

GROWING YOUNG TOGETHER

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

SARAH	A woman of adult age, quirky and motivated to be unexpected
ALEX	A man of adult age, equally quirky with a drive for creativity
SERVER	An uptight French waiter

SETTING

A fancy French restaurant.

(Sarah is sitting alone at a table for two in an elegant restaurant. She has a large handbag at the side of her chair. She checks her appearance in a small mirror in between looking around for someone, Her phone rings.)

SARAH

Hello? *(It's me.)* Oh. *(Oh, come one.)* Don't 'oh, come on' me. Look, what do you want? *(Can't we just talk for a bit?)* No, we can't just—

(She looks around uncomfortably, then...)

Hold on.

(She takes out an earbud, and puts it in her ear. Then a little quieter...)

Can you hear me? *(Yes.)* Look, Doug. You can't keep calling me like this. *(I just think we shouldn't--)* Doug, we're not right for each other. *(We could be, if only--)* We tried. For too many years. It's not— *(I really think we can make it work.)* Look, I can't do this right now. I'm on a date. Or, at least, I will be soon. Hopefully.

(Alex enters, looking around, and spots Sarah just as she waves to him.)

He's here. I have to go. *(But I think... and he goes on for a bit...)*

ALEX

(Having walked over.)

Sarah?

SARAH

(Still to Doug...)

I told you...

ALEX

(Thinking she's talking to him...)

I'm sorry?

SARAH

And I'm not coming back!

ALEX

You haven't left yet.

SARAH

(Still focused on ending the call...)

Good bye.

ALEX

Well, I think that sets the record for my shortest date.

(Sarah takes the earbud out.)

SARAH

Sorry. What was that?

ALEX

Are you Sarah?

SARAH

On occasion. I'm guessing you must be Alex.

ALEX

Unless you've got a better name in mind. Sorry I'm late. There was a huge traffic jam. This enormous green buffalo was charging down 4th Avenue, and the police had stopped all traffic while they tried to get everything under control. Do you mind?

(He motions to the seat. Sarah, makes a corresponding 'by all means' gesture, and he sits.)

Anyway, it was a big production.

SARAH

You're telling me that you're late because of a green buffalo production?

ALEX

There was dancing.

SARAH

Now when you say 'green', are you describing its color or conveying a lack of experience?

ALEX

Both, but mostly the latter. You could tell by the way that it was always slightly out of step with the police lieutenant.

SARAH

Breadsticks?

ALEX

Is that a new dance? I'm not familiar with that one.

SARAH

No, I was hoping maybe you brought some with you.

ALEX

I could probably find some.

(He raises his hand to wave over a server.)

Do you need a menu?

SARAH

Only when you are going to bake it.

(It takes Alex a moment, but he then makes a kneading gesture. Sarah gestures that he got the joke, and he gives her an appreciative 'nice one' nod, just as the server arrives.)

SERVER

Bonsoir. Welcome to Le Comptoir du Vin. May I start you off with something to drink?

ALEX

Perhaps, but first we are facing an unacceptably low density of breadsticks in our local vicinity.

(The server just looks at him in confusion. Alex turns to Sarah.)

That was clear, right?

SERVER

You want breadsticks, oui?

SARAH

We do.

ALEX

And do you know what you'd like for dinner, or do you need a little more time.

SARAH

I do. Do you?

ALEX

Oui. *We* do.

(The server is finding their wordplay utterly lowbrow.)

I'd like... whatever she's having. Your turn.

SARAH

(A sly grin comes to her face, and she turns to the server.)

I'll have chicken nuggets.

SERVER

Excusez-moi?

SARAH

Chicken nuggets. Shaped like dinosaurs, though.

SERVER

(Clearly disdainful.)

We do not have *chicken nuggets*.

SARAH

That's okay. I figured that might be the case.

(She reaches into her bag and pulls out a package of now-thawing dino-shaped chicken nuggets.)

About fifteen minutes at 350 Fahrenheit should do it.

SERVER

Quoi?

SARAH

What?

SERVER

What?

SARAH

Oh. Right. I'm sorry. I don't know what 350 is in Celsius. Do you?

ALEX

Uhhh, I think about 175.

SARAH

Thanks. So 175 Celsius for about fifte— ooooh dear.

ALEX

What's wrong?

SARAH

I have no idea what a minute is in metric.

SERVER

An eternity.

ALEX

(To Sarah.)

Did you bring any French fries?

SARAH

(Shaking her head in disappointment...)

I *knew* I was forgetting something. And to a French restaurant, no less. How embarrassing.

(The server stares at the two, and they just look at him. In a fit of disgusted resignation, he takes the nuggets, flashes a smile that speaks nothing of happiness, and struts off. Sarah and Alex maintain very serious expressions until he's gone, and then burst out laughing.)

ALEX

You brought chicken nuggets... That's... that's fantastic!

SARAH

Thank you.

ALEX

Although I have to ask. Why?

SARAH

It was a spur of the moment inspiration. I think you can tell a lot about someone by how they react to the unexpected.

ALEX

I couldn't agree more.

SARAH

Says the guy who claimed to be late because of a musical bison backup.

ALEX

It could happen.

SARAH

You were scoping me out first, weren't you?

ALEX

What? No. Though now I bet I know what that phone call was about. Emergency out?

SARAH

Nope. You just lost the bet. It was my ex.

ALEX

Your *ex*. Interesting. You keep your own personal set of letters. I like that. I used to keep a box of Oxford Commas in my glove compartment for grammatical emergencies.

SARAH

Good thinking.

ALEX

You can never be too cautious, careful... *comma*... or well-prepared. So, when did you two break up?

SARAH

That depends a lot on who you ask.

ALEX

Well, since I'm asking you...

SARAH
Then I'd say about two months ago.

ALEX
And him?

SARAH
I think he'd say we haven't.

ALEX
That's a little awkward.

SARAH
No, as it turns out, it's a lot awkward.

ALEX
So if I may be so bold, why'd you break up?

SARAH
He once showed up late for dinner.

ALEX
That bastard.

SARAH
I know, right?

*(The server has returned with a plate of dinner rolls,
and places them on the table.)*

ALEX
I see you've brought the *relativistic* breadsticks.

SERVER
Quoi?

SARAH
What?

SERVER
What?

ALEX

When breadsticks travel at close to the speed of light, they contract until they're shaped like this. That's what happened, right?

(The server just stares at him, and then shakes his head, rolls his eyes, and exits.)

SARAH

You're nothing like him. At least I think you aren't.

ALEX

Well, I'm not French for starters.

SARAH

I meant my ex. Doug.

ALEX

You should always be looking toward the future. That's why I make it a rule to never date anyone who's name is in the past tense.

SARAH

Good thinking. Who was your last girlfriend?

ALEX

May Beatrice Fielding.

SARAH

May B. Fielding?

(Alex grins.)

Sounds... *imperfect*.

ALEX

Well-played. So, Doug... What went south?

SARAH

I don't want to bore you with my life.

ALEX

There's something else you planned to bore me with?

SARAH

Do you really want to know?

ALEX

Of course, I do. It might help me avoid a pitfall if we make it to a second date.

SARAH

Sound reasoning. Okay. The problem with Doug was success.

ALEX

God, I hate that. Sorry. Go on.

SARAH

It's not that I object to it. More money's great, of course, but for Doug it went along with taking everything so seriously. It's like somewhere along the way he forgot how to laugh. And worse, it felt like he was making me forget. There was a right and a wrong to every situation, and wrong was inexcusable. Does that make sense?

ALEX

Oh yeah. At some point you have to start growing young again, or else everything just becomes... mundane.

SARAH

Growing young. Yeah. That's exactly it. It feels like everyone is racing to "grow up" and "succeed", but they never really think about what success means. They take someone else's idea of what life should be about, which is usually money, and just run with it.

ALEX

Exactly.

(He looks at her, assessing.)

SARAH

What?

(He makes a decision.)

ALEX

Do you want to know why I was actually late?

(The server returns with two plates of chicken nuggets.)

SERVER

Your 'pépîte de poulet dinosaure' (*peh-PEET day POO-lay DEE-nay-zor*).

ALEX
Merci, garçon.

SERVER
*(Rolling his eyes, and with extreme dryness and
insincerity.)*
It's like you were born in Paris.

(He turns to leave the table, but...)

ALEX
Wait! There's a problem.

SERVER
Too exotic for you? Or perhaps you need *(with intense disdain...)* ketchup?

ALEX
We haven't had dessert yet. We can't have the main course until we've had dessert.

SARAH
What were we thinking?

SERVER
To make my life a living hell?

ALEX
Nooo. That's just a perk.

SARAH
We'd like to see the dessert menu.

SERVER
But of course. Is there anything else? Maybe some crayons?

(Immediately...)

SARAH AND ALEX
YES!

SERVER
Can you be trusted with them?

ALEX
We'd be good.

SARAH

(Snorts...)

We'd be great!

SERVER

Together with a kids' menu, perhaps?

ALEX AND SARAH

Perfect.

(The server leaves with a magnificent rolling of his eyes.)

ALEX

Where were we?

SARAH

You were late.

ALEX

Oh, right.

(Alex pulls out a marble from his pocket and holds it up. It is swirled with blues and greens.)

I dropped it by accident, and it went down the sink. I had to take the whole thing apart.

SARAH

It looks like a little planet.

ALEX

(Excited...)

Exactly! I got this when I was about seven. I used to take it everywhere with me, although now I just take it when I need some good luck. But more than that, it's a reminder.

SARAH

Clearly not a reminder to keep it away from the sink.

ALEX

Well, that too now. But no. You see, I always thought of it like a little world that I could carry around with me. And I used to imagine all the different things that would happen in this world. People in this world would always be nice to each other, and there were faeries and dragons and all kinds of amazing things. It was the source of all kinds of stories that I used to make up. Still do, actually.

SARAH

Nice.

ALEX

Anyway, when I was about nine I decided that what the people of this world wanted more than anything else was just to be happy. They didn't struggle to get rich, or own land, or control the people around them. They just tried to spend as much time laughing, and making others laugh, as they possibly could. And the rulers, they would be the people who made the most other people happy.

(Sarah smiles, clearly finding Alex to be a kindred soul. After a moment of silent connection, the server returns with a dessert menu and plops it onto the table between them to break the moment. Sarah picks it up and reads.)

SARAH

Crème brûlée.

(They both shake their heads.)

Pralines.

(They look at each other, considering, then simultaneously shake their heads again.)

Macarons. Wait. That's it? Just three options?

ALEX

Sarah, do you suddenly have a craving for...

SARAH

Pudding?

ALEX

I was going to say ice cream, but pudding works. Garçon?

SERVER

It's Jacques, but whatever.

ALEX

We'll have pudding. Chocolate.

SARAH

Vanilla.

ALEX

Half and half.

SERVER

We don't *serve* pudding.

SARAH

I can't believe you'd deny service to an innocent bowl of pudding.

SERVER

Quoi?

ALEX

That's awful.

SARAH

I bet they serve pudding on your marble world.

ALEX

Are you kidding? There's an entire island in the Sea of Fudge populated by Pudding Poets.

SARAH

We should go there.

ALEX

Yes we should.

(He stands, and reaches out a hand. Sarah takes it, stands. The server just shakes his head in disgust and walks off.)

SARAH

I don't think we brought much happiness there.

ALEX

Eh, this will.

(Alex takes out a couple of twenty dollar bills and lays them on the table.)

Money's good for some things, after all.

SARAH

So, tell me about this world of yours...

(They start to exit.)

ALEX

Better yet, why don't you tell me about.

(Lights out.)