

“The Spontaneous Hand-Hold” by Alexander Lee-Rekers

Emily is in her pajamas, scrolling through her phone in her room. There is a knock at the door, which swings open to reveal Tonye dressed fancy and plastered in too much make-up.

TONYE: *(Pointing to her make-up.)* Do you have any baby wipes?

EMILY: You shouldn't use them for make-up.

TONYE: Tonight I do not care. Let them clog me, let them kill me.

Tonye crosses the room and sits on the bed, while Emily retrieves a bag from her ensuite. She passes it to Tonye, who starts removing her make-up.

TONYE: It's not fair.

EMILY: You were so excited for this!

TONYE: My very first date...

EMILY: Your first date. *Our* first date, because I feel like I was there with you. Not in a creepy way, like watching you, or-

TONYE: He was going to be the perfect, first boyfriend. Maybe even my first kiss that wasn't like a prank or a dare. You know what I was looking forward to more than anything? The first spontaneous hand-hold.

EMILY: *(Half whisper.)* The spontaneous hand-hold...

TONYE: Not planned, not acknowledged. Reaching out to each other and, just, like, *finding* each other.

EMILY: He has beautiful hands. So what happened?

TONYE: He's boring, Em. Ben is the most boring human being in the world.

EMILY: Ouch.

TONYE: His mum dropped him off at the cinema. She insisted on meeting me because she'd "heard all about me, and this one doesn't tell me anything"! And she was so lovely to me, but all I could focus on was Ben, standing behind her. He's unbuttoning and rebuttoning his shirt. It was like: "How many buttons should I leave undone? Three? Four? Five is too much. Or is it?"

EMILY: How many did he settle on?

TONYE: Four.

EMILY: Gross.

TONYE: It looked like he was wearing a blouse. We got some dinner, and we start talking about school to break the ice, you know? And then he says: "I don't want to talk about school. Let's get to know each other." So he told me about cars, and he told me about crypto, and he told me about how he wants to start his own business selling things on Amazon.

EMILY: Did you even see the movie?

TONYE: I'm getting to that. So we're walking from the cafe down to the cinema and he finally stopped telling me about his workout routine. And it got quiet and suddenly it was kinda nice? I looked over at him and he looked *really* good. And I smiled, and he smiled. And I went in for the spontaneous hand-hold.

EMILY: Waaait a sec: you can't just "go in for the spontaneous hand-hold", that defeats the purpose of it being spontaneous.

TONYE: I *know*, but I wanted the night to go well and this felt like my last chance! So I synchronised my walk with his and my arm swing with his arm swing and I kept trying to brush his hand with mine so he'd kinda catch it... He put his hands in his pockets and told me I was hitting him. I texted the emergency code to mum and she came to get me.

EMILY: I'm sorry. (*Pause.*) I was, a little bit, hoping tonight wouldn't go well. Didn't want to lose you to the man of your dreams.

TONYE: I think you're stuck with me for the time being.

EMILY: One day, you're going to meet somebody amazing. They're going to love you, they're going to think you're the smartest and the funniest and the most beautiful woman they've ever met. They're going to spontaneous hand-hold you so much that it loses all of its magic. Almost.

TONYE: And they'll have a beautiful friend, maybe their tall and handsome brother who will fall instantly in love with you when we all meet accidentally on purpose at a gelato shop.

EMILY: You don't have to-

TONYE: No, I do! Everything you've said about me is true of you as well. I mean that, Em.

EMILY: Yeah?

Tonye nods. The two of them sit together on the end of Emily's bed. After a pause, it happens: the spontaneous hand-hold.