

Youth Short Story Category – 2nd Prize 2020

A PERFECT COINCIDENCE

By Sophie Campisi

8:13. I have exactly 17 minutes to get my coffee and be at the tram stop so I can be at the interview by 8:45, making myself look perfectly punctual for a 9 o'clock start. Now, if there's one thing you must know about me is that I am always organised, to the minute. I know exactly where I'm going to be, at what time and with who. That's why I thought accounting would be the perfect occupation for me. Do I have a passion for it? Not at all. But it's calculated, organised and always on schedule. Perfect.

Why is the coffee taking so long? Only 12 minutes to be at Flinders Street. I concentrate on my breathing to calm my anxiety. 3 things you can see, my therapist instructs in my head. One. The heat rising from a woman's coffee, swirling intricate patterns through the air as she tends to her baby. Two. A barista tucking stray hair behind her ear subconsciously as she keeps up with the mornings high demand for caffeine. Three. An abandoned mug alone on a wooden table, surrounded by a ring of brown liquid. 2 things you can hear. I close my eyes, resting my head against the soothingly cold concrete wall behind me, taking myself away from the bustle of the morning rush. Music fills my ears, once muffled by the rattle of the world around me. *You were just the right kind, yeah you were more than just a dream*. I can't believe this is playing, I haven't heard it in years. It's *our* song.

The breakup was messy. Words were spat. Thrown. No regard for each other because there was no love there, nothing left to give. We'd completely given ourselves to each other and now we had nothing left to keep. We were broken.

When I met him, we both were fuelled with fire to follow our dreams. I was passionate about the violin, the way the notes combined effortlessly, dancing together into an orchestra of angelic melodies made me feel infinite. Alive. He constantly insisted that I was going to make it big someday and for a little while I truly believed it. Then the reality of the world set in. It wasn't set in stone I'd be successful. How many people could say they were lucky enough to make a career out of performing? The risk of failing and being left with nothing was too much, not worth the dream.

"This isn't you" he'd tell me. His expression pleading with me like a puppy watching you eat, eagerly waiting for you to give in and share. Eyes wide and desperate. "Do you want to spend the rest of your life being mediocre when you could be something incredible?"

I had changed. He fell in love with a girl who got lost in music, enjoyed watching her be taken to another place, another time. That girl was creative, audacious and utterly extraordinary. But she was lost and it felt like she was gone forever. We both missed her and couldn't see any way of getting her back.

I make my way down my usual path among the whirlpool of commuters, each mindlessly staring ahead. I walk past buildings I've seen a thousand times before, mind flickering with a million thoughts. I pass a KFC, instantly slammed with the stench of oil and too much salt.

"Bianca?" I have to be imagining his voice, replaying all those memories must have triggered something inside me. I keep walking, ignoring my hyperactive mind. I hear it again and turn in its direction. No way is he here. Standing in front of me in all his glory is *him*. Looking at me with that crooked smile, ruffled bed head hair and those damn green eyes. The boy I never stopped loving.

He always had a way with things working out for him. He would realise he'd dropped \$10 somewhere only to find another note on the ground minutes later. We'd be talking about someone who he hadn't seen for a while only to have them call in the middle of the discussion. Everything for him was a perfect coincidence.

And now standing in front of him, my mind is running wild like a herd of panicked wildebeest storming African plains. I've spent my whole morning reminiscing over him and he's right here? I haven't seen him, spoken to him even, for 10 years. "What are you doing here?" I muster, realising I can't just stand there looking bewildered. He's a lot bigger than I remember, arms more defined, sharper jawline, sun-kissed skin. Still dresses the same. Comfy, faded hoodies and old school vans.

"What a coincidence," he said, his voice rougher than I remember, sexier. "I just looked up at the right time to see you on the escalator in the station" I'm too fixated on the goose bumps forming on the back of my neck from his voice; low, soft and intimate. My mind finally decides to register what he's telling me.

"I wasn't in the station," I say, contemplating if this is another one of his stomach-punch coincidences I had once become accustomed to.

"Well, looks like you've got a doppelganger B," he teases, trying to put out the awkwardness lingering in the air. I continue walking and he follows. We catch up, filling each other in on all the good parts of the past 10 years. My thoughts are scattered, like a puzzle before you put all the pieces together. We arrive at my tram stop, welcomed by graffiti ads and germ-infested steel benches. "Good luck on the interview I guess," he says as he walks away, trying to mask the utter disappointment in his voice. In 10 years I haven't changed and I can see it in his face that he hoped I would have, that I'd realise.

My body moves in sync with the bumps and thrashing of the tram, speeding up, slowing down, turning this way and that. I embrace it. 8:40, 5 minutes to be at the accounting firm. Is this really

what I want? He still had hope that I'd pursue my music after 10 years. I couldn't even commit to that dream past high school.

And then I do something I've never done. The tram stops somewhere unfamiliar and I get off, completely derailing my perfect schedule. My anxiety is screaming in the back of my head but the adrenaline pulsing through my body ignores it. I feel electric. Alive again.

I turn a corner and stare in bewilderment at the first shop on the street. 'Lewis' Violins' is painted in gold cursive writing above an old wooden door like my own gateway to heaven, a sign sent from the angel's themselves. My own perfect coincidence. My legs are walking through the door before I tell them to. Then my arms are reaching for a violin, gripping the bow comfortably, slipping the instrument under my chin with the ease of someone who's done it a thousand times before.

Then I'm playing and I feel utterly extraordinary.