

CUSTOM-MADE

How to live happily ever after.

BY CASSANDRA KHAW

“Are you *sure* you want perfect?” Soo Yee looked up from her latte, fingers circling the ceramic cup. Yes, she thought, although she didn’t say it immediately. Perfect was *exactly* what she wanted.

“Maybe. Yes. I don’t know. You make it sound like such a bad thing. Perfect is the ideal, you know? If you can have perfect, why —”

Her best friend sighed. They’d known each other since college. In that time, they’d done everything together: get drunk, weather break-ups, survive rising sea levels, see the world change. He loved her like a sister. He always had her best interests at heart.

“Because perfect is *boring*.”

“But —”

“Perfect is also dangerous.”

She quieted. He wasn’t wrong. Biased, maybe. But he wasn’t necessarily wrong. The procedure was experimental. The associated peripherals? Also experimental. The jury was out as to whether world health organizations would grant their stamp of approval. Still, that didn’t change the fact that seventy-two thousand people had safely taken the plunge. Seventy-two thousand satisfied customers, all of whom report continued happiness with their results.

“What are you worried about exactly?”

“You trusting your happiness to an implant.”

“It’s not like that —”

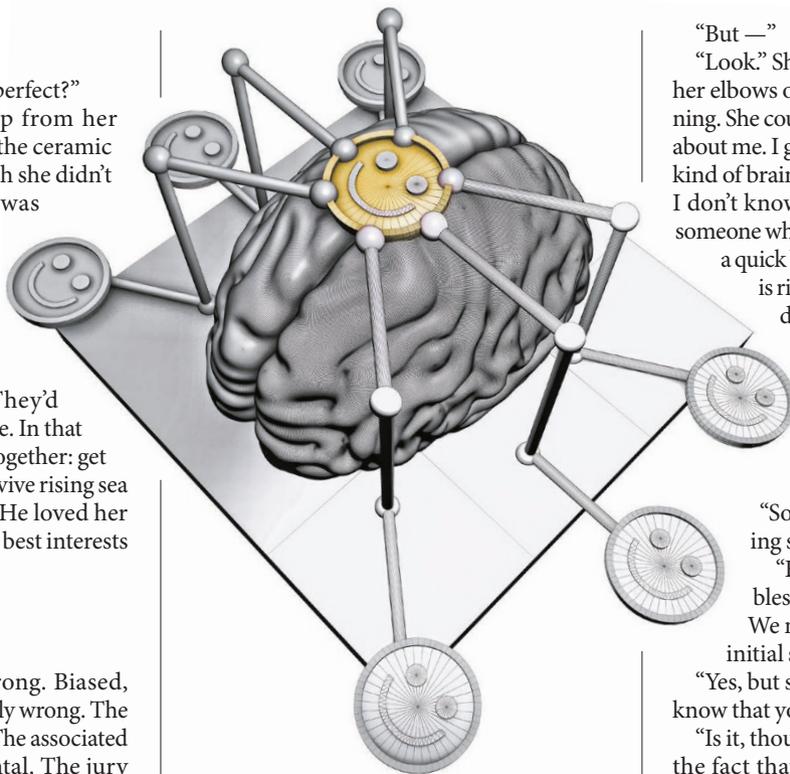
“No, it’s *exactly* like that.” He leaned back. A dappling of white, a few fine lines. A little more cynicism in the fold of his strained smile. If Soo Yee squinted the right way, she could almost mistake him for the boy she’d met a decade and a half ago. “They’re literally rewiring your brain. Resetting your hormonal production. They’re —”

“That’s what happens when you fall in love organically, you know? You get an upsurge in dopamine and serotonin production. Your brain literally does —”

“Yes. But that’s *natural*.”

Soo Yee sighed, the word *luddite* pressed to the roof of her mouth. But she swallowed

it with a draught of coffee. “Barely anything is natural anymore. You understand that, right?”



Most meat patties these days are bioprinted to specification. Wagyu is nothing but patented matrixes of —”

“This is why I buy organic as much as I can.”

“Okay. Fine. Let’s put bioprinting aside for a second. How about modern produce? Even the stuff we ate as kids. Corn, alfalfa —” Soo Yee began counting names on her fingers.

“I don’t eat alfalfa.”

“Shut up. I don’t eat it either. But I’m trying to make a point here.” Soo Yee wagged a finger at him, a half-smile slotted in place. “Kale, bok choy, soy, sugar beets, zucchini, turnips, chards —”

“What the hell are chards?”

“Dude.”

“Sorry, sorry.”

“Our world is synthetic. Our world has been synthetic for ages. Chemical flavourings in our food. Lab-grown vaccines. The only difference between all that and this —” Soo Yee gestured at the cafe. The shop was designer-chic, part of a new culinary wave, every ingredient on its menu custom-manufactured according to the tastes of its subscribers. “— is that we grew up with the former. You’ve never been in a world where all our previous technological advancements weren’t a thing.”

“But —”

“Look.” She steepled her fingers, propped her elbows on their table. Soo Yee was winning. She could tell. “I get that you’re worried about me. I get that you’re afraid this is some kind of brainwashing, that they’re trying to, I don’t know, randomly hook me up with someone who isn’t compatible for the sake of a quick buck. It’s not like that. Everything

is rigorously examined. Every candidate gets the opportunity to examine their future partner’s list of likes and dislikes, to critically evaluate the statistics that the company supplies. We go through psychological testing.

We meet each other. We talk.”

“So, why not just stop there? A dating service —”

“Because I’m tired of all the variables that come into play *afterwards*. We make a lot of mistakes after that initial stage of attraction ends.”

“Yes, but surviving that phase is how you know that you’re meant to —”

“Is it, though? Really? You’re discounting the fact that not all of us are psychologically stable. Trauma, personal experience, problematic upbringing — these are all factors that can contribute to a breakdown of a wonderful thing.” Soo Yee chewed on a lip. “Dude. I don’t know. Maybe, you’re just braver than I am. But I like the idea of a third-party-regulated happily ever after.”

“I still don’t understand why I’m here to be a third wheel.”

“Dude, I just need you to tell me if she’s as hot as I think she is, or if I’m completely crazy.”

They both knew she was lying, the words a peace offering. A concession to her best friend’s anachronistic sensibilities. But it didn’t matter. The door opened and they both turned to regard the figure framed against the dwindling gold of the evening: black leather and long black hair, the sunlight flashing across steel-rimmed glasses. The woman waved. Soo Yee’s breath caught between her teeth.

“Well?”

“Definitely hot.”

“Cool.” Soo Yee smiled as she rose to meet her soulmate. ■

Cassandra Khaw is the business developer for micropublisher Ysbryd Games. When not otherwise writing fiction, she punches things and occasionally, people.

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