

# BLESSED ARE THE MEDDLERS

CONFESSIONS OF A SERIAL MATCHMAKER

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*To all the single girls still waiting for Prince Charming . . .  
this story is for you.*

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It's like that book I read in the 9th grade that said "'tis a far better thing doing stuff for other people."

—CHER HOROWITZ (ALICIA SILVERSTONE) IN *CLUELESS*, 1995

PEOPLE TELL ME I'M a modern-day Emma. Of course, I've never worn a corset (thank goodness) or particularly cared for taking tea with those cute little cucumber sandwiches. I'm actually more like the Emma that Alicia Silverstone played in *Clueless*: a relatively well-dressed, modern girl with a sunny disposition and a weakness for wanting to help make people happy—especially in love.

Now that I am happily hitched, I take it as my solemn duty to make sure all my girlfriends are paired up too. After all, when I was hopelessly single, there were times when I could've used a major relationship intervention. So that's where I come in. I'm like eHarmony without the pesky questionnaire and quarterly payments. Or that persistent aunt who's always trying to fix you up with, oh, her tennis instructor. And unlike either of the aforementioned, I offer the personal insight of a trusted friend. Who can argue with that?

My most recent adventures in matchmaking started a couple

of months after I married the love of my life, Gavin, and officially became Mrs. Sydney Williams (née Alexander). I was sipping strawberry shortcake smoothies with my friend Jane after our weekly Pilates class. New to the Twin Cities after accepting a job as an on-air reporter at KARE-11, Jane and I had bonded immediately. Not only do we both work in journalism (I'm a full-time freelance writer and aspiring novelist), but we also attend the same church and share a mutual dislike for Pilates, despite its obvious benefits.

On the surface, Jane is one of those enviable women who seems to have everything going for her. She has flawless skin that glows without a single drop of Clinique, and her silky blonde hair is cut in an effortlessly chic, Victoria Beckham (aka Posh Spice) bob. Her workout clothes are even impeccably selected, black-and-white Juicy Couture sweats with robin's egg blue accents that bring out the unusual color of her eyes. Despite her exquisite taste in, well, just about everything, Jane hasn't been as lucky in love. And with my past experience of having gone on every bad date imaginable before meeting Gavin — unfortunate stories to which Jane could relate all too well — I desperately wanted to help. So after her initial uneasiness about yet another blind date, I set her up with Weston, the lone single guy in my hubby's touring band.

From what I could tell, Weston seemed normal enough. Sure, he only owned three T-shirts that he wore in a predictable rotation (the Police reunion tour shirt always came first, then his vintage Led Zeppelin, followed by a fading, slightly torn Foo Fighters tank top circa 1997). Another red flag was the winsome flakiness that often goes hand in hand with his choice of occupation. But what Weston did have going for him was

a great deal of charm, a killer smile, and enviable chops as a drummer. In fact, Gavin says he’s one of the best that he’s *ever* worked with—and trust me, Gavin is particular about his drummers, *very* particular. Unfortunately Weston wasn’t nearly as adept at keeping time with his own life. He was always running at least twenty minutes late. But as far as truly heinous flaws go (i.e., the crucial deal breakers that Jane and I agreed upon, including long stretches of unemployment, bad manners, extreme commitment phobia, issues with cleanliness, severe Mommy attachment, or a surplus of chest hair), Weston was in the clear. Or so we thought.

“At first everything was going reasonably well,” Jane said as we settled in at Jamba Juice the morning after her disastrous date. “He was twenty minutes late and wearing the Led Zeppelin T-shirt just like you predicted, but I planned for that. What I didn’t plan for was when he asked if I’d like to see his feet. He kept insisting they were *really, really* cute.”

“What? He wanted to show you his *feet*?” I asked, feeling slightly nauseated. Feet aren’t exactly my favorite body feature—especially guys’ feet, which tend to be far more unkempt. In my opinion, a good pedicure could benefit anyone, especially a nonmetrosexual male.

“We were eating guac and chips. I nearly lost my appetite,” Jane said. “I said no *at least* three times, and he took off his socks and shoes anyway—*right there in the restaurant!* Apparently he’s rather proud of his hairy hobbit feet.”

“Ewww,” I said. “That’s disgusting.”

“You’re telling me,” Jane said with the dramatic tone she typically uses in her news clips. “It only went downhill from there. He started talking about his pets.”

“Really?” I asked curiously. “But I thought you loved animals.”

“Well, I do,” Jane began. “But apparently not the way Weston does. He has five dogs and three cats, and they all sleep in the same bed as him.”

“Gross!” I said, wondering how in the world Gavin hadn’t picked up on Weston’s peculiar lifestyle. I mean, it’s great that Weston is responsible enough to take care of eight pets and play the occasional out-of-town show. But he’s definitely headed toward wacko zookeeper territory, not exactly an aphrodisiac.

“Yeah, and he told me precisely where each animal sleeps. Boo Boo, his calico cat, sleeps right by his head just like a human. His golden retriever, Pesto, lies next to Rosemary, his cocker spaniel, at the foot of his bed. And Nacho —”

“Nacho?” I asked quizzically.

“Yeah, Nacho, is another one of his dogs,” she said matter-of-factly. “Bottom line: I can’t deal with *that* many pets.”

“So did the night get *any* better?” I asked sympathetically. I mean, how much worse could it get?

“A little. But only because I told him I needed to head home and feed my fish,” Jane added with her trademark cackle. For the record: Jane’s laugh is an interesting cross between Chandler’s ex, Janice, from *Friends* and Cameron Diaz’s California girl giggle that can be heard in any number of her movies. It’s loud and distinct, but somehow Jane manages to make it endearing.

“Ooooooh, that’s cold!” I replied. “Guess you won’t be seeing *him* again.”

“Well, he still asked for my number,” Jane said. “Can you believe that? He didn’t sense that things weren’t going well.”

“That’s unfortunate.” I sighed. “Well, at least we can cross

Weston off your list of potential boyfriends.”

“Yeah.” She sighed back. “Who else can you set me up with, Syd?”



And that’s the funny thing about matchmaking. No matter how terrible a job I’ve done in the past, my friends (and even a few of my clients) just keep coming back for more. It’s practically my second job, even though my success rate is highly suspect, probably in the neighborhood of, oh, one for forty. It’s a good thing I’m not matchmaking on commission or I’d be poor—*really* poor.

Just when I thought I’d be taking an extended break from setting up my girlfriends with their most recent Mr. Wrong, one of them would quickly remind me of my greatest success as Cupid: the day I introduced my friend Rain to Stinky Nate, who is now her husband.

At first blush, it probably seems a little rude to call someone, let alone a friend, Stinky Nate. But Nate, a barista at my favorite downtown Minneapolis coffee shop, Moose & Sadie’s, *is* stinky and couldn’t care less. Much like Matthew McConaughey, he prefers the au naturel approach to personal hygiene. Basically, Nate’s the guy who’d make any environmental activist’s attempts to go green seem paltry in comparison. Nate showers only on special occasions (thank goodness he did on his wedding day, one of his few nonstinky moments) and doesn’t wear cologne—or even deodorant for that matter. Inspired by the way cats, his calico in particular, clean up by licking themselves, he’s been in constant pursuit of a more feline-like way to keep himself fresh. He hasn’t succeeded, though, which makes him smell less than

desirable. Especially in the sweat-soaked summer months, which were rapidly approaching.

But I knew Rain, a strict vegetarian who sews her own smock tops and only wears jewelry woven from hemp, would find someone like Stinky Nate simply irresistible. Of course, Rain maintained she wasn't looking for love. Whenever I'd suggest a setup, she'd remind me that she was a feminist who was more than happy to spend the majority of her free time in the company of her two favorite musicians, Billy Joel and Helen "I Am Woman" Reddy. She needed a man like a fish needs a bicycle, she said.

So I did it the old-fashioned way: I slyly introduced them when Rain and I met at Moose & Sadie's for breakfast before church one Sunday morning.

I'm pretty sure it was love at first sight, even though I'm not naturally inclined to believe in that sort of thing. Nonetheless, Rain and Nate totally hit it off and went out two days later (so much for swearing off men, huh?). And from the first wheat germ smoothie, their chemistry was palpable. Nate proposed a couple of years later (with an engagement ring made from hemp, natch), even though Rain had vowed she'd never marry.

Now that the stinky/hippie couple is married—and happily so—I'll admit that I can't help but feel pleased whenever I see them together. Same goes for my best friend, Kristin, and her current beau, Justin. Even though I went out with Justin first (and trust me, it's far less complicated in hindsight than it sounds), I encouraged Kristin to be patient with Justin when he was having trouble making up his mind early on, and it's paid off big-time. They're not only sublimely happy, but they're talking about getting engaged soon. Thinking about Kristin getting engaged makes me think of how much I miss her. Ever since she accepted

a teaching job in Duluth, which is a little more than two hours away, I hardly ever see her, save for the occasional weekend visit.

Despite my successes and the ever-growing number of singles in my social circle, it doesn't necessarily mean I'm destined for the soul mate-finding business, no matter how many of my girlfriends try to convince me that it's my gift. But in the name of love, I'll always give it my best shot.