

15. February 8, 2021

On a pleasantly unseasonable day in February, following a harsh January, Roddy Harris decides to wash his Subaru wagon to remove the destructive salt accumulation from its body. His decision comes amidst concerns from his wife, Em, regarding his arthritis, but Roddy, insistent on enjoying the rare warm weather, proceeds with his plan. As he prepares to wash the car, a young woman named Barbara Robinson approaches him. Dressed in vibrant red attire and holding a slim folder close, she inquires after Em, expressing a desire to discuss something likely related to a Writer's Workshop.

The narrative delves into the intricacies and dynamics of Roddy and Em's relationship, highlighting their personal quirks and the affectionate, albeit stubborn nature of Roddy. The conversation with Barbara hints at a potential interest in writing, but with an underlying context of challenges faced by the writing community, notably the suspension of a workshop program due to the passing of Jim Shepard and others' disinterest in the transition to remote learning—a dilemma likened humorously to making love while wearing boxing gloves by the department's current writer in residence, Henry Stratton.

Roddy perceives Barbara as an ambitious individual aiming to hone her writing craft, akin to aspiring to the renown of Toni Morrison or Alice Walker. However, he leaves it to Em to deliver the disheartening news regarding the Writer's Workshop. Inside their interaction lies an intricate dance of desire, aspiration, and the realities of practical limitations, with Roddy reflecting on the complexities of memory, obligation, and the continuity of everyday life through small tasks like car washing. This moment also subtly reveals layers of community interaction, personal goals, and the impact of external circumstances on individual pursuits and relationships, all wrapped in the guise of a simple weekday encounter.