

Scarcely Serendipity

“It was an accident.”

I looked across the elegant table at my boyfriend of thirteen months. An icy presence surrounded me. Apparently, I had been playing the town idiot. “Accident?”

He cleared his throat, adjusting his JC Penny tie uncomfortably. “You know I care about you. But I met this girl...”

I breathed out slowly.

He continued. “It was a mistake to spend time with her. I was at a vulnerable place...”

I heard buzzing.

“I know you’ll understand.” He placed his sweaty hand over mine and gave me a half smile. His eyebrows were furrowed in feigned concern. How cliché.

“Accident,” I mumbled as my brain began to grasp what he was saying. I glanced around the expensive restaurant, finally understanding why he spent more than \$20 on a date.

I remembered what Mom would say between draws from her cigarette, “Trust a woman politician over any man.” She was right as usual. Little boys quickly tire of their toys. Human nature. I had more than enough experience with human nature to know better than to trust someone.

I stood like the Queen Mary and leaned to whisper, “You were sure I’d forgive you.

That’s why you did it.”

My heels sharply clicked a morse code goodbye. I didn’t look back to see his face. The brave front lasted until the leather car seats touched my skin. Then the tears hit.

It was snowing outside my 90’s Lincoln, but I started driving with the awareness of a robot vac. My cell buzzed with an incoming call, but I rejected my ex’s attempted reconciliation with a right swipe.

“Hello?”

I swiped the wrong way! Hang up!

I felt the tires shift. I looked up; I was sliding off the shoulder into a ditch! I couldn't stop. My arms instinctively covered my head as the impact pushed my face into the steering wheel. Silence.

Warm blood trickled down my face. I stared at the windshield cracks. I'd hit a tree. My head felt heavy.

Somewhere in my double vision floated a face. A man's face I didn't recognize. I hoped he wouldn't steal my purse. I was helpless.

He was talking on his phone.

"Who are you?"

He said something about help. I liked his voice, low and soothing like waves. But it wouldn't stop droning, keeping me awake.

"Everything will be okay."

My brain slipped into a black hole.

An irritating beeping awoke me. I instantly recognized the anemic look of hospital walls.

A nurse checked my heart rate.

"You have a visitor," she said.

I wondered if it was my poor excuse for a boyfriend, until I saw an almost unfamiliar face.

"How you feeling?" he asked softly. I remembered the waves.

"You found me and called an ambulance?" I watched his eyes for shiftiness. They were open and clear.

"I'm on an emergency response team during bad weather. On the lookout for accidents.

I was a few cars behind you when you slid into the ditch. Someone's watching over you." He smiled, warm and creamy like eating fried chicken in macaroni and cheese.

My favorite comfort foods rolled into one.

“Do you usually visit the people you save?” I looked around at the hospital beds with tight sheets.

He paused. “No,” he answered quietly. “I never do.”

I felt a little tug of excitement in my stomach, but my brain reminded me about men.

“Thank you for helping me.” I held out my hand to say goodbye.

“I don’t want you to feel obligated to me,” he said slowly, “and my timing is bad--” He looked embarrassed. “But when you feel better, I’d like to take you out for coffee. It’s okay if you say no.”

I wanted to believe the shiny two dollar gold watch was legit, but I couldn’t let myself.

“I appreciate the offer, but--” I paused, “I’m not big on men right now. Last night, my ex-boyfriend gave the ‘other woman’ speech.”

He winced. “Not one of the good guys. But I’m just suggesting coffee, no obligation. I’ll drive though,” he teased. “Don’t worry about that right now. You rest up.” He stood like a lifesize GI Joe, “I’ll check on you tomorrow,” and he was gone.

I wondered what kind of guy drives around helping complete strangers when they need it most? Maybe it was his nature. Mr. Fix-it. I suddenly noticed the nurse was still in the room. Awkward.

She glanced at me. “He was--”

“An accident,” I smiled.