

“Red or purple?” George asked her. This is how he greeted her when Candace answered her phone.

“Red or purple what?” she replied.

“That’s a surprise,” he said, pretending to be exasperated. He was doing a lousy job of hiding his excitement. “Red or purple?”

Every Friday George called her with options to some secret thing. She would find out what it was tonight when she got home.

Candace was not a pretty girl. She was not a talented girl. No one ever put up pretenses otherwise.

As a child, just as all the other girls, she too dreamed of being an actress or a model or a dancer. She imagined walking down a runway in towering heels and fabulous clothes. She imagined taking her final bow on a stage quickly filling with bouquets to a standing ovation. But unlike other girls, no one ever entertained the possibility of these notions. They told her that things like that don’t happen to ordinary people. No one ever said she wasn’t good enough. No one ever said she wasn’t pretty enough. But it was implied.

On Valentines Day she didn’t go to school. It wasn’t that the other kids didn’t give her valentine cards, but they were never the ones you hoped for. She got a bag filled with the generic, “have to give you one, but don’t want you to think it means anything” cards. Every cartoon character on TV wished her a happy Valentine’s day, but none offered love or friendship.

She did not expect invitations to parties or dances, especially not from boys. She didn’t fret over it. She had gone to a dance once, by herself. She lost interest in the whole thing rather quickly as she watched girls whisper, too afraid to talk to boys, and boys milling about pretending not to be interested in girls. She left after a full twenty minutes of being remarkably underwhelmed.

Life seemed like a series of dances for Candace, even though she didn’t bother attending another one. All around her people whispered about what they wanted, pretended they didn’t want anything, and accomplished nothing in particular. She continued to be unimpressed. Finding it irritating having to witness the awkward and pathetic interactions of people within rooms, she preferred to study the rooms themselves. She began to see their intricacies; borders, piping, tiling, grout. She worked in the office of a trucking company where she mostly read books about fashion and interior design.

She had been studying beams in the ceiling of a restaurant, counting down the time until it wouldn’t be considered impolite to leave her office’s holiday party, when George had asked her what she was searching for. After she told him she was only looking at the beams, they had discussed architecture and the best places in town to observe it for the rest of the evening.

“I don’t even particularly like those colors,” she said to him now.

“I know,” she knew he was grinning and probably dancing his fingers around on a table as he was wont to do when he was trying to hold back a secret.

Her fiance delighted in their weekly game. Last time it had been restaurants. He had asked “big or small.” She’d chosen small and he took her to a tiny Italian place with romantic lighting.

The “big” option would have been a large, two floor Mexican restaurant with endless margaritas. One week she had inadvertently chosen where he’d proposed to her. She sighed, smiling.

“I suppose I’ll find out when I get home?” she asked.

“Perhaps,” he said.

As with most Friday afternoons, she spent the rest of hers wondering over the outcome of her decision. She was sure purple would end up being the better choice.