

What You Could Have Won

Rachel Genn

And Other Stories (Nov 3, 2020)

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Rachel Genn's novel *What You Could Have Won* explores love, fame, dependence, and emotional manipulation with compassion and sparkling wit.

Astrid is a rock star with a drug problem. She is also in love with Henry, a shady psychiatrist who tries to advance his career by using her as an experiment subject. As Astrid deals with her insecurities, drug dependence, and longing for Henry, he keeps notes on her behavior, feeds her drugs, and plans what he hopes will be his breakout book.

Henry and Astrid's versions of their relationship appear in alternating chapters. Henry's is told in the first person and Astrid's in the second person, the latter resulting in a sense that the audience participates in her struggles. The text also shifts through time to cover Astrid's tour of the US; the couple's vacation in Greece; and Astrid's time at a celebrity rehabilitation center in Paris. It devotes the most attention to Greece, where Astrid's suspicions of Henry's motivations grow, but where Henry expresses care only when he is left out from a party that he can hear in the distance. The sections set during Astrid's tour and in Paris fill in details about the couple's history and look toward their future.

The novel is brisk as it moves from thought to thought and incident to incident; it requires close attention. But its tone is breezy—a counterpoint to the seriousness of its subject matter. Such contrasts emphasize the weight of Henry's betrayals and of Astrid's struggles.

What You Could Have Won is a lively, bracing novel about the perils of attraction; it brims with insights into physical and emotional dependency.

REBECCA HUSSEY (November / December 2020)

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