

Short Fiction
2900 Words

There Are Coincidences

By

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I

The wind from the water was cold in the City Next to the Sea. Sage wished she had brought a jacket. The torrents of salty air whipped her hair across her rosy cheeks and she quickened her stride to avoid the car approaching the crosswalk. She didn't trust the automated cars. Just last week a woman was struck by AUTOMative while checking her mail. Sage thought it strange that the news called it a "hit and run." She was fairly certain the AUTO had no sense of morality.

Her hotel in the City Next to the Sea was one of many, but it was the only without an elevator. Standing fifty-seven stories high, it was easily the largest building on the street. Upon entering the lobby, she made a bee-line for the pods — stepping gingerly inside the effervescent tube, clutching her purse to her chest.

"Hair, ma'am." The attendant, a small, ginger man whose name tag read Eddie, thrust a hand into the opening delivering a small rubber band. She nodded, a small smile cracking the skin of her lips which were chapped and raw with the cold. She cupped her hair to her head, wrapping the elastic around the mass of hair.

In four seconds she was on the forty-fourth floor. The pod opened and she stepped into the carpeted hallway. The walk to the door of her room was short, but her feet ached from the solid heels of her new boots. She hadn't anticipated the cold.

She pushed her thumb to the small black palette on the door and waited as the door clicked open and swung into the small room. A wave of heat spilled over her, calming her cheeks and softening her lips. She'd paid extra for the scent package, so the room smelled like her grandmother's house: warm apples and cinnamon with a hint of cigarettes.

She'd also paid more for the massive window that was the entirety of the east wall. But when she pulled back the curtains, she could see only a sliver of the Sea. A yellow building on its way to being the tallest structure in the city obscured the view.

At first she was angry. She was angry that the hotel considered this sliver a "seaside view." She was angry that she hadn't thought to bring Band-Aids for the bloody blisters on her feet. Angry that she didn't check the weather before leaving. Angry that her vacation was turning out to be a lousy one.

But as she wiped away the sheet of condensation that had formed on the window when she opened the door, she saw her mother. Not her mother, but a woman who looked like her mother. In her reflection, she saw the figure say the words she'd heard thousands of times before: "There are no coincidences. Everything happens for a reason. Chase your reason."

As the glass cleared, the figure became more tangible, and she realized it was not her reflection anymore. Spiky blue hair replaced her dark curls, green eyes replaced her brown. She jumped back, knocking her heel on the base of the bed adding a cut to her array of blisters.

She realized now this figure, a man she was certain, was not nearly as close as she'd thought. Instead, he was in the yellow building, staring out of his window and into hers. She hastily moved to pull the curtains across, but stopped when he gave an apologetic smile, his pink lips sitting above perfectly white teeth. She stood for a moment, staring, watching as he gave her a slight nod and slowly drew his curtains.

II

Last night, she'd had a dream about this mystery man. She'd fallen asleep with her curtains open, hoping he would show himself again. She knew she should feel violated, uncomfortable, but there was something about his smile that made her feel safe.

Perhaps it was his blue hair. She'd always had a thing for guys with colorful hair. Her last boyfriend was a ginger — a flaming ginger — with bright orange hair that fell just past his shoulders. She'd loved to run her fingers through the long tangles until he protested and smacked her hand away. But after a while, she liked his hair more than she liked him. And one day, when he came home and his hair was gone, she realized she had fallen out of love.

At least, that's what she told herself. Never mind that he had found someone else, that she had to go. No, she broke it off with him. She packed up her things and booked a hotel in the City Next to the Sea because she simply was not in love with him anymore.

She'd woken up early, startled by dreams of blue-haired boys and the persistent ringing of the hotel phone. The sun had barely begun to peak over the sliver of the Sea. She thought first of the blue-haired boy, but saw his curtains remained closed. The phone ceased its incessant ringing for a moment before it began again.

"Hello?" She answered, sleep weighing heavily in her voice.

"Yes, Miss Falloway, we have found a belonging of yours." This voice, she recognized, belonged to the man at the front desk. She couldn't remember misplacing anything. "It is a locket, it seems, with your name 'Elizabeth Sage Falloway' engraved on the back."

Her hand quickly found her neck, feeling furiously for the locket that usually dangled between her breasts. Her heart dropped as she realized the chasm was empty. “Yes, of course. Thank you. I can’t imagine -- I don’t know how I lost it. Thank you. I’ll be right down.”

When she arrived in the lobby she saw him: the blue-haired boy. He was taller than she’d pictured, lanky with angular features. He stood with one hand in his pocket, the other clutching something. As she neared the front desk, he turned and let a small smile creep across his lips, as if expecting to see her.

Before she could speak, the front desk attendant introduced the blue-haired boy as Louis, the man who found her locket. Her mother’s words rang in her head.

That evening, when Louis knocked on her door and asked her to dance, she couldn’t say no. Of course it was an odd request as the hotel bar had closed hours ago. But, she reminded herself, there was no such thing as coincidence. Louis found her locket and the pair were destined to meet.

As they walked down the sidewalk between the yellow building and the hotel Louis held her hand like they had known each other for ages. He told her about his job, he worked at a bookstore down the road, and he gushed about the impending doom of the paperback industry.

“No one reads *physical* books anymore!” His grip tightened around her hand. She returned the pressure and laughed, pulling two small paperback books from her satchel. The features on his face softened and he leaned into her, placing his lips gingerly on her forehead. “That’s why I love you,” he whispered.

She paused for a moment, unsure of what to say to this boy she'd met only hours before, but she remembered her mother's words, "Chase your reason." She was convinced he was her reason, her destiny. What are the chances that this boy would be in the apartment directly across from her, that they would lock eyes, that his smile would melt her insides? What are the chances that he would find her locket, a piece of her she didn't even realize was missing, and return it to her? That he would find her room and ask her to dance?

They spent the evening in a club, one she'd never heard of but that he assured was a chain. She learned he was a twenty year-old university drop out. He didn't see the point in spending thousands of dollars on education when he already knew everything he wanted to know from reading books. His dream was to write a book, but not, he said, a holographic book. He wanted to write an old school paperback, a book that only true readers would appreciate.

"Like you," he said, placing both hands on either side of her face and pulling her in for a kiss. As their lips touched she felt a warm, burning sensation spread down her back. A spark of passion, she thought.

Suddenly, the scent of burning hair reached her nostrils and she felt cool water running down her back. The ends of her hair had found the flame of a candle and ignited in a fiery display of passion. The bartender had thrown a glass of water on her back. Sage and Louis laughed and moved to the dance floor. She didn't care that she was soaking wet.

A few hours later, the pair lay in Sage's hotel bed, half-dressed and exhausted. She traced the scar on Louis's abdomen before asking what it was from. "Appendicitis," he told her. She'd never met anyone who had their appendix long enough to contract appendicitis. She showed him

her tiny matching scar. She didn't remember having it removed. Much like circumcision in male babies, a baby's appendix was removed at birth.

"Would you want our baby's appendix removed?" He was facing her now, his green eyes glowing in the dim light. She couldn't believe she was having this conversation with a man she'd just met, but she couldn't help but feel it was meant to be. After all, there are no coincidences.

"I think it's best," she replied. He looked skeptical, but smiled and pulled her into him. The pair exhausted themselves once again and as she lay, looking at the popcorn ceiling, she noticed the room no longer smelled like her grandmother's house. The apple had been replaced with a sharp citrus and the cigarettes with sweet cologne.

"Elizabeth?" Louis was looking at her as she looked at the ceiling. No one called her Elizabeth. No one except her mother. It felt comforting coming from his lips.

"Hm?" She turned to face him.

"Let's get married." His face, once softened, was now hardened in seriousness. A tear rolled from his left eye and she reached to catch it before it reached the pillow. She'd seen this face before, just two days ago when she'd looked in the mirror. After her flaming ginger had confessed his love for another. After she had packed her bags and kissed the cat goodbye.

She nodded in response and pressed her head to his, their tears mixing as they fell.

"What are the chances that we'd meet?" he spoke softly.

"There are no coincidences." She felt full once again.

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III

The sun reflected off the sliver of sea outside her window and fell directly over her eyes. She woke, the light warm but blinding, with a feeling of disorientation. Her fingers felt for the blue-haired boy but the spot beside her was empty. She could still smell the citrus and cologne.

There was a knock at her door. It was Louis with a tray of French toast sticks and eggs, her favorite. How did he know? He didn't, he said. He just grabbed his favorite hoping she would like it too. That sat in bed, faces puffy in the morning light, and enjoyed each other's company.

The next three days passed as the last, but their time together was coming to an end. They'd spent every moment of the week together, but it never felt like enough to her. Without telling Louis, she'd extended her stay. They'd have two more days before she had to return home.

