

Y O U N E V E R K N O W

B Y L E W I S S H I N E R

Entry for a contest co-sponsored by Volkswagen and Harlequin Romance, seeking a 200-word romantic short story that involved a VW Beetle.

BUT THAT WAS 1974, and San Francisco, and a hand-painted v w beetle, an icon of a revolution she'd always regretted missing. This was the new version, a sleek black semicircle on wheels. It was the vanity plate that connected the cars and decades in Jake's mind: U N E V E R N O .

He caught up to her in the Harris-Teeter parking lot. "Jake?" she said. Her hair was shorter, with traces of gray, but her beauty still stopped his heart.

"There hasn't been a day I haven't thought of you," he said.

"But you never showed up..."

"My car broke down. After all the grief you'd given me about it, I was humiliated. When I called, your number was disconnected, you'd left no forwarding address."

"So you're here now?" she asked. "Married?"

"Briefly, long ago." Hope and fear tangled in his throat. "You?"

"I'm on my third." She saw his dejection and said, "But hey. It's a rough patch right now. You waited 25 years, you should stick around." She smiled the crooked, glittery-eyed smile that had pursued him across the decades.

"You never know."

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