

[I Let My Family Look for My Prince Charming](#)

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WOMEN OF VISION

I Let My Family Look for My Prince Charming But I set the criteria and have the final word

Shalmali Pal, San Francisco

For some reason an Indian mother finds it necessary to stretch the truth when it comes to her son's height. "You're very tall. That's good, because my son is six feet," said a potential mother-in-law while perched on my uncle's sofa in Calcutta. When I found myself face to face with the aforementioned son on a street corner in New York City about two months later, I couldn't help noticing that he had perhaps an inch or two on my 5 feet 7 inches. Taking into consideration this man's many appealing characteristics--he's a successful investment banker, well mannered, well traveled--it seems odd that his mother chose to describe him in terms of inches. Welcome to the world of arranged marriages, where height is only a few notches below moral rectitude on the desirability scale.

Born and raised in America by parents who moved from Calcutta more than 30 years ago, I grew up on the prevailing notion that first comes love, then comes marriage. I watched Prince Charming fall for Cinderella and her slipper, and followed Laurie Partridge, the oldest sister of television's "The

Partridge Family," on countless dates with her beau d'episode.

Fast forward 20 years and I'm singing a slightly different tune. While I haven't gone so far as to allow my parents to pick a mate virtually sight unseen and cast my lot with a stranger (as is still the tradition in many Indian families), I have agreed to the occasional discreet introduction.

Fortunately, my parents have respected my preferences in a mate. I would prefer someone who also was raised outside of India. I'd like it if he weighed more than I do. I want no mustaches. But most important, I don't want to be featured in any matrimonial advertisements, such as this one I found on the Web: "Renowned Physician's Family seek Bengali surgeons, physicians, others, 32 to 42, for US Citizen, Bengali, Brahmin, bright, pretty, adorable, petite, US raised, educated daughter. Two degrees, Business Administration, Computer Science, 37, looks 20ish, 3-day unconsummated convenient marriage annulled."

When people ask why I've agreed to my family's setups, I could say it's about preserving my cultural heritage or maintaining a link to a homeland that my parents have fought to preserve. But in the end, I'm just lazy. Marrying an Indian means a lot less explaining: Why don't my parents call one another by their first names? Why do they eat with their hands? What is that red dot on my mother's forehead?

Marriage strikes me as stressful enough, what with having to learn the ins and outs of any "normal" (i.e., slightly

dysfunctional) family. Fitting in to a family with ties that are several time zones away could be too much to ask.

In the last two years I've phoned, e-mailed and dined with three potential "ideal husbands." (This is according to the aunts or cousins who talk up the suitors to my parents. Marriage brokering is a favorite pastime for my extended family.) The investment banker was my first blind date. The timing couldn't have been worse. He'd made his mark and was searching for a full-fledged adult companion, not a recent journalism-school graduate who spent most of lunch whining about being unemployed.

After that came drinks with the San Francisco-based attorney. He rattled on about himself for an hour and then we said polite goodbyes. It was a superficial meeting, as initial conversations usually are. Two days later he sent me a long-winded e-mail explaining that he wasn't ready for a serious commitment--which was a shame because I'd already mailed the invitations, set up the bridal registry and commissioned the cake.

Finally, there was the multimedia artist raised in London. We had been e-mailing each other for a few months and, for the most part, it was a pleasant exchange. When we met in person, he complimented my apartment, but said he would like it better if I weren't in it (I think he was joking). He made me see "Deep Impact." Enough said.

Obviously, none of these gentlemen wound up being "the one."

And compared with the agony that can follow a breakup after just a few months of dating, I came out relatively unscathed. However, just because there wasn't an emotional investment, the rejection didn't smart any less.

In my most dire moments I consider surrendering my marital future to the scientists at the University of Hawaii who successfully cloned a couple of mice. If I could fuse together elements of my three suitors, maybe I would have the perfect man. I could just relax while genetic engineering caught up with my needs. Of course, I don't see the anxious aunts and cousins waiting it out with me. In fact, my father seems keen on sending me on an extended holiday to India. I can just picture myself rolling out of Calcutta customs, bleary-eyed and jet-lagged, to be greeted by a line of eligible young men, holding up little cards with their respective heights printed on them, well-intentioned mothers hovering close at hand.

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