

Accidental Love

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Jennifer Gilbert

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It's late, 2 am. She's attempting to back out of his driveway as calmly as possible, but she's upset. Hot tears are stinging her eyes, blinding her. 'I don't think I can love you the way you deserve to be loved' His words resonated in her head like the beat of a drum; loudly, forcefully, but how did he think she deserved to be loved, didn't he realize what he'd already shown her was enough, that he was enough for her? Her car sat idling in his driveway for what seemed like hours. She sat staring blankly at his front lawn, remembering their times together. That first night in his house she was nervous, he was so gorgeous and smart and funny she just didn't think she'd ever measure up to the kind of woman he undoubtedly deserved. After that night he pulled away slightly but then out of nowhere he allowed her back into his house ... and his life. Now here she was again, wondering what she'd done that was so wrong. She laid her head against the steering wheel of the car and closed her eyes. She wasn't sure how long she had stayed like that until she glanced at the green numbers illuminating the interior of her car, 2:30. She was tired but wanted to get home and as she put her car in reverse she looked sadly for the last time toward his window pulling slowly out of his driveway toward the gates and home. As she drove to the end of the main road his house sat on she debated on whether or not to take city streets or the freeway. City streets did offer much more to look at and possibly keep her awake but ultimately the freeway was quicker. As she pulled on to the interstate a song came on about lost love and how the angels cry when two people obviously meant for one another just can't make it work. As the song came to its dramatic height the tears that had brimmed the bottom of her sad green eyes began to spill slowly down her flushed cheeks. She sobbed softly and as the song came to an end she looked at the sign that read '7 miles to Ramon Road' ... "almost home." She said into the darkness. The drive was pretty boring this early, only a few cars littered the road then. As she approached the next exit her eyelids got heavier. 'Roll down the windows' her dad always told

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her. She rolled them down, but it was still warm out, she chuckled to herself. “Only in the desert is it 80 degrees on a November night.” The car would go a few more miles on its path toward home and suddenly sleep overtook her. She could no longer keep her eyes from closing and unbeknownst to her as they did her car careened into the guardrail straight into oncoming traffic, colliding with a truck on the other side. Her eyelids fluttered rapidly, then nothing. As the rescue crews arrived ... she could hear them talking to each other at first. “Did you get a line, yet?” One medic shouted to the other. “I’m working on it, her veins keep collapsing.” The 1st medic looked frantic. “Keep trying.” Then she thought she heard a female medic ask, “Does she have an emergency contact in her phone?” The 1st medic yelled from the back of the rig, “Just dial the last number in her phone.” The female medic flipped her phone open and hit the power button, ‘the accident must have shut it off’ she thought. As the phone powered on she searched dialed numbers. “There’s some guy named Ruben in here, I guess I’ll call him since his name has a star by it.” The second medic said almost relieved. The 1st medic said, “yeah that means he’s an emergency contact, call him ... now.” “We have to get this rig moving!” The driver yelled. As the ambulance screamed down the freeway the female medic in the passenger seat dialed the last number in her phone. It rang almost 4 times when finally, a tired voice answered. “Hello?” The medic sighed. “Hi, is this Ruben?” She asked politely. “Yes, who is this?” He said in an almost irritated tone. He knew the voice wasn’t Jennifer’s. He wasn’t at all prepared for the next words the medic spoke. “Well I have your number because there was an accident involving a ‘Jennifer Gilbert’ the last number in her phone was yours, I’m sorry its so late but we needed to let someone know she is unconscious and unresponsive at this time. Are you a friend of hers?” Ruben ran a hand over his face trying to absorb what he was being told. “Yes, I am ... a friend.” The medic continued, “We are rushing her to Desert Hospital can you meet us there?” Ruben sat

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up out of bed and immediately grabbed his pants from the chair at his bedside and slipped into his shoes. “Yes, yes of course, I’ll be right there.” “Thank you, you can just go through the emergency department. Tell them who you are, and they will send you to where she will be.”

“Okay, thank you.” He said quickly, wanting to end the call so he could get going. “Thanks.”

The medic replied and quickly hung up. As Ruben ran out of his front door his head flooded with thoughts of her. They hadn’t told him anything about her condition, other than the fact that she was unconscious and unresponsive and that scared him. When he made it to his car he realized he forgot his wallet on the dresser. ‘Dammit’ he cursed to himself. He ran back into the house and grabbed his wallet and as he did, he noticed her necklace had been left there thrown over the top of his wallet, he smiled at this. He grabbed it and caressed the solid silver heart with the pad of his thumb, “you have to be okay, Jennifer.” He said to the emptiness. He clutched the necklace tightly in his hand and headed out of the house and to the hospital. As he sped down the street toward the hospital, a million thoughts whirled around in his mind, all running together.

They had made love that night, but he told her that it would be the last time, he said he couldn’t love her the way she deserved ... he stopped just then at a red light. “God, what the hell was I thinking?” He said slamming his hands roughly against the steering wheel. ‘Was that why this happened?’ He asked the dark empty space of his car. ‘Am I being punished for trying NOT to hurt her?’ He questioned ... but whom was he questioning? Himself, God ... he wasn’t sure and as he pulled up to the emergency entrance all he could think about was getting to her. As the valet opened his door, he dashed out handing the young man his keys and running through the automatic doors. He ran to the desk and frantically spoke to the older woman sitting behind it. “I’m looking for Jennifer Gilbert, she was brought in by ambulance.” He said in a worried tone. “Okay sir she’s in the ER still ... room 6.” She smiled at him. “Thank you” Ruben said shortly

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and ran in the direction of the emergency department, in search of her. As he jogged down the long hallway the hums and beeps and from the machines were a constant reminder of where he was now, at 4 am. When he reached room 6 he took a deep breath. There were doctors and nurses all huddled around her bedside, talking. One of them turned around just in time to see him standing in the doorway. "Can I help you, sir?" The nurse spoke softly, walking toward him. "Yes, my name is Ruben, Ruben Baray." The nurse looks relieved then. "Oh hi. I'm glad you made it, let me get the doctor for you." The nurse turned to the group huddled around her bed and as they did he caught a glimpse of the woman in the bed, it was Jennifer. She had what seemed like hundreds of tubes and wires attached to her. "Oh god." Ruben whispered, frightened. The nurse then pulled the curtain around her as the doctor approached him. "Hi, I'm doctor Mondavi, I'll be handling your friends' case until they move her upstairs." He said reaching for Ruben's outstretched hand. Ruben noticed then that the man had a thick middle - eastern accent. "Ruben, Ruben Baray, how is she doctor?" "I'm afraid your friend is in a coma, there is very little brain activity at this point, and we don't know if she will make it." Ruben gripped the wall for support. "Is there anything you can do for her, please she can't die." He rambled frantically. "We're doing everything we can, but her family must be notified, just in case." Ruben just shook his head. "Yes, of course I will call them. Can I see her for a second please?" Dr. Mondavi simply nodded and side - stepped him so he could walk toward the bed, as he did these the other nurses' left the room talking quietly amongst each other. Ruben sat down slowly and looked down at her. She looked as if she had been beaten, badly. Her face was completely swollen, her eyes were black, and she had multiple bruises, scrapes and cuts. "My god, Jennifer. I don't know what else to say except that I am so sorry. I never meant for this to happen. I - I - I don't even know what I was thinking when I said what I said tonight. I should

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have just kept my mouth shut and told you to stay. I'm so sorry." He said resting his head gently on her arm. As he closed his eyes, he thought of what to say to her family. How was he going to explain this to them? He wasn't sure but he knew he needed to figure it out and fast. As he lay there thinking of what to tell her family a nurse came in to check on her and was startled when Ruben sat up. "I'm sorry I didn't mean to wake you." The petite brunette said apologetically. "It's okay, I wasn't asleep." He said looking up at her sadly. "Her vitals are stable for now, I'll be back to check on her again later, okay?" "Thanks." He replied shortly. He picked up the phone at her bedside and dialed her mother's number. One ring, then two, suddenly a frantic voice answered. "Hello?" "Hi Laura, this is Ruben, Ruben Baray, listen there's been an accident." Silence. "Oh my god, it's Jennifer. What happened?" She questioned, now completely frightened. "It's not good, the doctors need you to come down here as quickly as you can." Her mother sniffled. "Her father and I will be there as soon as possible." "Okay. See you then. Goodbye." As he clicked the phone off and set it back in its cradle he felt a little better, now at least her parents knew the situation and the doctor could speak with them about what to do concerning her care. Ruben looked down at her swollen face and bruised body. He felt awful, like this was partly his fault and maybe it was but he really didn't have the mental or physical energy to deal with that at the moment. Right now all he wanted was for Jennifer to sit up and talk to him, yell at him, tell him to go to hell, anything so long as she was awake. Then he remembered he had the heart necklace she had left at his house still in his pocket. "Hey sweetie, you forgot something at my place." He smiled and opened her hand placing the heart gently in her palm and closing her hand tightly around it. "I want you to know how sorry I am for the things I said last night. I just didn't want to hurt you; I never wanted to hurt you. You are my sweetheart. I can't imagine anyone ever hurting you, especially not when that someone might be

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me. I know deep down I would never hurt you intentionally but I couldn't stand doing it even on accident and last night I did just that." He ran a hand through his hair and sighed. "Please just be okay, please?" He pleaded like a child. Just then her mother and father rushed in with Dr. Mondavi right behind them. "Mr. & Mrs. Gilbert?" Dr. Mondavi questioned. "Yes." They replied in unison. "Your daughter is in a coma, she has severe head trauma and at this point we don't believe she will live much longer." Her mother's knees buckled then and Ruben grabbed the chair next to him pushing it quickly toward Jennifer's father who simply nodded in his direction. "I have scheduled an MRI for 5 am and I want to run some more tests before we make any final decisions, okay?" Her father was still in shock but managed to nod. Ruben spoke up then. "Isn't there anything more we can do for her?" He asked sadly looking to the doctor for any confirmation. "I'm afraid not. All we can do is wait and see. I am very sorry." Ruben's heart sank he couldn't believe it yet. His relationship, if one could call it that, with her, was so turbulent. One minute she was calling and texting him daily and always doing little sweet things for him and the next she would pull away saying that she wanted to give him his space. That was another reason for their conversation last night. As much as he wanted to believe that Jennifer really did care for him like she said, it was difficult when she was constantly pulling away from him. He didn't like it and it scared him. He wasn't 100 percent sure that he wanted to be with her exclusively, but he also knew that he couldn't stand the thought another man either. He remembered a conversation they had the night of the concert, the concert was so much fun and she looked so beautiful, that much he remembered. They talked later that night in his bed about her seeing another man a few weeks before and he was fuming ... and he wasn't sure why. Jennifer wasn't a possession and she didn't 'belong' to him but secretly he wanted her to want that. He wanted her to need him the way he needed her. It suddenly occurred to him that he did

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need her, as much as he joked about not needing anyone and being independent, he needed Jennifer in his life. It was hard for him to wrap his mind around the idea of her NOT being in his life anymore and until that moment he hadn't even realized it himself. Suddenly her mother spoke up. "I thought Jennifer was staying with you tonight, why was she driving?!" Her mother tried to keep her voice low. "We had a little disagreement and she left, I knew it was late and I should have begged her to stay, I'm sorry." Seeing the pained look in Jennifer's mother's eyes made his heart sink even more. "Maybe I should go ..." Ruben started and stood up. Her father put his hand up. "No of her being with Ruben you can't, she needs you here just as much as any of us." "But I ..." Ruben tried to cut in. "Look I don't care what happened last night, all I know is that if and when Jennifer does wake up, she'll feel better seeing you here." Her father was almost scolding him now so he sat back down. "I am going to take Lori downstairs to get some coffee, do you want anything?" He asked looking directly at Ruben. "No, thanks. I'm okay right now." Her father nodded. "Just call my cell if there's any news." He said bluntly and walked with Jennifer's mother in tow, out of the room. Once they were gone he looked down at Jennifer again whose hand had begun to twitch. "Jenn, hey its Ruben can you hear me?" Nothing. Not even a tremble. He sighed heavily. "Jennifer please wake up." He was near tears now. Suddenly a nurse appeared in the doorway. "Excuse me sir, but we need to get her moved to her room, you can see her there." Ruben stood up and walked toward the door. "What room will she be in?" He asked calmly. "I.C.U room 8." The nurse said walking past him and moving the rails of the bed down. "Oh okay." He walked slowly out of the room and toward the elevator that would take him upstairs to the ICU. As he stood in the elevator he wondered what was going to happen next. 'Would she wake up and defy the doctors?' He wondered. As the door to the elevator opened he noticed the difference in the atmosphere here. Much more serious and quiet, almost like walking

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into a meeting that you are ten minutes late for. There were lots of whispers and stares from onlookers and hospital staff ... and not much else. As he inched closer toward room 8 he took a deep breath hoping to calm his frazzled nerves. When he arrived at the door he was almost afraid to go in, thinking the scene might be much worse now. He exhaled deeply and turned the handle. He walked in and looked toward the bed, there she was looking so fragile and helpless. He walked toward the bed and pulled up the chair as close as he could to the side of the bed. He picked up her hand in his, now very cold and lifeless. "I hope you can hear me Jennifer ... you have to wake up. For your family, your friends ... me." He sighed heavily. "I know we have had our differences about how things should be but I want you to know that I care about you ... so much." His voice started to crack and he had to clear his throat before continuing. "I never anticipated caring for anyone like this ... ever again. You changed that." He laughed stroking her hand with his thumb. "You have been doing that since the day I met you, I guess I should have known huh?" He questioned her unconscious form with a smile. "I remember the first time you surprised me with something. I had lent you a dollar for the soda machine and for whatever reason you decided that you had to pay me back the dollar plus one more and even give me a card!" He said exasperated. "I was really surprised and very flattered that you did that ... I can't imagine you not being in my life Jennifer, you have to come out of this, please!" His voice was rising now and he knew that he had to reign in his emotions before they got the better of him. He took a deep breath before continuing. "I am so sorry for what I said tonight, after everything you have done for me and all that we've talked about I should have known better than to think I could just walk away from you like all of it meant nothing. You mean so much to me ... you're a wonderful friend, a sensitive lover ... I don't know what I'm going to do if you don't make it. You HAVE to wake up, Jennifer ... you just have to." He looked at her lifeless form for any sign

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that she could hear him but there was nothing. No sound, no tremble, just peace. She was slipping away, just as the doctor had said and knowing that scared him more than he could have imagined. Just then a technologist appeared in the doorway. “We’re going to be taking her for an MRI, sir. If you’d like to go with her you can.” Ruben didn’t respond, instead he simply nodded and stood up helping the tech push the bed out of the narrow door and down the hallway toward the elevators. As they walked toward the MRI station the tech looked to Ruben, do you happen to know if she’s pregnant?” He questioned cocking his head to one side. Ruben stopped short. ‘What kind of question is that?’ He thought to himself. The tech must have read the confused look on his face because he quickly put his hand up. “I just need to know for safety reasons, if she is the MRI could harm the fetus.” He said matter-of-factly. “Oh uh no I don’t think she is.” The technologist looked questioningly at him, but just nodded. “We’ll put a shield over her abdomen ... just in case.”

Ruben stared at him with raised eyebrows but didn’t say a word as the tech placed the shield over her and ushered him out of the room to begin the test. 30 long minutes later the test was done and Jennifer was wheeled back to her room. The tech didn’t say a word until they reached the door. “The doctor will review the results and go over them with you as soon as possible.” He stated with little emotion. Ruben simply nodded. “Thank you.” He said quietly as the tech excused himself. The minutes seemed to tick by painstakingly slow as Jennifer’s family & Ruben awaited the test results. Then as if on cue at 6:45 the doctor walked slowly, purposefully toward them, his expression was difficult to read. The next words out of his mouth would hit her family & Ruben like a ton of bricks. “Good morning folks, I’m not sure how to tell you all this but Jennifer has very little brain activity, just as we suspected. There is only a 5 percent chance for recovery at

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this point. The head trauma she suffered in the accident caused a great deal of pressure on her brain.” He stopped talking for a second taking note of the somber look on everyone’s faces. “However,” he began again. “We may be able to add a few days, maybe even weeks to her life by implanting a shunt on the left side of her head to relieve some of the pressure. Is that an option you’d like to discuss?” Her parents quickly nodded but Ruben shot up out of his chair. “Wait isn’t surgery risky, I mean what if something goes wrong she could die on the table!” He was beginning to shout. The doctor turned his attention to him. “Yes Mr. Baray you are right, there are always risks involved with surgery, but this may offer Jennifer a few more days.” At that Ruben sat back down heavily in the brown chair next to her bed, resigned to the fact that regardless of what he thought was best for her, they were going to go ahead with the surgery anyway. Her mother and father were quickly ushered into the hall to sign the necessary forms consenting to the surgery. Ruben sat in the brown leather chair holding Jennifer’s hand, fuming. He couldn’t believe any of this. The become stifling to him and he had to get out of there. As he stepped out into the hallway Dr. Mondavi pulled him aside. “Mr. Baray I’d like to talk to you privately.” He started, “Now I know you are not thrilled with the idea of this surgery but you may change your mind when I’m finished.” Ruben’s heart began pounding in his chest so loudly he was certain the doctor could hear it. “Jennifer is pregnant.” Ruben couldn’t form 2 coherent thoughts if he tried. “P-p-p-pregnant?” He managed to choke out. “Yes Ruben, at least 7 weeks ...” “Oh my god. Does her family know about this?” He asked as quietly as possible. “Yes I informed them when I had them sign the consent for surgery. They looked almost as surprised as you, I’m guessing that’s why they signed it.” He said bluntly. “I don’t know what to say.” Ruben muttered. “Well, you don’t need to make any decisions yet but you will need to, soon. I will be back later to let everyone know how the surgery will proceed.” With that doctor Mondavi turned

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on his heels and darted down the hall. Ruben stood frozen in the same spot for what seemed like hours when a dark haired younger man approached him. "Excuse me, are you Ruben?" Ruben looked toward him with a confused expression; he was in no mood for games. "Yes, why?" The man smiled and extended his hand. "I'm Jenn's brother, Larry." He said, smiling. Ruben extended his hand. "Nice to meet you Larry, I just wish it didn't have to be here." He said looking down at the floor. "Me too." His voice trailed off as he stared blankly down the hallway. "How's my sister?" Larry asked cocking his head to one side. Ruben sighed heavily and leaned against the wall. "Not good, Larry, not good at all. The doctors want to implant a shunt on the left side of her brain but it's risky and ..." He paused wondering if he should tell him any more ... when he saw the worried look in her brother's eyes he knew he needed to tell him, after all he'd find out sooner or later. "She's pregnant." Her brother's eyes widened at this. "What ... I mean ... how, when ... " her brother stammered, obviously just as surprised as Ruben had been. "I know it shocked me too," he said half chuckling. "I never thought I'd have another child, ..." He said looking away almost ashamed that everyone had to find out like this. "Are you sure it's yours?" Her brother questioned with raised eyebrows. When Ruben's head shot up and Larry met his intense gaze he could tell the questioner had angered him in some way so he tried to explain. "I meant nothing by that honest, but my sister was talking to another guy around the time you and her were starting to talk again, I just wasn't sure whether or not this other guy could have been ..." Ruben put his hand up. "The baby is mine ... I know it is. The doctor said she's only about 7 weeks along and a few weeks prior to that your sister and I were not seeing anyone but each other." He stated confidently, although in the back of his mind he really was worried that if in fact the baby was not his he would lose any kind of leverage he had over the kind of care Jennifer got and in his mind right now that was paramount to everything else going

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on. When he looked up her brother had a goofy grin on his face and before Ruben could ask about it, he said simply, "I'm gonna be an uncle again, that's cool!" Both of them laughed then but Larry could tell that Ruben's mind was somewhere else. "She's gonna be alright, you know?" Ruben looked up. "Well the..." Larry stopped him mid-sentence. "I don't care what the doctors said or will say, I know my sister and I know she's not going to just give up." He stated as confidently as he could. He just hoped that his instincts were right and that she'd wake up, for everyone's sake. doctors said