

Coulda-Woulda-Shoulda

Lina

"You can't be thinking about would've's and could've's all the time! Life happens- it just happens and there's no way to tell what should've happened, if you did this or that and the other!"

I can't?... I can't, huh? But I'd love to know what could've or would've happened. I would like to ruin the human experience and truly know! Know what this or that and the other entails! To understand what potential I hold- what would've happened if I bumped my head and forgot everything, maybe if I grew wings and flew away, what could've happened if I paid more attention, what should've happened...

If only I did... if only I was, if only I said, if only I-

Coulda-Woulda-Shoulda

Part 1: Coulda

DING DING DING!

"Jeez! Alright, alright- I'm coming!"

I yelled before picking up my tray from a nearby booth.

Balancing sodas of all sorts mixed in with a water or so and the occasional apple juice. I was quickly making my way; closer and closer to the front desk- to the *DING DING DING*, the urgent sound ringing in my ears before I- *SPLAT CRASH SPILL*, colors of all sorts raining down. I could've been on the ground too, my head to the tile, spilling out from the top just like the drinks. But I wasn't.

"Hey, I've got you. You alright?"

"You've got me?! What? Oh."

The only reason I was even upright was because of this strange man, halfway out of his booth, holding me up by the hand. This suddenly reminded me of the time I bought a bookend. All of my books would fall to the side every time I sat at my desk but then I got this book end. That bookend was the only thing keeping my books upright. Come to think of it they should make one of those that looked like a young man with glasses holding-

"You there? Miss uh...Rue,," the suited bookend asked, clearly concerned for me, his

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eyebrows furrowed like I might be important, reading the pin over my heart.

"Yeah, yeah, thank you." I fully stood up and held his hand for a moment longer before letting go and kneeling to pick up the drinks, the *DING DING DING* replaced with a long drawn-out silence before I felt a shoulder brush against mine, placing the cups upright as I stacked them, our shoes sticking to the floor as the mix of drinks continued to spread across the tile.

"You aren't exactly here, are you? You always look lost in thought," he mused., I could feel his eyes trying to meet mine but I kept myself busy, cleaning up the spill with a rag.

"Always? We've never met," I simply say, my lips pursed. I don't talk to men, neither do they talk to me!

"I know, I just come to Charlie's often and see you here. You're always staring at the floor, even when you're working like there's something moving under there. Is there?" he asked with a small curious smile.,

I finally looked up at him.

He was pleasing to look at. Hm.

I responded, "Sometimes, it depends on the day. The floor is whatever I make of it. It's not as boring as you'd think." I then stood to walk off. I still had to tend to the noise even if it wasn't presently nagging at me.

"Hey- Rue!"

"Huh?"

"Do you think you could talk to me about the floor sometime?"

"About the floor?"

"Yes, the floor."

"Now?"

"Yeah."

I had a choice.

Was the love of my life right behind me? Asking me to sit with him, grabbing at any excuse he could? There's a lot of things that could happen, I mean what if this guy's got some weird habit or a penchant for picking up waitresses with far off gazes, maybe he's an ultra creep and likes pineapple on pizza! God, that would suck- stop it! Don't stall! Choose, choose, choose!

DING DING DING DING DING DING!!

"I'd love to!" I yelled over that loud noise in my head as I chose to sit with him.

Part 2: Woulda

Ring ring ring!

"This is Ruby speaking,, how can I help you?"

She greeted the phone in the most polite manner, her eyes sparkling. Ruby loved her job,, she was doing what she was called to do! She was the right- hand woman for the head of her favorite fashion magazine!

"Of course, I'll connect you now. Have a goodnight, sir!" she said before hanging up and standing to pick her bag from her desk and put on her coat. She had a date tonight, not just any date but a date with a mystery man! As Ruby's heels clicked in the silent hallway, the evening sun melted onto the floors like rays of gold. All she could think about as she went down the elevator was about this man! They have never met before but... something! Something had her thinking that it just might work out! Ruby was never the kind of person to be on dating apps but her friend set her up with a guy "she might like."

"Oh, how I hope I like him!" she whispered to herself, practically skipping down the street. The stars above twinkled as if winking at her, maybe today was the day!-!

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"Eek!" Ruby squealed before tripping backwards on the icy pavement, but she was still standing? A suited man held her by her hand, keeping her upright. She would've been on the ground, her head to ice, her hair ruined! But suddenly she heard a voice as she slowly looked up to meet his gaze.

"Hey, I've got you. You alright?"

"You've got me?! What? Oh." Ruby giggled as he pulled her upwards, almost too close. They held hands for a moment longer before separating as the suited man chuckled.

"You're okay there, Miss umm..."

"Ruby. Yes, I am! Thank you so much for catching me." She felt her face get hot.,

He was so cute! But I have a date so I can't be thinking about him. Not now! "Where are you walking to? It's pretty late for a lady to be out right now. I can escort

you!" he offered with a small curious smile.

He looked at her as if she was important!

"I'm going to this place called Charlie's? It's a small cafe just around the corner, I think I'll be fine!" Ruby nodded before walking off. She had a

date to get to, she couldn't be here talking to another man! No matter how cute and charming and handsome and perfect he was... she just couldn't! How unfair life was!

"Hey- Ruby!"

"Hm?"

"Do you also go by Rue by any chance?"

"Yes! How did you know?"

"I'm meeting my date; her name is Rue."

"Oh! So, you're my date then?"

"Yeah."

She felt over the moon as she walked back over to him, she had no choice but to cling to his arm as they both walked to Charlie's together. Did she meet the love of her life?! He had to have been! God, she had to tell him! Don't stall! Choose, choose, choose!

Ring ring ring ring ring ring!!

"I like you!" she yelled over that loud noise in her head as she chose to love him.

Part 3: Shoulda

There shouldn't have been a *DING DING DING!*

There shouldn't have been a *Ring ring ring!*

She shouldn't have picked up that tray nor the phone.

He shouldn't have sat next to the window nor got off work early.

She shouldn't be able to afford those heels.

He shouldn't have fallen in love with her.

She should've tripped.

He should've had his headphones on.

She should have never bought that book end.

He should have never remembered her.

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Ruby Marrow should have ended up dead.
He should have left before she had even tripped.
Fallen back, head fractured.
Her insides spilling out from the top like a knocked over drink.
Colors of all sorts mixing with her blood on the floor.
Her eyes forever looked up to the ceiling.
Maybe it was moving.

Ruby Marrow should have had no family or friends attend her funeral.
She should have died alone.
They should have **never** met

Things happen.

The tragic and short story of Ruby Marrow has many possibilities. So many things she could've, would've and should've done.

Regret, deep regret, so deep it can be felt in the bones. That's her name. And it's yours too.

We all regret things we haven't done, wish things turned out the way we wanted them to. But that's not how this happens.

Yet there is hope.

You have experienced love, you have experienced happiness.

So did Ruby.

Who am I to decide what should have happened to Ruby Marrow?

Who are you to decide what should have happened either?

Do all you can,

Do all you will,

And then and only then,

You will find something precious.

Not what you coulda done,

Not what you woulda done,

Not what you shoulda done,

But what is right in front of you.

What is happening now.

Live **now**.