

## Life Is Like a Box of Chocolates

**Dana Jetey**

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*The linked stories of Life Is Like a Box of Chocolates follow a determined girl's coming-of-age and romantic pursuits.*

Dana Jetey's novel-in-stories *Life Is Like a Box of Chocolates* follows the personal development and choices of an ambitious girl.

The book comprises three stories that center a single character. In the first story, Diana grows up admiring the surgical work of her parents and becomes determined to follow in their footsteps. When she takes internships to familiarize herself with the field, though, it dismays her parents, who would prefer she follow a different path. In the second story, Diana has just completed her first year of university with straight As and is rewarded with a solo trip to celebrate. On this trip, she meets a man who intrigues and engages her. She believes that she is falling in love with him, their age gap notwithstanding. An unfortunate incident separates them, but hope remains.

But in the third story, Diana seems changed; inconsistencies arise, and the transition between this tale and the previous one is disjointed. Diana reunited with a former lover in the second tale, but the third moves straight into an account of her unhappy marriage with another man; it includes a confrontation with a stranger claiming to be her abandoned husband. Explanations are absent regarding the gap between the tales, and the book's conclusion is without a true sense of resolution.

The book's characterizations are too loose as well. Little is known about those around Diana, who are fleshed out most in terms of her interactions with them. For instance, her parents play a determining role in her career choice, but beyond their desire for her to choose a different career from theirs, their frequent worrying, and the fact that they are respected at the hospital where Diana interns, they're vague presences in the text. There are a few exceptions, as with the hospital's matron, who urges Diana to be open-minded and fearless; she shares a touching story that humanizes her more than most. However, the book's conversations are too awkward in tone, making their participants feel less real. Further, the distinctions between people's thoughts and conversations are not sufficiently drawn: some of Diana's thoughts appear in quotes, as if she is continuing a conversation with someone when she is actually reflecting to herself alone. Variations in this style occur in single paragraphs, muddling the text further.

The connected stories that make up *Life Is Like a Box of Chocolates* emphasize unpredictability through their heroine's unfulfilled dreams.

GABRIELLA HARRISON (June 14, 2024)

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