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By

Gretchen

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WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... Gretchen Troxell's, "What If – The Story of Our Meet Cute," is the hypothetical rabbit hole of want, disappointment, and the accepted sigh of relief. It's like being inceptioned by your own hopes and fantasies; a frame narrative of what ifs that compound dreams and melancholy. This story is a story that encapsulates one of the many themes within this issue: how our memories cling to our bones and shape us the way that we are. What I like most about Troxell's piece is the way that it illustrates the mental lengths that people will go to, the scenarios that people will create, the rationale that people will connect to justify their feelings. In our speaker's moment of what-ifs, we see longing, we see consolation, we see acceptance with the knowledge of one's own situation. What if we got everything we wanted? What if we truly knew what was good for us or bad for us? What if we were able to fall in love with the one that was meant for us to love? What if we knew how to make the choices that didn't end up with us getting hurt? What if it wasn't terrifying to love? What if...? An enjoyment to read, enjoy.*

Five Stars

QUALITY QUOTABLE *(for the love of language...)*

What if you were moving into your first apartment and visually struggling, so I offered to help your mom carry boxes up your steps, but then your younger cousin dropped a box of plates, and I took the blame for them and offered to buy you new ones, but when we got to Ikea, I was like "wait can't we just buy them at Goodwill?" and you kicked me out of the car, and I walked a mile back home before your cousin confessed the truth, and you drove by to pick me up?

My English teacher told me I was too analytical for my own good, but I think she only said that because “anal” sounds a tad unprofessional. I don’t agree with her. Problems have solutions, combinations open locks, there is always an answer. I don’t have an answer right now, but there is one. What if we met in a different manner? What if we had that one moment to look back on – something that tied us together – something that kept us strong?

I can’t stop thinking about it. Like...

What if I had a *really* big dragon tattoo that reminded you of your weird uncle who you only saw at Thanksgiving, and had like one inside joke with, and never spoke to again after you turned 12?

Or...

What if I wore a shirt that was your least favorite color, and you criticized it every single day until I broke into your dorm room and dyed all your shirts that color until you loved it, and then you loved me, and now that color reminds you of me, and you just so happen to see it everywhere?

Or....

What if I worked at Subway and always messed up your three ingredient sandwich, (despite you know, it only being three ingredients) and you eventually complained to my manager, but once I was fired, you saw me emo-smoking outside the establishment, and you really, really needed a lighter, so you were forced to talk to me, and then I threw the lighter in your face, and we both laughed?

Or.....

What if my favorite animal was a snake, and once on a Girl Scouts camping trip, you were super scared of a snake, and you envision me as the one who saved you and basically your life, and you were like HOLY SHIT YOU'RE MY HERO, and I totally agree, and we hugged and laughed even though I've never been a Girl Scout and haven't even eaten a Thin Mint, but at least I know that they're called Thin Mints, right?

Or.....

What if I worked in a gas station in New Jersey, and you weren't aware I had to pump your gas for you, so you got really offended, so, like any rational minimum-wage worker, I recorded a video of you yelling and hashtagged it "KarenRant" and put it all over social media until the shame grew too much that three years later you came back and apologized with the cheapest flowers you could find (I know because you left the price tag on [only \$2.39])?

Or.....

What if you were moving into your first apartment and visually struggling, so I offered to help your mom carry boxes up your steps, but then your younger cousin dropped a box of plates, and I took the blame for them and offered to buy you new ones, but when we got to Ikea, I was like "wait can't we just buy them at Goodwill?" and you kicked me out of the car, and I walked a mile back home before your cousin confessed the truth, and you drove by to pick me up?

Or.....

What if I was trying to sell a fantastic vacuum cleaner on Facebook Marketplace, but it's a super competitive market, so you dressed up to try and impress me, but you showed up like a week late (and didn't even message me first – I still don't know how you found my address), so my vacuum was definitely sold – again, super competitive market — and you fake cried, and I

awkwardly stood there as I realized you had never done theater before, and then you asked if you should try acting, and I had to crush your dreams right then and there?

Or.....

What if we were a part of different groups that accidentally booked a visit to a dairy farm on the same day, so we got partnered to milk a cow together, and I squeezed too hard at too weird an angle, so the hot milk sprayed right into your open mouth, and you started gagging, so to make you feel better, I attempted to squeeze it in my own mouth, but I have terrible aim, so I squirted you again, and you ran out crying, so I took you to a gas station and let you fill up some water balloons I keep in the back of my 2007 Honda Civic with milk and hit me right in the face?

Or.....

What if I made up a bunch of fake organizations to put on my LinkedIn to impress potential jobs, and you messaged me thinking it was funny, but I was so impressive, you actually wanted to hire me, but you forgot you're not a job recruiter – until one night when you're lying awake in your own sweat, and you're half-asleep, thinking about getting a job, and you suddenly remember you were only a recruiter in a dream, so you made up a fake job, and you tried to get me to believe you, but I'm not stupid because you claimed the interview was in your dorm room?

Or.....

What if you were walking around with an ultra-sharp sewing needle, and I was sprinting through the hallway, trying to get away from my roommate who's a little too into 500 Ouija boards, and I crashed into you, and in the process, you stabbed me with the needle right in the nose, and I screamed, and you tried to tell me it look like a really cool nose piercing, but your placement was incredibly off, so when you took your earring out and stabbed it in my nose, I didn't appreciate it

as much as you thought I should, and our screaming alerted the neighbors, and we both had to attend anger management classes together?

Or.....

What if we both put library books on reserve at the same time, but when I went to pick mine up, I realized I wanted to read yours more, so I took it and left a note explaining the situation, and you thought it was kind of funny, so you took the book I originally reserved and hated it so much, you typed up an eight page, MLA essay detailing everything wrong with it and then hacked into the library system to find my address and sent it to my house and were satisfied, until you got a letter saying you had the wrong house, and you realized I moved, so you contacted a bunch of local realtors until someone recognized my last name but wouldn't give any more info, so you did a deep dive and found my new address and sent it to that house, but then my parents contacted you and said I don't live at home anymore, so you made a fake Facebook profile, and over a few months, you added friends and photos to make your profile seem real, and then you added me, but I never accept Facebook requests, so two years later, when I accidentally misclicked and accepted you, you found a post about my new apartment and then sent the letter there, and then you realized you've been misspelling my name the whole time, and my name is Gretchen Troxell, not Gretchen Troxwell, so then you were just kind of embarrassed and decided (when drunk) to message me the whole story?

Or.....

What if you were a better person? What if you cared about anyone other than yourself?

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *I've always been one to blame myself in terms of failed relationships. In writing this piece, I finally understood the lesson "you can't love someone into loving you back," which became my central theme. I chose to utilize a comedic tone as humor is a majorly*

overlooked coping mechanism. Sometimes people simply just suck – some people are just bad, and that can make the world a lot scarier. So... why not joke about it, right?

AUTHOR BIO: Gretchen Troxell is originally from Hilliard, Ohio but is currently an undergraduate student at Bowling Green State University. There, she is studying creative writing and film. Thankfully, she has very supportive parents who genuinely believe she'll make a living in one of those fields. This is her first published piece, and she enjoys writing stories that focus on mental health and anything with a satisfying murder in it.