

## | Mahima

It had been one hectic week this one! The Lions of Cannes were giving us all at work sleepless nights. The Ultimatum from the boss was dreadfully clear "Make it three in a row!"

Having worked all my life in the creative arena of Advertising, I was now looking at the possible exhaustion of my creative juices. The uber creative Tanmay, yeah that's my given name, Mass comm. major from a top Bangalore college 15 years back was now turning out to be a machine at the end of its useful life, belching out recycled ideas and 'inspiring' new ones from the hapless Ad guru wannabes that have been thrust under my belt.

What I had assumed would be a terrific first trip to Cuba & the Caribbean's had turned out to be a total kill joy. Meetings upon meetings with potential clients and the serious prick that the Sales Manager, Siddharth proved himself to be during the week, put more burden to my already sagging self worth. The tropical rains and insane humidity outside definitely didn't make things any better.

Well hey! On the brighter side, we did manage to get an order for a 15 sec commercial for a Jamaican brewer. That's something to be especially proud of, I guess.

Staring at an old footage of the 1998 FIFA world cup at the lounge at the José Martí International Airport, I sat there, stoic and totally perturbed about the closing deadline, about Dhriti & Abhay back at home. It had been over 2 weeks since I saw my wife and kid and now that I am going back to see them, all I have for them is a box of Swiss chocolates that I bought at the airport.

I knew from the day the Lions were up for grabs that I would lose my sleep, my temper, my confidence and what not! My growth in the company had been partly due to my contributions for the Lions entries. We had stuck gold the last two years when we won the Lion under the Media category. I was very swiftly elevated to "Creative Head" last year and I had very little to be unhappy about. The new position paid me well, new car, new apartment and of course a small cabin, all for myself. Hell! I even had my own secretary.

"Boarding starts in an hour" Siddharth informed without being asked.

"Alright, I guess I have more time to think about what went wrong for the Brazilians" I said cheekily, making a gun clicking action at the large screen at the lounge.

Siddharth was not too bad; he was young, fresh out of MBA College, killing himself to prove his salt in the meandering industry of Advertising. He quite often reminded me of myself, the fact that I didn't like. He wandered off to a recliner at the corner of the lounge, phone in hand, probably chatting up his girl friend or whoever.

I was desperate for a few minutes of naptime and I would have killed for everyone around to just shut up. The airport in Havana did not fly direct to India and we had to change flights at Frankfurt. I was expecting one hell of a jetlag!

The modest lounge in the small airport was teeming with people. The recent thaw in US – Cuban relationship seemed to have a magical effect as I saw more and more tie & suit clad businessmen milling around the coffee & book shops that dotted the scene around the lounge.

While I was animatedly browsing through the human traffic, I caught many eyes catching mine although for just a second but all of them had the same indifferent look.

One particular set of eyes that lingered on for just that extra second was that of a woman who looked strikingly familiar.

“Do I know her? Well may be I do or I don’t. But If I do know her and I approach her with that, It would be the most clichéd approach I could make. I am probably wrong about this” My heart beat went faster just by the thought that maybe I knew that woman and that I may look like an ass if I did know her and chose to ignore

Hoping that I had not shown any emotion of finding a familiar face, I sheepishly turned towards the large screen. A rerun of the now legendary Brazil Netherlands semi finals was on with Ronaldo in his No. 9 jersey of mythical powers dribbling past the iron clad Dutch defence. I was never a football fan but could not ignore such magic. The brilliant goal had me slapping my thigh just as a few heads turned at me, eyebrows raised, some single and most of them both.

Still busy chatting up his girlfriend or whoever, Siddharth relished the sight of me embarrassing myself. I knew because he had a smirk on his face as he looked at me.

“Shi..” I clenched my fist tight. This was the worst trip ever.

“Tanmay? Is that you? Oh my God! What a pleasant surprise?” said a pleasant sounding voice as I took some time to shake myself off from the mortifying episode I just had.

“Ye.. Yes..” I was stuttering much to the amusement of the man on the laptop sitting two seats next to me.

“May I” she said, while pointing to the vacant seat next to me.

“Of course. Please. I knew I knew you...you know..When I saw you over there..” this was definitely not me speaking. I was always confident around women and I had a lot of pretty ladies working with me at the company.

“Pratima! YES! That’s who you are!”

Pratima was my Mass Communications classmate from Bangalore and was an amazing beauty at the time, not that it had diminished any bit over the years. She looked bold bordering on the brazen in the attire that she had chosen for herself. Thick kohl lined eyes dripping with mascara, long curly hair dropping down over her well toned shoulders, brown lip gloss with hints of makeup.

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