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Fiction Story

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### But What If?

Her mind had been a whirlwind since she received her father's text messages during athletics that afternoon. It was midnight, and her shift at the local Sonic Drive-In had ended nearly an hour ago, but she just could not go home. She was not ready to confront her parents for what they had said that day, and she did not think she ever would be. In the great state of Texas, however, she would not have a choice. She had to stay with her parents until he eighteenth birthday. Although it was fast approaching, she had to deal with this situation now. Her parents were in bed and asleep long before her shift ended, so on nights she worked there was plenty of time to reflect. It was freezing outside, but she wanted to take a run none the less. The chill bumps appeared all over her body as she changed into her track sweats sitting in the back seat. She was unsure if the chills came from the twenty-six degree temperatures, or if it came from the thought that she was thinking this might possibly be the last run she ever made.

She called her boyfriend, and as was typical, he did not answer. It was then the tears started to form. Lucy was not your typical female. She would rather the wind chill freeze her eyes open than let a single tear spill down her cheeks. She shot a quick message to her boyfriend. "I'm sorry you missed my call. I could really use your support right now. Hope you're having a great night. I love you!"

Her lungs had already begun to frost over from the race around half of the trail, and her chest was aching with the chilly oxygen she was inhaling. She began to think that walking might be a better option, but one more gust of wind made her change her mind completely. It was a

clear night, so she knew that the stars were going to be beautiful in the glow of the moon from the top of the hospital parking lot. She hopped in her convertible, heater blasting with the top down, and headed for the hospital. She checked her phone for a response from her boyfriend. As she suspected, nothing. She climbed the stairs to the top of garage and propped herself against a cement pole. The beauty of the moon was mesmerizing, and she decided now would be the perfect time to spark that blunt she had skipped sixth period to roll. Just as she lit the cigar, another shadow appeared in the doorway of the stairs.

Lucy was not intimidated. She had decided that the world would be better off without her, and she was soaking up every bit of all that she had enjoyed while here on Earth. As the substance relaxed her, she had another thought. *Just because things are hard does not mean they are not meant to be.* Her parents had been in her ear about her toxic relationship for more than a year, and their persistence had not faltered. She grabbed her phone to send another message to her boyfriend, when suddenly, the figure from the stairs came upon her.

“Why haven’t you gone home yet? If your dad wakes up and you aren’t home, he will have a heart attack?”

She blinked and the shadow was gone. *This is some good stuff,* she thought to herself as she began to make her way to her car. Whether it was her mind or the supernatural, she had something that needed to be done. She took a long look at her next destination; the overpass on the highway perpendicular to the high school football field. She was perplexed as she began walking down the stairs with heavy feet. She had two things on her mind: Where did that shadow go, and was the silhouette waiting on the overpass she was anticipating traveling to the same person? She hopped into her car, more eager for explanation than sealing her fate at this point.

*She's Gonna Listen to Her Heart* blared in the speakers as she made her drive to the field house where she would park her car and make the walk that would end it all. She reached the steps, and as she moved closer the shadow did not move. The shadow seemed like it wanted her to keep walking forward. Once she was near enough to speak in the tone she felt matched her emotional state, she decided to confront the shadow.

“How did you know this is where I would be coming?” she asked the shadow in a puzzled whimper. Her heart was breaking at this point.

“Well you had mentioned it a few times, and when you came to see me today, I just kind of thought today might be the day you decided that it was time. I am here to let you know that it's not,” the shadow replied to Lucy. She knew she could not touch him, but she knew who the shadow was now. Her brother was taking care of her. He had taken time to come visit her from his new life. There was one problem though. She had so many questions for him, but just as it happened when he left her world the first time, he was gone before he could help her work through any of her emotions. She pulled her cell phone out of her pocket. No messages from anyone, not her boyfriend, not her father; the presence or absence of Lucy seemed irrelevant to anyone's life she thought as she paced the edge of the bridge.

“If the wind catches you just right, you're just going to blow right off,” a voice grumbles from the steps. She quickly jumped off the edge and looked this man straight in the face. It was dark, but the moon was bright enough so that she could clearly make out the words “Vietnam Veteran” on his cap. He was bundled up better than she was, but there was a big difference in the two of them. It was clear Lucy was intruding on his home. She sat on the cold cement, shivering and embarrassed by what her life had become. The tears unfroze as the adrenaline coursed

through her veins. She began to sob. The homeless veteran hung his old leather coat on her shoulders and uttered a phrase she would never forget.

“I’ve been here, and it gets better. And if I cannot promise you anything else, I can promise you that at least one person would miss you if you were to leave the world behind,” he began to preach. She was already scared out of the act, and was simply sitting in a wreckage of emotions. This kind stranger held her as he had held many others in emotional distress during his service in Vietnam. A tear snuck out of the corner of his eye as he grieved the losses for what was probably the billionth time. The sky was greying, and she knew that it would not be too long before her parents would be up. She needed to go, but she could not shake these thoughts of ending it. Regardless, it was clear that tonight was not the night for it. She whispered a thank you and hugged the old man for a long minute before releasing him to his duties. *I wonder how many lives that man has saved*, she thought to herself as she started her car once more. She had just started her car once more when she felt her phone buzz. It was her granddad, and she answered as quickly as humanly possible. In his old age, he had taken to waking around four in the morning, and occasionally he forgot not everyone’s alarm went off that early

“Yes, Grandpa, I would love to meet you at the doughnut shop tomorrow before school. I will meet you there at eight,” Lucy said through gasps for air and hiccups.

As she pulled into her driveway, she just could not bring herself to immediately head up to her room. It was now nearly three in the morning. She needed to be as quiet as possible coming inside, and she certainly could not take a shower. But she did not care. This night had revealed two things to her; there are those in your life who will always care about your well-being, and there are always going to be those that do not. She was finally starting to understand what her dad had been trying to tell her that day.

She crept quietly into her bedroom far later than she should have been, and she turned her heat blanket on medium. Her heart hurt for a moment because the man who saved her life was still freezing on the bridge. She hated that she had left him, but something told her he enjoyed what he was doing, that she was not his first encounter with this situation. She checked her phone one last time, though this time she was a bit more thorough. She had yet to receive a message from the boyfriend who knew that she was at an emotional breaking point, and he had once again left her to fend for herself emotionally. Her dad was right; she could do better than this. Everything she had tried to defend about her boyfriend the day before was futile. Her father was wise enough to see her soul being drained but she just could not. She knew now, and she was going forward with life. Her future, who she hoped to become, could not accommodate the albatross that her boyfriend had become. However, the mystery still remained as to how she would let him know. The even bigger question was whether or not she could. There were variables at play beyond her control, so rather than deal with them now, she elected to get some sleep before her trip to the doughnut shop with her grandfather the following morning.

She woke with her alarm, ready to take on the day. Well, she would be ready with a few of those long, green pills hiding in her pencil pouch. She had so many problems, and she was not prepared to deal with them. She just continued to pump herself full of sedatives, hoping to forget that her life was in shambles. She continued the relationship, but she her soul was being sucked dry. Finally, she reached a breaking point. In a pill-induced coma, she decided to end her relationship with the only boy she had ever known. As hard as it was at the time, her dad was quick to remind her that destiny always has the upper-hand. Parents will never understand, but when she hugged her dad after her basketball game the next evening, she felt loved in a way that she had not felt in a long time. Most importantly, she was free of the toxic relationship that could

have ruined her life. She let her dad drape his arm around her shoulders as they walked to his truck. Lucy and her hero were best friends once again.