisors in that building were too wrapped up in their own drama to ever notice. It just didn't help that she was constantly slipping by us and out the door.

I hung up without another word. Within the span of that call, the day had become extremely overcast and my shoe had come untied. I sighed and bent down to tie the laces.

I saw her exiting the humanities building as I stood up. The copper curls were tucked into a lemon-yellow hat that time, and her umbrella swung by her side as she walked. I wondered if the amount of cherries on it became overwhelming when fanned out.

On Thursday, I deliberately took the route to my chemistry class that went by the bus stop. I was trying not to let myself get too attached or weird about it, but rain clattered against my window, I couldn't find Bella, and I needed something happy that day.

I found her in the same spot. A magazine was spread out on the arm of the bench beside her as she flipped through it – a lengthy article, an ad for men’s deodorant, another for the newest Nissan model. This time, I made sure to smile back, and as I passed I prided myself that she had smiled first. Maybe, just maybe, she noticed me too.

Later that evening, I sat outside to type my latest lab report. I briefly wondered why this class was even taking up so much of my time, but for once I didn’t dwell on it. Instead, I typed because I didn’t want to be so gloomy anymore.

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday – passing the bus stop became a daily route. Each day, one of us would begin the exchange. It almost seemed as if we’d alter who started it and who followed. Each day, her umbrella leaned against her leg. I wasn’t sure why she brought it on the days when there didn’t seem to be any chance of rain. I wondered if maybe she suffered from an extreme case of hydrophobia. Or maybe she was simply being cautious. I liked that. I was cautious too. Each day, I fancied I knew her a little bit better.

One Friday, I got out my iron. I unfolded the ironing table and took all the creases out of the brightest shirt I owned. It was blue. I’d gotten it during a trip to Virginia Beach a few years ago and remembered being happy when I bought it. At the time, college was just around the corner so the uncertainty of the future seemed fresh and inviting. As I stood ironing the shirt now, I thought about how much had changed. How the future seemed like a puzzle and I was that one puzzle piece that was cut crooked and just didn’t seem to fit no matter how it was turned. How all I wanted was some certainty. I would get that International Relations degree, even if I had to retake chemistry. But what would I do once I got it? Would I move to D.C. and go to the

cherry blossom festival? Or would I stay in Ohio? As of now, I couldn't even figure out what I was doing that summer. Or that week. So I got out the blue shirt, and I ironed it. Because at least that gave me temporary control. I slid the iron back and fourth, letting the heat warm my cool hands, and I ironed until the shirt was as crisp as its color. I was determined to match the amount of sunshine the girl radiated, so that I could provide her with some sun too. Perhaps, she'd even have to open her umbrella to find some shade.

As I passed her that day, I wondered if she noticed my shirt, and whether I'd have the guts to strike up a conversation with her next time. What would I even say? *Hello, maybe it's all in my head, but it seems like you notice me too, and seeing you everyday has become something good to hold on to.*

Later that Friday, I got another call from Blake.

"Dude, I think I saw her," he said. *Her?*

I didn't know how to respond.

"She's over by the stoplight on Sumner, digging through some trash. I couldn't grab her though, I was late to Studio."

I realized he was talking about Bella. "I got her."

It just so happened that to get to Sumner, I had to pass the bus stop. I saw the girl, and the moment came and went just like the last without speech, but I couldn't even be disappointed. Ever since I'd met her, life just seemed to get better. Not too long after the first downpour, I'd gotten a pair of grey jeans that fit even better, I'd managed to pull my grade in chemistry up to a C, and now I was on my way to finding Bella. I swore the girl with the cherry umbrella was

living proof that sometimes, all you needed was one good reason to get out of bed on time and iron a shirt or two.

The third Wednesday after we met, as I approached the bus stop, I saw she was reading *Of Mice and Men*, which was one of those classic high school books assigned to drooling tenth graders that I actually enjoyed. I wondered what she thought of the ending. As if on queue, she looked up from her page as I got nearer. That made me feel confident, so I started the smile exchange that day even though I'd began it the day before too. Hers seemed more spontaneous. I decided tomorrow would be the day. Tomorrow, because I wanted to know what she thought of the ending of *Of Mice and Men*, I would ask her. And if it went well, I'd know none of it had been in my head all along.

The next morning I woke up in good spirits. The April showers seemed to have parted for good, and I thought I even heard a bird chirp out my window. I put on my new grey jeans. As I walked to geography, I rehearsed the scene in my head: I would approach with confidence in my grey-legged stride. She would look up. Hell, I would even smile first again. Then I'd gesture to the book in her hands with ease, *How do you like the ending?*

But when I neared the bus stop, the blood in my veins began to rush. Her daily spot was vacant. All that occupied the bench was a pigeon, what looked like an old *Subway* wrapper, and a seemingly older man with hair the color of pepper. Where was she? I picked up my pace and scanned the area. What if something had happened to her? Had she become sick?

Maybe I was being rash, and she was only running late. I decided I would wait for her, so I sat down and I counted the yellow cars that went by. It began to rain. I questioned whether the raindrops were real or whether the storm was a figment of my imagination because she wasn't

there. By the time the rain had soaked through to my bones, I figured it was time to call it a day. I hadn't even brought an umbrella.

Friday afternoon I walked toward the bus stop with an impatient heart. Her seat, empty. That familiar rush immediately overtook me again. But this time, I saw *it* before I endured another rainy session. She opened the driver's door of a shiny white Nissan and got inside. It looked new, and the betrayal I felt made its newness so potent I thought I could smell the fresh leather from across the street. I recalled the magazine I'd noticed her flipping through the other week, the casual glance at the ad for the newest Nissan model.

I felt a few drops of rain fall upon my face as I watched the girl with the cherry-covered umbrella drive away in her sunny car that didn't know where to find me.