

“Mom, I know, I’m on my way.” Kate crossed the sidewalk, “Yes, I see the town car. I’ll be there as soon as I can. Mom, calm down - the proposal is with Marie, and you can start without me because Ted knows what to say. That why I hired him.” Kate ducked down to confirm with the driver that this was her car. She reached for the handle, and was struck down by a bike messenger, hitting her head on the curb. Everything went black.

When Kate woke up, she found herself in a hospital bed.

Simon had seen the entire thing happen. He was walking to the hospital for his clinical instruction day, when a bike messenger had run into Kate, who had stepped into his path as she tried to get into her car. Her phone and bag had gone flying, and as she went down, the back of her head had hit the curb. As the only witness, and very nearly a full-fledged nurse, Simon assisted her in the street, and felt he should accompany Kate to the hospital.

“How’s your head?” Simon asked, pursing his lips in empathy.

Kate raised her hand to her head, which was throbbing. She squinted at the nurse, who was now standing with the window behind him. “It’s so bright in here,” she observed.

“Oh, let me take care of that,” Simon reached for the shade and pulled it down. The room became dim and a lot more bearable. The nurse was dressed in navy scrubs, his auburn hair curled down around his temples. He approached the bed and began adjusting the covers, “you had quite a nasty accident.”

“I feel like I got hit by a train. What happened?”

“Not quite a train, Kate. A bike messenger sideswiped you hard when you were getting in your car. You hit your head on the curb. I was there. Oh, I’m sorry, I neglected to introduce myself. My name is Simon.”

“Wait, you’re not my nurse? How do you know my name?” Kate pulled the blanket up a little, feeling uncomfortable.

“I’m a student. I was heading to this hospital when I witnessed your accident. I’m sorry but I checked your wallet for your name. It’s back in your purse though.” He pointed at her nightstand where her bag stood. “Did your mom never tell you to look both ways?” Simon smiled sweetly.

Kate’s eyes widened. “My mom! Oh, she’ll be so mad I’m not at work.”

“I think she’ll take it easy on you when she sees what happened,” Simon encouraged.

“You haven’t met my mother. Is my phone in there?” Kate made a feeble attempt to reach for the bag.

“I’m afraid it’s in a few pieces,” Simon gave Kate a sympathetic look.

Kate settled back down into the covers, and Simon pulled the chair closer to the bed after helping her drink some water. They talked quietly in the dim light, and Kate noticed Simon’s eyes were nearly an emerald green. She could not take her eyes off him. She learned that he was graduating nursing school that month, and that he already had a full-time placement in palliative care. Simon had gone back

to school at age 25 after taking some time off after his first attempt at college. His plan was to work full-time while pursuing his master's in nursing.

Kate felt so comfortable with Simon, and their conversation was easy. She was grateful that he had stopped to help her. Who knows what would have happened if he hadn't been there? In this city, you never knew if people would stop to help others. Kate herself had always taken a few seconds to give homeless people change, but she wasn't sure how she would handle an accident or an emergency. People like Simon were special. It didn't hurt that he was adorable. Her eyes became heavy, and she drifted to sleep when Simon had left to get her a green tea from the cafeteria.

He returned with the two cups in his hand and set them down on the table. He smiled when he saw that she had fallen asleep. She was strikingly beautiful but didn't seem to know it. Her hair was long, chestnut brown curls grazing her shoulders and framing her sun-kissed face. She had a few light freckles on her nose and cheeks, and her lips were full and a lovely pink. Her calm demeanor was effortless, and Simon was drawn to her in ways he couldn't articulate. He felt as though he had known her forever. Simon felt Kate would be an immeasurable force in his life. He sat back down in the chair beside her and soon fell asleep.

For weeks, Kate and Simon were inseparable. His schedule was a smattering of day and night shifts, and Kate managed to work around this by bringing her work home on the nights he was at the hospital. Some mornings he would arrive to her apartment at 7:20, coffee and warm bagels in hand. He would climb into her luxurious king bed and wrap his arms around her to wake her up. With the sun streaming into her loft, they would often find themselves tangled in the sheets before Kate had to head to work. She couldn't get enough of his lips grazing all over her body, and he was delighted with her silly jokes.

One late afternoon, Kate showed up to her apartment with Pad Thai for them both, knowing that Simon had to head to work. They hung out on the couch while they ate their dinner.

"Hey, I've been meaning to ask you something!" Simon blurted out.

"Shoot, Big Tex," Kate smirked.

"The canvas in the closet by the door - why is it in the closet?"

Kate leaped off the couch, nearly spilling her food everywhere.

"Careful there, Head-injury Henry!" Simon joked.

"Ha-ha-ha, funny guy," Kate slid open the closet door and pulled out the painting. "This?" she asked.

"Oh wow! I love that! Why don't you hang it?"

Kate shrugged, "I don't know. I didn't think it was that good. I can see every mistake I made."

“YOU painted that? Okay now you must hang it! It’s gorgeous!” Simon was standing up now, his hands flailing as he spoke. Kate adored how animated he was when he was excited.

“You really think so?” Kate tilted her head, scrunching up her face.

“YES! Oh my gosh, are you kidding?”

Kate set the painting down carefully against the wall. “Come here,” she said. “I have to show you something.”

She led him down the hall and opened the door to a room filled with canvases, paints, and paintings. His eyes were drawn to a painting on the easel. It was a painting of him. On the canvas, his green eyes were bright, his hair fell casually along his forehead – it was a beautiful rendition of him, and his jaw dropped in shock.

She smiled up at him and slid her arm around his waist and squeezed. He glanced down at her and back to the painting. It took him a minute to find his words, “this...is incredible. You are incredible. Kate, you are so talented! I’m so in love with you!”

There it was. Simon had been thinking it, but he was concerned that her sophisticated background would have her hesitant on saying it back. Simon loved her, no question.

He leaned down and kissed her fully, cupping her face in his hands. Her arms flew around his neck, and she pressed her body into his. He could feel her hands roam down his back and pull him toward the bedroom, both of them scrambling to remove each other’s clothing. Kate turned and leaped into the bed, and Simon flew after her, both teasing each other, eyes flickering with passion.

As they lay in the afterglow, Kate’s head on Simon’s chest, Kate confessed that she absolutely loved painting, and if she wasn’t so busy in the family finance business, she would have more time for it. Simon listened to her words, but he was distracted by the light in her eyes as she spoke about painting.

Simon suggested she make this her full-time career and that she was talented enough to make it as an artist. Kate laughed it off. Artists don’t make a lot of money until they are famous, and surely, she wasn’t good enough for that to become a reality. Besides, her father would be so disappointed. He had spent her whole life preparing her for the role of CEO once he retired. It was not in the cards for Kate to pivot to a whole new career at nearly 30 years old.

“And Simon?” she turned to face him. He drowned in her light blue eyes, smiling. He raised his eyebrows. “I love you too.”

That Friday night, Kate stopped at the bakery on her way home from work and picked up a small cheesecake. She changed quickly into a sundress, just as Simon was coming through the apartment door. He threw his scrubs to the floor and walked naked to the shower. Kate smiled, admiring his body as he dried off

afterward and dressed in his khakis and a white shirt. His tan skin hinting out from the collar was enough to drive her wild.

“Ready?” he asked.

“I’m excited to meet her!” Kate exclaimed, a little too loudly. She was nervous.

They made their way to Brooklyn and climbed the three story walk up to Simon’s Mom’s door. Simon let himself in and Kate watched as his mom hugged him so hard, and then turned to Kate, pulling her in for a big hug as well. Kate immediately loved Laura. She was easy going like Simon.

While Simon grilled out on the balcony, Laura and Kate chopped vegetables for a salad. Laura bragged about Simon and told Kate how Simon had cared for his father in the final stages of his battle with leukemia. Simon had moved right in and set up the hospital bed, dosed out pain medication and bathed his father to keep him as comfortable as possible. When the time came, Bill had passed away at home, surrounded by Laura and Simon, and their cat Milton. Simon had been the rock of the family.

When Simon decided to become a nurse, Laura knew this was his calling. He had been through so much, and now he was dedicating his life to helping others. She was so proud of her son. They had a lovely dinner together and Kate felt it was time to introduce Simon to her family.

It could not have gone worse. The next week they met up with Kate’s parents in their home. Kate’s mother was such a snob to Simon, peppering him with questions about why his career started so late, bragging about Kate, asking Simon about his parents and their careers. Kate’s mother essentially wanted bank statements, the way she was carrying on. She was so obsessed with money and class. Kate was embarrassed and apologetic as they headed back to the apartment. Simon reasoned that they were just looking out for Kate; being protective. He truly was an angel on earth, and he sure did not deserve the rude reception her mother gave him. Kate didn’t speak to her mother for a week, despite the eight million phone calls and texts being sent her way.

One afternoon, Cynthia cornered Kate in her office, and attempted to smooth things over. “I’m sorry I was so hard on uhhh,” she began. “What’s his name again?”

Kate rolled her eyes, “seriously Mom? His name is Simon. You’d better learn it because I’m in love with him.”

Cynthia scoffed, “you are *not* in love with him, Kathryn. He’s a nursing student for Pete’s sake.”

Kate shook her head, “Mom, he’s a nurse. And that shouldn’t matter.”

Cynthia threw her hands up in the air, “whatever dear. He is entry-level. You need to focus on your future and quit running around with that boy. He has no way of supporting the two of you.”

“What is this, 1940? I do not need support Mom. I am a grown women with a job and my own place. Well, our own place. Simon moved in last weekend.”

“He what? See, he’s a freeloader!”

“Not that it is any of your business Mom, but he is paying his share of things. God, you are so judgmental. Why can’t you just be happy for me?”

“How much does a nurse make, Kathryn? It cannot be that much. How can he even afford half of that beautiful apartment?”

Kate saw red. “That’s enough mother. This conversation is over. I’m going home.”

Kate stormed out of the office and skipped the elevator altogether. She slammed open the door to the stairwell and started down the 14 flights, angrier with every step. Mid-way down, her heel caught the edge of the top step and she fell down the entire flight, twisting her leg in a horrid way.

Kate found herself once again in a hospital bed, this time in a cast, with Simon by her side. The doctors explained that because her leg was broken in two places, it would be best for her to be in a wheelchair for four weeks to allow the bones to set properly, before graduating to crutches. They didn’t want Kate to bear weight on her broken leg until the four-week mark.

Simon cared for Kate as she attempted to work from home the first two days. Kate was exasperated from trying to move about, and she was stir-crazy having everything done for her. She conceded to his nursing care, and quite enjoyed the extra attention that came with a cup of tea or her lunch tray. He was so gentle and sweet with her, even helping her get cleaned up in the mornings, and setting her up to brush her teeth. The pain after the surgery was at an all time high when Cynthia showed up unannounced. She had brought a box of business files from the office and set it on the dinner table just as Simon was coming out of the kitchen with dinner for Kate.

“Since when do you eat spaghetti, Kathryn?” Cynthia snarled, glaring at Simon. Kate looked defeated.

“And what is this? Cotton pajamas? Kathryn, come on. Where are the silk ones I bought you?”

“I like these, Mom.” Kate was already tired with this line of questioning.

“Simon, she shouldn’t be eating this. How is she going to put together the merger presentation when she is overloaded with carbs and feeling all puffy? This is her career young man. You can’t stand in her way with this sort of nonsense!”

Simon opened his mouth to reply, but she continued. “Kathryn, come over here,” she said as she shoved the dinner dishes to the side of the table and opened Kate’s laptop. Kate began to roll the wheelchair toward the table but struggled a little.

“Hurry up Kathryn, this is important. And for God’s sake, you do not need the wheelchair. Just stand up and stop looking for attention.” Simon could see tears in Kate’s eyes. She was exhausted. It had only been two days since the accident and the pain was wearing on her.

Simon broke, “that is enough. Pack your things, Cynthia. Kate is fresh out surgery and she’s in pain. Anything to do with the business can be handled by your staff.”

“How dare you,” Cynthia balked. Simon did not back down. Kate had no fight in her and he had to protect her.

“This business is not what Kate wants, it can wait, or your company can handle it. She wants you to back off and leave her alone! Can’t you see she is in pain? And even before the accident, she was not happy. Do you even know what Kate wants? Have you seen her amazing paintings? Did you know she was a talented artist? Her work is absolutely incredible. Of course, you don’t know any of this because you never let her speak for herself!”

Kate stared at him, wide-eyed. He knew at that moment he had gone too far.

“Both of you, get out. I am tired of everyone telling me what I want!” Kate exclaimed.

Both Simon and Cynthia protested, but Kate became angrier, and they left.

The next day, Kate muddled about the apartment on her own. She managed to make tea and toast, and watched movies on her laptop in her bed, ignoring every notification that came her way. At 6 p.m., her doorbell rang. She ignored that too. It rang again, followed by a knock. She pushed her hair into a messy bun and rolled out to the living room. The doorbell chimed again, a knock, and then, “Katie, its dad.”

Kate unlocked the door and wheeled herself to the couch as her father let himself in. Kate wriggled herself onto the couch and tried to straighten herself up a little while her father started the kettle and fumbled about making her a tea. He had brought her a broccoli cheddar soup and turkey sandwich from the deli on 5th avenue that he had always taken her to as a girl. She gobbled down half the sandwich before he had even returned from the kitchen.

“Aww you were hungry! So, kiddo, Mom is upset,” he started.

Kate blew on her soup and flatly muttered, “is she.”

“Well maybe not in the way you think. Her and Simon went for coffee when they left here last night. It seems she is upset with herself.”

Kate raised her eyebrows.

“That Simon of yours is pretty impressive. Your mother has definitely had her eyes open to the reasons why you love this kid so much.”

“Yeah well,” Kate began, “he shouldn’t have told her all that stuff about the paintings. That’s my business. I’m not too pleased with him right now either.”

Kate’s dad looked at her thoughtfully. “Can I see them?”

“My paintings?”

“Yes. Mom is dying to see it all too. We had no idea you were so unhappy.”

“It’s not that I was unhappy. Running the business with you brings me closer to you. I love working with you. It’s just...”

“Not your passion. I get that, kiddo. Business can definitely be boring. When I started the company, my aim was to help smaller businesses, and I’ve done that. It

is what gets me fired up in the mornings. But what gets me jumping out of bed is not necessarily what would get you jumping out of bed. I understand that completely. My dad wanted me to take over his chicken farm.”

Kate found herself laughing for the first time that day. The thought of her father running a chicken farm was ludicrous. He was a businessman to the bone, and she could see why he left Indiana to come to New York City as a young man. He was meant to do this.

They talked some more about following their passions. Kate was so happy to have this weight lifted off her chest, and her dad wasn't at all upset that Kate didn't want to run the business. She discussed concerns about becoming an artist full time, and his business-oriented mind put her fears at ease. They discussed how to transition from the business world to the art world, while using some of her already sharp marketing skills. Kate's dad was blown away by her paintings and they found themselves strategically planning her next moves, well into the evening.

Her dad was right. If she weren't going to risk anything, she would never jump out of bed in the morning to greet the day. If she didn't take a chance on herself to do what she loved, what would be the point of living her life?

“But first, you have got to get that boy back. I like Simon. It is clear that he loves you. Any man who would take the time to have coffee with your crazy mother when she's in one of her snits is a hero to me.”

Kate laughed out loud, throwing her head back, then winced in pain. Her dad helped her take her pain pill and tucked her into bed before letting himself out. Before Kate fell asleep, she texted Simon to apologize.

When she woke up the next morning, there he was, laying beside her softly snoring. She watched his breath rise and fall, then noticed the coffee, warm bagels, and flowers on the nightstand. She carefully maneuvered herself beside him and wrapped her arm around his waist. He stirred slightly and turned to kiss her bare shoulder. “I'm sorry,” he whispered.

She could smell the coffee on his breath as she kissed him with everything she could muster.

One year later.

Kate, paintbrush in hand, bounced her sleeping baby a little higher in the sling to adjust them both. Dressed in paint-splattered overalls, she was working on the largest piece she had ever been commissioned for. Laura was setting up the front counter for the grand opening on Saturday, placing smaller items on the front desk, and puttering around.

The bell above the studio door chimed, and she heard, “There's my baby!”

Kate placed her finger to her lips and shushed her mother, who was practically running at Kate with her hands out to take the baby. Kate's dad in tow, he beamed at his daughter, and she smiled back. Cynthia dropped her bag on the counter where Laura was working and reached for the infant.

"Oh, okay Mom, be careful," Kate whispered, happy to offload the nine pounds of infant that seemed considerably heavier. He was only a week old, and he settled into Cynthia's arms with a stretch and a little grunt.

Cynthia sat in the rocking chair in the back of the studio, staring at her grandson and watching her Katie paint.

Laura had placed Cynthia's bag next to the rocking chair and carried on with her tasks of merchandising the shelves behind the till and putting out the flyers for the art classes Kate was going to teach.

Kate's Dad pulled another chair next to the rocker and stared at his grandson. They had named the boy after Simon's late father, William, which happened to be his middle name as well. The boy was so tiny, and Kate's dad thought he could have stared at him all day and night. Funny how babies are so mesmerizing. Simon arrived with a deep-dish pizza, and the family gathered to dig in. They retired to Kate & Simon's apartment, and passed the baby around, talking late into the night. It was a lovely evening, and they all felt grateful for such an amazing year of changes. Kate especially felt appreciative that Simon had come into her life and helped her steer it in the right direction.