

Perfect Match

We were a perfect match, and now that she's a part of my world, my life will never be the same.

I could tell you my backstory, but there isn't much to tell. Nothing of any real interest, anyway. I am neither exceptionally clever nor particularly enterprising. Laying low is what I'm good at and what I've always done. The cautious, unassuming spectator; me in a nutshell. As for my looks? Well, let's say passersby have always done just that—pass me by—for apart from my big heart, I am average in every sense.

My girl, my wonderful, darling girl.... Now, *her* story is definitely worth regaling.

For starters, she graduated at the top of her class. A First in journalism from one of the most prestigious universities in the country is no easy feat, but that's what she achieved, all while partaking in myriad social and extracurricular activities. She left her mark on the Philosophical Society, the Amateur Dramatic Club, and the women's lacrosse team, to name a few. Her peers admired her, nay, *adored* her, and the friendships she forged while pursuing her degree have withstood the test of time, distance, burgeoning careers, and, in some cases, growing families.

Naturally, the job offers poured in from reputable media outlets shortly after she donned her cap and gown. Headhunters chased her relentlessly; six-figure salaries were tossed around. But being tied down to one place was never her intention. The world was her oyster, and she wasn't about to let something so humdrum as secure employment keep her from seeing and experiencing everything it had to offer.

Life is too damn short.

Her adventures began when she signed on for a six-month stint in Rio de Janeiro teaching English to young mothers and their children living in the city's favelas. In her spare time, she immersed herself in Brazilian culture, made life-long friends with the locals, and even learnt Portuguese to a near-native level. The highlight of her time in Brazil was being invited to participate in the Rio Carnival parade—a dream come true. She Sambaed her heart out the best she could, but she's the first to admit that dancing has never been her strength.

Soon, a second wave of the travel bug hit her, and Thailand's gentle, tropical winds beckoned. It was there she fell truly in love for the first time. A free spirit from Boston with no fixed address and a tendency to drop his Rs swept her off her feet while she swept the elephant

enclosure at the wildlife sanctuary where she volunteered between shifts at a luxury seaside resort. Together, they trekked across much of Southeast Asia, stopping here and there to work odd jobs in exchange for room and board. It wasn't long, however, before the Bostonian lad, true to his nomadic nature, wandered into the arms of another and shattered my girl's heart into a million pieces.

Her parents pleaded with her to come home, if only briefly, but she knew they would persuade her to extend her stay. A month would turn into three, then six, and before she knew it, she'd be anchored to obligations and stripped of her long-term goals. So, she picked up the fragments of her broken heart, shouldered her backpack, and caught the next available budget flight on a dilapidated plane to Guwahati—the first leg of her solo journey through India.

Five glorious months of travelling up and down either coast by bus and rail came to a grinding halt when she contracted dengue fever and was admitted to a municipal hospital south of Kolkata. As you can imagine, the conditions were less than ideal. Atrocious, in fact. Hygiene level, one, at best. Fearing for her life, she promptly discharged herself and sought the help of Hare Krishna monks, who took her in and patiently nursed her back to health. But three solid weeks of tasteless vegan meals and countless hours of meditation were all she could endure. She longed for the familiar sights, sounds, and fragrant aromas of mainland Europe.

While she made her way around the Mediterranean, visiting castles, ancient ruins, and countless cathedrals, I waited patiently with hope in my heart. My perfect match was out there, somewhere. It was only a matter of time.

Our paths might never have crossed had it not been for a bout of dizzy spells and recurring headaches that saw my girl return to London last autumn. I never would have learnt her name if the attending porters—newbies, I reckon—had adhered to protocol and not uttered confidential information in my presence.

'Oh my God! I actually know the donor... *Milaine Chambers*,' one said as she wheeled me from the theatre to recovery. 'She was on Heart FM just the other morning promoting her travel podcast and talking about her upcoming surgery.'

'I heard it was a brain tumour,' said her colleague.

'It's so sad. I listened to her latest podcast, and she was so upbeat and positive. I don't think it occurred to her she could die. She even signed off with, 'Catch you on the flip-side!' like brain surgery is no big deal.'

'She *was* only twenty-eight. She probably felt invincible.'

‘So young. It’s so unfair.’

‘I suppose the silver lining is that this guy gets to live. Let’s hope he’s one of the good ones. It would be a shame if Milaine’s perfectly healthy heart ended up in some undeserving asshole.’

Had they known about my extremely rare medical condition—anaesthesia awareness—I doubt they would’ve engaged in such casual discussion about the woman who gifted me a second chance at life. Their careless whispers, however, have given me a renewed sense of purpose like I’ve never known before. As soon as I recover, I will seek adventure and live life to the fullest by embracing every moment, every opportunity, just as my darling Milaine, for whom I am eternally grateful, always did.