



Photo by Jaiden Dembo

Meet-Cute

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“I wish we were an anomaly in the world of serendipitous encounters. The kind that tapped into your emotional reservoirs and seeped out of your reverie, bleeding into the everyday whether it was convenient or not. A notch or three above puppy love or exemplary more-than-acquaintances. There were probably stories like that. We probably weren’t one of them.”

Jasmine placed her notebook on her lap and looked up at her therapist, who was listening intently. Her head remained level as her eyes fell down to her notebook and her fingers fumbled with the bottom rungs of the notebook’s coil binding.

“This story seems different than your previous ones,” her therapist commented, sitting up slightly from his recline.

“What do you mean by different?” Jasmine replied.

“Different: as in lighter. Happier, almost.” Jasmine pressed her left thumb into the

coil and tilted her head back down to face her notebook. The notebook was a graduation gift.

“They actually don’t end up together in the end.”

“Yes, but I don’t know that. Neither does your audience. Maybe they don’t need to.” Jasmine silently applauded her therapist’s attempt to be encouraging.

“I think it’s a good direction, Jasmine.”

Jasmine mustered a toothless smile in return. It had taken her the better part of three sessions to write anything remotely optimistic.

“Is there anything you want to add?”

A combination of mild agitation and unbridled hysteria welled up in Jasmine’s throat, the kind she allowed to sink back into her stomach even when she couldn’t stomach what she wanted to say. A meld of fight and flight that culminated in a starving stalemate. Whenever you’re ready, he stressed in their first session. Jasmine wasn’t sure how to gage what it meant to be comfortable or ready. To her it was enough that she had conceded to attend counselling and that she managed to keep the strained, staccato responses she harbored in her throat at bay. She paused before replying.

“No.”

She knew full well that her “no” omitted her thoughts on senseless shootings and goodbyes that took place too late or didn’t happen at all. Her “no” also didn’t include her failure to reply to a weary soul in need of convincing when it was inconvenient and when it mattered most. Jasmine’s gaze darted back and forth between the Proust quote on the bottom left hand corner of her notebook and her therapist’s ballpoint pen. She was, at best,

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distraught at her inability to have been neither a better stranger nor an available friend.

“Well, whenever—”

“—I’ll let you know when I’m ready,” she interjected gently, grazing her finger across the edges of her notebook’s mascara-stained narratives. Her therapist smiled thinly and adjusted his silver frames. They had two remaining sessions together.

She exchanged goodbyes with her therapist after scheduling another appointment and proceeded to the nearest bus stop. The sun had gone down and the sidewalks were littered

with damp autumn-tinted leaves and miniature puddles which found shelter in sidewalk cracks from the afternoon’s rain shower. She lowered the volume on her smartphone and moved towards the center of the uncrowded sidewalk. Walking in the middle of the sidewalk often gave her the impression that she was less isolated than she felt.

Jasmine went through three playlists, wondering how often the spaces where pens met paper were locales for if onlys and could-haves. To wrestle with the ineffable or make up for the follies of men with bad intentions.