

A Whirling Dervish. [Except]

Liv H. Scott

She is very silent. She has a coffee today, and forgot to put the bottle of Advil back in her purse.
It sits on her desk.

“Larson.” She treats me like a child. “Is there something you want to talk about?” she asks me.

“I don’t actually want to be here. At all.” I say. She looks sad.

“Why is that?”

“I just don’t want to be here.” I state.

“There has to be a reason.” she pressures. “Can you think of any reason?”

“I know whatever I say. If you think it means I’m going to hurt someone, or had hurt someone,
or I’m going to hurt myself- then you can tell whoever you want about it.” I snap.

“Did you hurt someone?” she asks quietly.

I stare at her. I sigh. I look at the clock. We still have a lot of time.

“Look. You can’t tell anyone this. It didn’t mean anything. I didn’t mean anything by it.” I mutter.

“I just had a bad day.”

“Why? What made it bad?” she presses.

“What makes anything bad?” I ask.

Ribbon’s eyes were ringed in pink, little fluffy chunks of his dark hair hung out of his ponytail.

“Why are you so weird? Why are you strange? Why can’t you just speak English, and wear baggy
jeans, and have short hair? Why can’t you be normal?” I shook him as I screamed. I screamed until I was
hoarse. Until he was crying. I folded him up in my arms. Crushed his tears against my chest.

“That didn’t happen.” I sigh.

“Larson its ok.” she stresses the word *ok*.

“No.” I snap. “No it’s not ok. No, I mean, it didn’t happen like that.”

“Why can’t you be normal!”

I’d never met Mr. Jacobs before. Roland’s mom had let me in through a flutter of *Salut, ca va?*, and *Roland is up the stairs*.

“Why can’t you just go to class, pay attention and do your homework. Why do you insist on making my life miserable!” The voice was rough, and loud. It came from the one room I’d never been in.

My father’s study. Roland had said when I’d pointed to it, asking where the bathroom was. He looked so blank saying it. I wanted to know what his father studied. Why rich people had studies.

“A D. Really. A fucking D, Roland.”

It would have been ok if his father had hit him then. I mean. It would have been alright. I would have known what to do. I’d only known him for two weeks but I would have known to step in. I’m a big kid. I could have gone out for wrestling or football. I could easily throw anybody’s father off of them. I could have taken Roland home. Told his mother. Called the police.

“You know. I’m really disappointed in you.”

I was standing in their hallway. I was most definitely not supposed to hear any of that. God, I was hoping that at some point, any moment now, Mr. Jacobs would just hit him.

“Larson?” Roland whispered, I turned to stare at him. Roland’s eyes were ringed in pink, little fluffy chunks of his dark hair hung around his shoulders in tangled loops- as if it’d been pulled out of its ponytail too quickly. I didn’t have a chance to speak.

“Let’s go get a soda.” He forced a smile. “I’ll buy you a grape.”

We walked to the gas station. We bought sodas. We sat on the side of one of the highways. We didn’t say anything for a very long moment. Roland pretended not to notice how I hadn’t even taken a sip. I pretended not to notice the way his fingers shook when he put the cap in his mouth—or the way it fell out and rolled down the gutter.

“Why are you so weird! Why can’t you be normal! Why did you have to talk to me? Why did you come over to my house—today—ever? Why do you have to be so fucking nice!” Ribbon’s fingers are digging into my jacket sleeves. He’s attempting to shake me, but all he’s doing is trembling.

I stare at him, at the tears that streak his cheeks. His skin is all flushed pink. I pop the cap off my soda, and hold it out. He takes it with numb fingers. He doesn’t even look to it. He pops it in his mouth and stares at the highway. I don’t understand him. I sip my soda. I want to tell him he’s beautiful. I can’t.

I think about shifting on the pavement. I think about wrapping him in my arms, and squeezing him against my chest.

“I’m not from Jersey.” I mutter. He hiccups. The cap clunks against his teeth. “I’m not even from New Jersey.”

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I walk past his house today. Right after supper. I stare up at the two stories. Everything is dark and I wish I’d thrown rocks at his window, or played whatever the hell that song is, from that movie, and serenaded him out. I wish I’d taken the time.

I scoop a handful of tiny pebbles from the gravel in the gutter. I pick up a rock no bigger than my pinkie nail. I toss it at his window. It hits with a clink in the darkness. I toss another pebble.

“Inés.” I heard Mr. Jacobs say once.

“That’s my mother.” Ribbon had whispered, the stem of the lollipop in his mouth tickled my ear.

I can see her standing there. Over that four foot deep rectangular hole in the ground. Maybe there is something to bury. Maybe there is nothing. I can see her in her black, sobbing, and Mr. Jacobs standing right there behind her.

Maybe my parents are there. Maybe my mom is trying to hold my hand, and squeeze it. Maybe I just don’t attend. Maybe Inés is crying so much, so damn hard that no one can hear the goddamn

preacher. Maybe it's all in French- in Franglais- maybe its Elvish and we can't hear it over her din because she kissed him last. She saw him last.

I chuck the rest of the gravel at the window. It reports like buck shot. The dog starts barking. I turn and head in the opposite direction. I head home. I shove my hands in my pockets, its cold. It's Halloween soon. I find a green apple dum-dum. I unwrap it and stick it in my mouth.

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She doesn't say anything when I come in with a cut eyebrow. She just sits and stares at me. It's very silent, and the walls are pink, and I feel sick because I got up at five today.

"Tree branch." I state pointing to it. She gives a slight nod.

"You're parents told Me." she says. "Larson, you—I know this must be hard on you, but you don't have to go looking for him. You shouldn't."

I shrug. She reaches out and grabs my hand. I freeze under it.

"Larson, why won't you just tell me what happened?" she asks.

"Because I don't know what happened." I watch her eyes, they look like everyone else's. All filled up with pity. I slide my hand from hers. "I don't know what you want from me."

"I want to help you." she pleads. Like it's that easy. Like this is a movie, and there's an adult that understands me. Someone who can fix me. Like I'm broken, and this is just one more movie.

"No, you want to find Ribbon." I say.

"Why do you call Roland that?" she asks. "Was it his nickname?"

"It was his name."