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Why We Like Love Stories

By

STEPHEN GREGG

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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Why We Like Love Stories was originally produced by Agoura High School (Agoura Hills, Calif.) on May 16, 2018.

CAST:

Bark..... Aaron Ellis
JessicaZanna Hocker
Chloe Emma Isrolit
CrooperBen Math

PRODUCTION:

Director Jake Marone
Stage Manager Jason Goldman
Theatre Teacher..... David Krassner

Thanks to the actors and writers of Lab Twenty6, whose performances and critiques improve every play I write.

Why We Like Love Stories

CHARACTERS

CROOPER: 16, later 17; anyone with a heart so easily broken is basically good.

CHLOE: 16, later 17; a prickly exterior surrounds a tough shell, which surrounds a warm heart.

BARK: 16, later 17; a warm heart surrounds a warm heart.

JESSICA: 16, later 17; everyone's a little in love with her because she's kind.

NOTE: You're free to change the genders and/or preferences of the characters. Change the names as necessary. Make small changes as appropriate.

SETTING

Pin Cushion, California.

A truck-stop town 230 miles east of Los Angeles.

Population 786 and dropping.

The present.

To my mother,
Marilyn Dickson Gregg,
my original love story.

CROOPER, 16, has had his heart smashed by CHLOE. Now, it's seven months later. He's at the top of the hill that looks out over Pin Cushion, and that these young people use for for courting and for yearning. He stands alone on the hill, reading a text he's just written.

CROOPER. Hey Jess! I'm up on our hill, which means I'm thinking about you. I'm also thinking about math. Devon was telling me about something called the Fry algorithm. It's a mathematical way to make a choice. The basic idea is that if you're choosing something, you estimate how many things total you're going to have to choose from, and you examine a third of those to figure out what you like and don't like. Then, after that, you choose the first one that was better than all the ones you looked at already. (*Beat.*) Jessica, this has been

such an amazing five months. But unfortunately, we're not a third of the way into our dating lives, so it's too early to settle on someone. *(He corrects this.)* Decide on someone. I wish the math of this was better for us. *(Even reading this is hard for him.)* I asked Mad Cat to the All Hallows' Eve parade. Sorry for the late notice. I know we'll always be friends. *(And he hits a button.)* Send. *(But it doesn't. Something has gone wrong.)* Send. Sennnnd. SEND!

(JESSICA enters out of his line of sight, wearing a Halloween mask. She carries a small bag.)

JESSICA. Hey hey!

CROOPER. Hey!

JESSICA. I knew you'd be up here. *(She takes off the mask, looks out at the town.)* I never get tired of this view. Even the Costco looks good from up here. I thought you might need an after-school snack. *(She takes out grapes.)*

CROOPER. Thank you.

JESSICA. Red. And green. I was in the grocery store thinking, how do I not know your grape preference? And ... *(She takes out a second mask.)* Happy All Hallows' Eve! Try it.

(He puts the mask on for a moment. She holds up a mirror to let him see his reflection.)

JESSICA *(cont'd)*. It's good, right?

CROOPER. It's great.

(A long moment.)

JESSICA. Do you have something you want to say to me? *(Beat.)* You haven't even wished me a happy birthday.

CROOPER. Happy birthday.

JESSICA. Did you forget, or is there a surprise later?

CROOPER. I didn't forget.

JESSICA. I knew you didn't.

CROOPER (*a tad abrupt*). I've been thinking about math. Devon was explaining a math way to make a choice.

JESSICA. Is this the stupid Fry thing? I made so much fun of him. It might be a good way to choose an apartment but trying to use it to choose a girlfriend is very male.

(*CROOPER is feeling a little stressed.*)

JESSICA (*cont'd*). What's the matter?

CROOPER. Did you know this is where Chloe broke up with me?

JESSICA. Chloe? I didn't know you dated Chloe.

CROOPER. Yeah. She thought it was a good place to break up because it's beautiful and—

JESSICA. You dated Chloe?

CROOPER. Yeah. And it was a really easy breakup 'cause—

JESSICA. How did I not know this?

CROOPER. It was just six dates.

JESSICA. Why would you date someone that angry?

CROOPER. She's not that angry once you get to know her.

JESSICA. And the card thing. I thought it was a joke at first. I said, "Hi, I'm Jessica." And she was like, (*A grand presentation.*) "My card."

CROOPER. I liked her. She kept a journal mostly to list all the ways that she could improve herself.

JESSICA. I do that.

CROOPER. I liked the way she broke up with me; it was clear and simple. She just said, “I don’t see this as a romantic thing.” (*Straight at JESSICA.*) *I don’t see this as a romantic thing.*

JESSICA (*missing it*). I think it’s better to give reasons.

(They stare down at the town.)

JESSICA (*cont’d*). Do you ever—do you ever have something you want to say, and it shouldn’t be that hard, but—it’s like jumping off the high-dive—you know it’ll be fine, but it’s still scary to do?

CROOPER. Yeah.

JESSICA. Let me see your hand.

(He holds out his hand, probably face up, as though she were going to drop something in it.)

JESSICA (*cont’d*). Close your eyes.

(She turns it over, slides a ring on it. This takes some doing.)

JESSICA (*cont’d*). I am crazy about you.

CROOPER. Oh wow.

JESSICA. Do you like it?

CROOPER. It’s beautiful.

JESSICA. I decided to call it a “ring of closeness.” Is it too tight?

CROOPER. No it’s perfect. It looks expensive.

JESSICA. Not in the long run. It’s a way of saying—well here goes— (*It might or might not be clear that this has been memorized.*) This is an offering from my heart. I know it’s too early at our age to think that we might spend the rest of our lives together, but it kind of seems like we will.

CROOPER (*again, a little abrupt*). You know something I really like about you? I think you're really strong. Like, if something bad happened to you, you'd just take a deep breath and then a month later it's like, OK, that's in my past.

JESSICA. I'm so glad you think that. At my last school, I dated this guy named Chip Chip for about—it wasn't even that long—not even three months. He broke up with me totally out of the blue. BY TEXT! And ... at first I thought I was fine—I was sad but I thought I'd just snap out of it. But I didn't. It seemed like the world changed, like everybody could suddenly tell that I was a fraud. I stopped going out, I lost weight. My parents didn't say it, but I think it was part of why we moved here, to give me a fresh start.

(CROOPER's on the verge of a panic attack.)

JESSICA (*cont'd*). Parade's starting. We should get down there.

CROOPER. I kind of already asked Mad Cat to the parade.

JESSICA (*beat*). Mad Cat?

CROOPER. I'm so bad at breaking up with people.

JESSICA. When did you ask her?

CROOPER. Kind of a while ago.

JESSICA. You're breaking up with me? Why?

CROOPER. I don't know. The reasons a person tells you they break up with you are never the real reason.

(This sends her into grief.)

CROOPER (*cont'd*). A lot of guys in this school want to date you.

JESSICA. I don't want those boys! We could make this work.

CROOPER. You know why people like love stories? It's because in a love story, you can make someone fall in love with you, but in real life you never can.

(A long moment.)

CROOPER *(cont'd)*. Are you OK?

(She doesn't answer.)

CROOPER *(cont'd)*. I have to get down there. Sorry.

(He tries to take off the ring, but it's too tight.)

CROOPER *(cont'd)*. I can't get this off, but I'll use soap and water on it tonight.

(He starts to leave.)

We hear the sound of a text being sent from CROOPER's phone. A moment later, we hear JESSICA's text notification.)

JESSICA. Was that you? *(Reads.)* Hey! I'm standing on our hill, which means I'm thinking of you ... *(She reads silently for a moment.)* "I wish the math of this was better for us." *(Some expression of disgust.)* Math-A-matical with an "A." Do you ever even read?

"We're" is supposed to have an apostrophe!"

"I know we'll be always be friends."

Crooper, we're gonna be classmates for two more years. I'll be here when your crappy study habits catch up with you. I hope your application to UCSB gets lost and then mysteriously found and then you still don't get in! I'll know when Mad Cat breaks your heart, because that's gonna happen, don't ask me how I know. And when she breaks your heart, I hope that it crushes your spirit and that you ... *(She gets emotional.)* I don't hope that. Go away.

CROOPER. You know what I hope? I hope we can still come up to our hill sometimes.

JESSICA. This isn't our hill. It's my hill.