

Just My Luck-Short Story
Alice Winters

“Are you busy?” Shepherd asks as he peeks into the spare bedroom. We’d turned it into a little office space where I could do classwork without getting distracted as I’m easily known to do. It’s like the dog walks into the room and I forget everything I was doing for school.

“I just finished. What’s up?”

“I thought we could go on a date.”

Ooh, a date sounds nice. “A normal date or the kind of date where you tie me up and toss me in the trunk of your car, like our first date?”

Shepherd grins at me as he leans against the doorframe. “If you think that was our first date then I really don’t need to try so hard every time.”

“I didn’t say it was an *enjoyable* first date. The ones since have been much nicer. A little less terrifying, besides that time you took me to that horror house restaurant.”

He thinks for a moment before raising an eyebrow. “The sushi place?”

I shudder.

“How was I supposed to know you didn’t like *sushi*?”

“There were tentacles!”

“What about the other day when you told me if I turned into a tentacle monster the first thing you’d do is have sex with me,” Shepherd says.

I start laughing because that was *way* out of context. “I did not! I said that I would *still* love you even if you were a tentacle monster.”

“And then you said, ‘Think of how fun the sex could be.’”

I’m now laughing too hard over the ridiculousness of this. “I vaguely remember... nothing like that. I think you’re just making shit up at this point, honestly. Let’s get back to you poisoning me with sushi.”

“Oh lord. The sushi was amazing, and I even cared enough to stop and get you a hamburger at McDonald’s when I was done eating,” he says which makes me laugh. He’d actually felt really bad and I didn’t want to look inconsiderate, so I’d been trying to get myself to at least eat some of it. The issue is it all tasted horrible. “And that was like two years ago.”

“I never forget *anything*,” I assure him.

“You really don’t need to tell me that. I’m aware.”

I laugh as I kick off and send my chair rolling across the room toward him. It wasn't exactly the smartest plan, especially when the rollers hit carpet and stop but my momentum doesn't. He grabs me before I crash onto the ground.

"Well, that was sexy," Shepherd says.

"Thank you. I didn't want your skills to get rusty, so I thought you could practice saving me," I say as I get out of the chair. "Alright. I'm ready. Where are we going?"

"It's a secret," he says as we walk out to where Bear is preoccupied with chewing on a fabric squeak toy that looks like a human leg. Shepherd got it for him because he thought it'd be hilarious since he likes to remind me of the time when I thought Bear was going to eat me. I, on the other hand, realized that Shepherd's sense of humor is dangerously dark.

But Bear loves it. I'll wake up with that fucking leg inches from my face like Bear thinks it's my job to protect it while he sleeps. He seems to realize we might be leaving and jumps up to follow us, leg still being squeaked between his massive, bone-crushing jaws.

"One of these days he's going to come back with a real human leg in his mouth and it'll be your fault," I say.

"That sounds kind of cool, if I'm being honest," Shepherd says because his main goal in life is being obstinate.

"You're such a liar," I say as Shepherd lets Bear out, telling me we're going some place that allows dogs. Bear's thrilled as he prances around with his leg. I really think he should leave it at home but Shepherd "likes the way it makes people question if we're serial killers as they drive by." That logic isn't very sound, but I love Shepherd and the little things that amuse him.

Shepherd goes around to the back of the car and pops the trunk. "Hop in."

I stare at him then glance back at Bear, wondering if a night with Bear would be much, *much* superior. He squeaks the leg in response.

He gives me a look like he's the innocent one. "You said you liked our first date!"

"It was a joke," I say as I put Bear in the car then get into the passenger seat.

Shepherd eventually closes the trunk and gets into the driver's seat.

“Where are we going?”

“Secret.”

Bear sets his head on Shepherd’s shoulder and starts squeaking the leg right in his ear. *Squeak-squeak... squeak-squeak... squeak-squeak.*

“Remember when I told you to have him leave the leg behind?” I ask.

“I can’t hear you”—*Squeak-squeak*—“over the sound of Bear’s happiness.” *Squeak-squeak.*

“Ah, is that what it is?” I ask as I start laughing. There’s no way it can’t be hurting his ears with it that close. But Shepherd is a stubborn man and refuses to even notice as Bear squeaks away.

He’s determined to make sure we’re both suffering from hearing loss by the time we arrive at the park. It’s a big open park that has trails that lead into the state forest. It’s also one of Bear’s favorite places to run since it’s not often we come across anyone and it’s quite secluded.

“Can you grab Bear?” Shepherd asks.

“Sure,” I say as I get out and go to the back seat to fetch the dog. I snap his leash on and take his stuffed leg before tossing it into the front seat where he hopefully won’t notice it during our ride home. He’s too excited about the walk to care.

When I get out, I see Shepherd has a five-gallon bucket.

“What’s that?” I ask warily.

“The picnic basket I was trying to show you in the trunk,” he says.

“When was that? When you told me to ‘climb in’?”

He grins. “Maybe.”

“Why a bucket? Why not a bag?”

“A five-gallon bucket makes me look more manly,” he says, voice deepening as he flexes his arms and starts strutting away.

“Don’t flex too much or your shirt’ll rip, it’s so tight. Then you’ll get arrested for public indecency.”

“I’m pretty sure it’s legal for a man to take his shirt off at a park.”

“Yeah, but it won’t be legal what I’ll do to you after you burst your way out of that shirt,” I say.

He gives me a mischievous grin. “Maybe I want my shirt to rip, then.”

Me too. “Too bad we can’t.”

“Fine, fine,” he says as he starts leading the way. I follow after him with Bear beside me, tail wagging every step of the way. He does receive a lot of looks as we go out with him, mostly because he looks like he’s had a rough life, but he’s always so damn happy that not many seem to look at him in fear, and I’m positive he loves everyone.

“It’s such a nice day out for a walk,” I say, glad he pulled me out of that room.

“We’re going for a run, not a walk,” Shepherd says as he shatters my hopes and dreams. Depression begins to consume me as I slowly look over at him, trying my hand at giving him the saddest eyes I can muster.

“But... we’re... on a date.”

“Yes, but you never know when you might need to run. We have to keep in shape.”

“We already ‘keep in shape’ three days a week!”

He takes off running and Bear lunges after him before hitting the end of the leash and jerking me forward. And as I watch Shepherd in his too-tight shirt, hanging onto his five-gallon “picnic basket,” I can’t help but wonder why this is even considered a date.

But Bear gives me sad eyes like he can’t understand why I’m not having a blast running through the park like Shepherd is. So I start jogging after him as Bear parades and prances all around, happy to get his way.

Once we get in the woods, I find that Shepherd’s finally slowed to a walk and I manage to catch up with him.

“Are you done making my date miserable?” I ask.

“A little bit of running is good for you,” he says with a beaming smile.

“Yeah, a little bit, but you don’t understand the definition of ‘a little bit,’” I say. “It’s not exactly a favorite pastime of mine.”

“But if we walked, it’d take us forever to get where I’m going,” he explains as he switches his five-gallon bucket to the other hand before holding his right hand out. I slip my hand into his and squeeze his fingers.

“There, now you have to drag me if you try taking off again,” I decide.

He laughs. “We don’t need to run anymore, I just did it to see the look on your face.”

Wow, isn't he romantic. "That's not cute but *you're* cute, so it weirdly makes me forgive you."

"That's just how I roll," he says as he swipes his hair back. Or at least tries to with the five-gallon bucket in his hand. I'm actually slightly embarrassed by how we look but somehow he's pulling off the "gallon" look.

He veers off the trail and starts trailblazing, but I follow along since it seems like he knows where he's going. When he reaches a small clearing he stops, looks around, and drops his bucket like he's staking a claim to the place. "Here we are."

"I'm extremely excited to see what you have in that bucket," I admit.

"First, there is the sheet so your butt doesn't get damp," he says as he pulls out a packaged tablecloth which he tears open. He pulls the tablecloth out and looks highly confused when it's about three feet by three feet.

"Ooh. Is that one for the dog and there's a bigger one for us?" I ask.

"No... I clearly can't figure out centimeters," he says as he lays it down. Bear immediately flops down on it, taking up the whole thing as he wags his tail, pleased with how caring Shepherd was to think of him.

"Dammit, Bear. Come here."

Bear grudgingly gets up and goes to his side as Shepherd flattens it back out and pulls out a battery-operated candle, which he sets in the middle.

"Ooh."

"I forgot the battery, so don't get too excited."

Then he pulls out a container filled with... chocolate? The second thing is just a huge bag of M&Ms, and then the third thing is gummy worms.

"There we go."

"You just brought junk food?" I ask.

He looks at me. "Do you like it?"

I grin at him as I sit down on the little square. "It really is all my favorite foods."

"I know! That's why I packed it. Oh, and just a squirt bottle of caramel," he says as he pulls it out of the bucket. "There. It's complete."

I open the first container and look in at the truffles. "Ooh, my favorite. Sit, sit. Feast with me. We're probably going to be so ill we won't

even be able to walk back to the car,” I say.

“As long as you enjoy it.”

“Sit!”

“Hold on a second,” he says as he goes over to Bear with his back turned to me. They seem to be having a secret session because I sit there in confusion as they do whatever it is they’re doing.

“What are you doing?” I ask.

“Call Bear to you.”

“Okay... I swear to god if he has a different toy, I’m kicking you out of the bed,” I say. “Come here, Bear.”

Bear turns around and I notice he has a little bow tie on and something in his mouth. He trots up to me.

“He’s got something to give you.”

“Give me,” I say as I hold my hand out. Bear, who’d been prancing right toward me, slams on the brakes, eyes me, then leaps through the air, *thrilled* I want what’s in his mouth. He lunges toward me, play bows and waits for me to grab for it again before taking off and doing laps around us.

“Dammit, dog!” Shepherd growls as he chases after him.

I laugh as Bear evades every maneuver Shepherd tries on him. “He’s just trying to keep you in shape in case the bad guys come again!”

“This evil thing! I’m going to get a new dog!” he threatens as Bear does jumps and dodges and prances all around.

After I have tears in my eyes from laughing at Shepherd’s failures, Bear, finding it hard to pant with whatever he has in his mouth, comes over to me, sits down, and spits it out right on my lap.

It’s soaked in slobber but when I pick it up, I see it’s a little box. I flip it over, noticing on the top are the words:

Will you marry my dad?

I glance up at Shepherd in shock. “Oh my god...”

He kneels next to where I’m sitting. “It was supposed to be all romantic and we literally practiced this for *days*. He even had this little move where he like lifted his paw and you were going to be blown away by the execution,” he says as he opens the box and pulls the ring out. “Killian, you mean so much to me. I never realized how lost I was in this world until I met you. I never knew how much I could care about someone, how much I

could love someone. And I know that I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Will you marry me?”

I nod before realizing I need to do more than nod. I think I was so blindsided that I didn't expect this, but it makes the moment even more amazing. “Yes, of course. Of course I will. You're my whole world, Shepherd. I was stuck in such a dark and toxic world until I met you. And you made my life worth living. I love you so much—and of course I'll marry you.”

He smiles as he fumbles with the ring. “My fingers are slimy and wet from Bear's saliva. He really was trying hard all week long to master this but when it came down to it... he just took the long way to get there.”

“Kind of like us,” I say as he pushes the ring onto my finger and I cup his face with my free hand, pulling him in to kiss him.

I don't think anything could possibly make this moment more special. I press into him and when he releases my hand, I wrap my arms around him and hug him close to me. “I really am the luckiest man alive.”

“Nah, I am.”

“Eh. I called it first,” I tease as I pull back so I can look at him.

I'm surrounded by the two things I love most in the world and Shepherd did so much to make sure this moment was perfect. It doesn't matter what roadblocks there are along the way—in the end, I couldn't have asked for anything better.

I'm not sure how my life *could* get any better than this, but I know that with Shepherd in it, it definitely will.