The man smiled and asked Abbie, “Do you want the good news or the bad news?”

“I could use some good news,” replied Abbie.

“We won’t be able to be certain until we tow out your car, but I didn’t see any signs of serious damage. The tow truck will just need to pull you out of the ditch back onto the road. I recommend that you take it through a drive-through carwash on your way home. I’d go through two or three times. Country mud is like concrete when it dries, so best to clean as much of it off while still wet. Then I’d take it into a car detailer tomorrow, so they can get underneath and remove the remaining chunks of mud.”

“That is good news! I was sure I destroyed the back of my car. So what’s the bad news?”

“Apparently, you are not the only one to crash your car tonight. The dispatcher said it might be a while before he can get a truck out here. He didn’t make any promises, but he has one guy that lives near here, and he’s going to try to get a hold of him even though it’s his night off. So we might be here for a while.”

“We?“ asked Abbie. “I feel bad. You know you don’t have to stay here and wait with me?”

The man with a confident smile said, “I’m pretty sure I do. There is no way I’m going to leave you out here alone in the rain by yourself.”

“I’m embarrassed to admit this, but I don’t have my purse with me. All my credit cards and money are in my purse. Do you think they’ll be willing to take payment when I get home?”

“Don’t worry about that,” said the man. “I belong to a motor club, and I get several free tows a year. I’ll tip the guy an extra 40 bucks for his time. You don’t need to pay me back for that either. Just pay it forward to someone else in the future.”

“Thank you so much! I greatly appreciate all of your help tonight, and I promise to pay your generosity forward.”

“You’re quite welcome. Do you need to call anybody and let them know you’re safe?”

“No, I haven’t been gone that long. My roommate is working the evening shift and won’t get home for a few hours.” Abbie paused for a moment and then asked, “So what should we talk about?”

“What is it, friends, family, or men?” asked the man.

“What do you mean?”

“Considering the way you’ve been crying and the fact that you have no phone, no purse, and sporting a mismatched outfit, my Spidey senses say you had a big fight and ran out of the house.”

“Your Spidey senses are correct,” confirmed Abbie. “It’s men. Specifically a man.”

Abbie’s answer seemed to peak the man’s interest. “Do tell.”

“I don’t know. It feels kind of weird sharing my personal problems with a stranger.”

“Why? Who better to share personal problems with than a stranger? Think of it. I don’t know anyone you know. So anything you tell me can’t get back to them. And since I’ll only hear your version of the events, I’ll always take your side.”

Abbie laughed. “That’s a good point! Well, the short of it is my boyfriend of five years and fiancé of one week just dumped me.”

Abbie was expecting to receive consolation, but instead, the man said, “Wow! You are a lucky girl.”

“Lucky?” replied a surprised Abbie. “You have a strange concept of the word lucky.”

“Do I? It sounds to me like you dodged a bullet.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Tell me about your relationship with your ex. What’s his name?”

“Steven and I had a good relationship. He’s a great guy. He’s good-looking, has a steady job, treats me well most of the time. My friends and family adore him. He’s reliable.”

The man interrupts Abbie. Clearly trying to make a point, the man said, “He checks all your boxes, doesn’t he?”

Abbie was slightly triggered and offended by this comment. “What’s wrong with being with someone who has redeeming qualities?”

“Nothing.” replied the man. “But you’re missing the most important quality.”

“What’s that?” asked a curious Abbie.

“Passion! You’ve been with this guy for five years, and you don’t even live together?”

“He has a good job two towns away, and that’s a pretty long commute for work.”

The man’s energy increased as he said, “So what! That reason may be legit for a few months, but not a few years. People who are passionately in love with each other find a way to be together as much as possible. Except in the rarest of circumstances, no job or long commute would prevent them from living together. You said you’ve been together for five years? Be honest, how many of those years have you been waiting for him to propose?”

“I don’t know. I guess at least three years,” Abbie replied as she looked down, feeling a bit embarrassed.

“How often do you see Steven? “

“I see him almost every weekend and during the week when we have something specific planned?”

“During the weekdays, when you’re not with Steven, how do you feel about that?”

“I don’t know what you mean. I guess I feel normal. I know I’ll see Steven on the weekend.”

The man continued to speak passionately. “Don’t you see how lucky you are? Steven did you a favor. He may not have been consciously aware of it, but if he waited five years to propose and bailed after a week, he knew that you two weren’t right for each other. Don’t you want a relationship where you’re madly and passionately in love with your partner?”

“I see what you’re saying, I do. I love Steven, but I’m beginning to realize it is not with the passion you’re describing. Of course, I’d love to have a passionate relationship, but not every girl gets that.”

The man expressed himself enthusiastically. “So you just settle? You find a guy who checks all your boxes, you get comfortable and sacrifice the most important thing in a romantic relationship, the passion, the romance!?”

“I guess I never thought of myself as settling for Steven. But, even if I did, what’s wrong with settling for a decent guy I care about? It’s better than the risk of being alone.”

“Not for me, not anymore. If I settle for the wrong partner, I have zero chance of finding the right one. I’d rather take the chance.”

“I am starting to see your point. I’ve never felt that kind of passion for anyone, not even when Steven and I first got together. We got along. All the pieces seemed to fit. I guess I just got comfortable and stopped looking for anything else,” Abbie conceded. A clump of drying hair fell onto her face covering her eye.

Before reaching his hand out to brush Abbie’s hair from her face, he asked, “May I?”

Abbie found herself gently nodding yes without any conscious effort. The man’s large hands carried a gentle touch. Abbie’s eyes closed involuntarily as his fingers touched her skin. It took three soft caressing swipes to push Abbie’s hair back behind her ear. Chills ran up and down her spine each time his hand grazed her cheek and intensified throughout her entire body as his fingers circled her ear, then gently slid down her neck.

When the man was done clearing Abbie’s hair from her face, her eyes opened slowly, and everything had changed. This man was no longer just a shadowy hero. For the first time, she looked at him like a man. She now saw his face in vivid detail. He had strong features, dark, almost black hair, and thick dark eyebrows that contrasted his baby blue eyes. Steven had hard-to-beat Hollywood-type good looks. But something about this man made him more attractive and appealing than Steven could ever be.

She wasn’t sure what it was. Was it his confidence? Was it his smile? Was it his strong presence? Was it his gentle touch? She was uncertain of the answer. While this man may not have had traditional good looks, he was quite handsome in his own way. Abbie could not think of a time when she was as attracted to a man as she was at this moment. The man’s confident smile was evidence that her face must have revealed her attraction to him.

“I don’t even know your name, “said Abbie.

“Let’s keep that a mystery for now,” replied the man.

“You don’t want to tell me your name? Are you some celebrity or famous football player trying to protect your identity?”

The man laughed. “I played football in college, but I assure you my current profession is shared by men and women of all ages, shapes, and sizes. I promise to explain later why I don’t want to give you my name just yet.”

Unphased, Abbie said, “Okay, Mystery Man, I’ll play along for now. I don’t see a ring on your finger. Have you found your Miss right?”

“I thought I did in my last three relationships. The first two, I now realize that was just optimistic thinking.”

Abbie interjected, “And the third?”

“That relationship ended about six months ago. Like your Steven, my Jenny was a great match. She checked all the boxes. She was beautiful, a great person, my friends and family loved her, yada yada yada. But then I had an epiphany.”

“An epiphany?” asked Abbie.

“Yes! I was on a road trip with my professional football team.”

Abbie interrupted, “I knew you were a football player!”

The man laughed heartily. “I am just teasing you. I was on a business trip relaxing in my hotel room. Jenny and I were texting the usual things couples text when they are apart. Things like ‘I love you. I can’t wait to see you again. I miss you.’ And then it hit me.”

Abbie chimed in again. “Those texts weren’t true?”

“It’s not that they weren’t true. It’s that the texts weren’t important. As I was lying in my hotel room, I was thinking it would be fine if Jenny were here. I’d love to see her. But it was just as well if she wasn’t. It wasn’t as though I was completely indifferent, but I wasn’t passionate. That’s when I realized I wanted more out of a relationship. I needed more. I want to be with a woman I love so deeply that it physically pains me to be without her. I was never going to feel that way for Jenny. That is when I knew things had to change.”

“I certainly would categorize that as an epiphany. I understand what you’re saying. To be honest, before I knew Steven came over to break up, I felt disappointed that he was interrupting my alone time. So what happened with Jenny?” asked Abbie.

“When I got home, I had a painful break up with her. She didn’t understand why I was breaking up, and at the time, I don’t know if I was sure either. I just know I needed something more than a checkbox relationship.”

“And since then, you haven’t found that woman for which you yearn?”

“Well, I started dating with a new perspective. If I didn’t feel that passion on the first few dates, I ended things quickly. Even when there was chemistry and even if I really liked the woman. I had a new standard for a relationship. Unfortunately, I became discouraged as no woman inspired that feeling that I was seeking.”

“Do you think you’ll ever find her?”

“I had my doubts until tonight. Actually, until about 30 minutes ago,” the man said as he gazed deeply into Abbie’s eyes.

“Me? You think I’m that girl?” Abbie asked, uncertain how to respond.

“I know your that girl! Fate brought us together. Can’t you see it? Don’t you feel it?” Mystery Man’s words were passionate and sincere.

“I’m not sure what I feel,” said a bewildered Abbie.

Mystery Man leaned in to kiss Abbie. His kiss was as soft as his touch. This kiss triggered all the same endorphins as his caresses but at quadruple the intensity. Abbie found herself getting lost in their connection. Time and space seem to fall away, leaving Abbie with no idea of how long they had kissed. When Mystery Man pulled back, he watched as Abbie’s eyes opened, awakening to her deeper feelings for him. His smile grew wider.

“Now, Do you feel it?” asked Mystery Man.

“Yes,” proclaimed Abbie. “I just wish I was as sure as you were. How can you be so confident fate brought us together.”

Mystery Man was excited to answer this question, and his enthusiasm showed in his voice. “Think about it, Abbie. What are the chances that you’re going to find yourself in a ditch, on a country road, with no phone, no purse, no way to seek help? When was the last time that happened to you?”

“Never.”

“Exactly! Fate put this all together for us. If you hadn’t dated Steven for five years, or if he hadn’t broken up with you exactly when he did, or if it wasn’t raining so hard tonight, we may have never met. Fate went out of its way to make sure this meeting happened. How long had you been waiting for help?”

“Probably about half an hour,” answered Abbie.

“This may be a country road, but it is the main road between towns. Half an hour is a long time without seeing a car. Fate made sure that no one else got to you before I did. Let me tell you something you don’t know. I am on this road because I’m on my way to my parents’ place to help my father with a project on their new home. I’ve never driven on this road before. My parents have lived in the same home since I was a child. Then one day, poof, they tell my siblings and me that they’re moving out to the country. I am totally convinced fate had a hand in that decision. We were meant to meet tonight!”

Mystery Man’s enthusiasm extended into a more passionate makeout session. Abbie could not remember ever being kissed this way by Steven. She certainly never felt the way she was feeling in that moment. As Abbie thought more about it, she concluded that for Steven, kissing was more of an obligatory prelude for sex. Fortunately, this was not the case for her Mystery Man.

Mystery Man’s kisses sent a message. Their kisses were connective, sincere, not a means to an end. To Abbie, his kisses were an expression of his feelings and his passion for her. She had never been kissed by anybody like this before, and she never put so much thought into what a kiss meant to her. This experience showed Abbie that a kiss doesn’t have to be just something couples do. There kissing was quickly removing many of Abbie’s doubts. And when they were done, Abbie was feeling “all-in.”

“Alright, you’ve convinced me. Fate rained on us today,” Abbie conceded. “What do we do now? I don’t know anything about you, not even where you live. ”

“I live about two hours away,” said Mystery Man.

“I live near here. How do we make this work?”

“I’ve been thinking about that since I saw you. The moment I arrived, I could feel fate had something special in mind. My suspicions were confirmed when I saw the most beautiful woman I’ve ever met standing before my eyes.”

“Oh my God, I don’t feel beautiful at all. I’m a total disaster right now,” replied an insecure Abbie.

“That’s fantastic! If you look this gorgeous at your worst, imagine how beautiful you will be when you’re at your best. I hope my heart can take it.”

“I like the way you think Mystery Man,” Abbie said, grinning from ear to ear.

“I figured you lived around here, and after hearing the circumstances that brought you here to me, I’ve come up with a plan. Here is what we’re going to do.”

Abbie couldn’t stop herself from mentally comparing Steven with her Mystery Man. Steven was indecisive about everything. She often felt like half their time together was spent endlessly contemplating what they would eat for their next meal or which restaurant they would go for dinner. She envisioned a much different experience with her Mystery Man. Mystery Man seemed to know what he wants. He’s a man with a plan, and Abbie liked the authoritative way he was about to lay it out for her.

Mystery Man continued, “My apartment lease ends in a few months. Let’s meet back here in three months. I think you’ll need that time to wrap things up with Steven and be ready for us.”

“But what if I’m ready now?”

He laughed. “Are you ready now?”

“Yes,” proclaimed a more confident Abbie.

He beamed a smile and said, “I like what I’m hearing,” as he gave Abbie a single long, slow kiss.

Mystery Man continued, “I love that you’re living and feeling in the moment right now. But I think it’s important to find closure with Steven and allow yourself some time before starting a new relationship. Steven is going to make a concerted effort to get back together.”

Abbie piped in, “Steven made it pretty clear that he was done with me. What makes you think he is going to change his mind?”

“One look in your mirror will answer that question. He is not going to let you go that easy. Don’t be surprised if you find yourself giving him a second chance. If you have been together for five years, he knows the things you like, and he knows how to play on your emotions. He’ll do what he needs to win you back,” explained Mystery Man.

“I seriously doubt he wants to get back together, but you’re right; we have broken up before, and he does have a way of wooing me back. Aren’t you worried that he might succeed?” asked Abbie.

“No, because I know that even if you get back together with him, you’ll be thinking of me the whole time,” answered Mystery Man flashing a sly smile.

“You are pretty sure of yourself, aren’t you?” asked Abbie as she smiled back.

Mystery Man became more serious and looked deep into Abbie’s eyes as he said, “I am that sure of us,” and then they kissed.

Mystery Man decided to go deeper into his reasoning for the three-month wait. “Abbie, the time apart is not just to get things cleared with Steven. It’s also for your friends and family.”

“What do you mean?“ asked Abbie.

“You said your friends and family adore Steven. If you bring me into the picture too soon, your family may not accept me, or they may think of me as just a rebound relationship. They need to see you single for a while. They need to mourn your relationship with Steven and get their closure too. This time off is for you as well. Since my last relationship, these last six months have given me time to reset, renew, and prepare for something better. I’d like to see you have that time as I did.”

“I suppose you’re right. I’m sorry I got you off track. Continue sharing your plan.”

Getting back to his plan, Mystery Man said, “Let’s meet back here exactly three months from today at noon. Then, we’ll head into town to find me an apartment.”

“You’re willing to move to my town just like that? What about your friends and family? What about your work?” asked Abbie.

“I work at home, so no problem there. I’ll actually be moving a lot closer to my parents, and my siblings are scattered across the country. As for my friends, two hours is not that long to drive. We will still get to see them often enough.” Mystery Man ups his intensity as he emphasizes, “Try and understand Abbie. None of that stuff matters to me. I want to be with you, near you. Even if everything I said weren’t the case, I would do anything just to be with you, even if I needed to get a new job. There are a million jobs. There’s only one you.”

Mystery Man could see that Abbie was struggling with her thoughts. So he asked, “Are you still having doubts?”

“It all feels so sudden, so unreal. I want to believe. I want to have the confidence that you do. But I’m scared. I don’t even know your name.”

Mystery Man decided it was time to explain why he is apprehensive about giving his name to Abbie. “Let me explain why I don’t want to give you my name. If I give you my name, the first thing you’re going to do when you get home is try to find out as much information as you can about me. It will quickly become a box-checking exercise. I assure you that I will check all your boxes, and I’m sure you will check all of my boxes too. But then we become all about the details. That’s the last thing I want. I want this to be about the emotion and passion we feel for each other. If we can’t sustain this feeling for three months, then what is the point of it all?”

“I love everything you’re saying. I feel everything you’re feeling. But there is this little voice inside that warns me that this is all some sort of game. Like this is some elaborate ruse to get me into bed. I’ve seen men do some very creative things for no other reason.”

Mystery Man looked at Abbie and thought silently for a few moments before asking, “Abbie, if I asked you to come home with me for the night or the weekend, would you do it?”

“You know I would,” answered Abbie as if it were a rhetorical question.

“Exactly my point. I’m not in this for short-term fun. I’m in this for the long term. I don’t want to wait three months to see you. It’s going to feel like torture. But I know that this time apart is best for our long-term success. Can’t you see that?”

“Yes, but I guess I just needed reassurance. This is all so unexpected. I think another kiss might help, ” requested Abbie with a smile. But, to Abbie’s dismay, an approaching tow truck interrupted her incoming kiss.

“Duty calls,” said Mystery Man before he exited the car.

Abbie watched as her Mystery Man made sure the tow truck driver took extra care when pulling her car out of the ditch. She couldn’t help recognize how opposite her Mystery Man was from Steven. In the hour that Abbie knew Mystery Man, he had already shown more attentiveness and concern for her well-being than Steven did in the last three years of the relationship. She wondered how she could ever have seen Steven as Mr. right, when she now sees him as Mr. wrong, at least for her.

After a significant effort, Mystery Man and the tow truck driver successfully excavated Abbie’s car from the muddy ditch. She watched as Mystery Man tipped the tow truck driver, shook his hand, and headed back to his car.

He opened the driver’s side door and stretched his hand out for Abbie. She took his hand. As he helped her out of the car, he said, ”Your chariot awaits, me lady.”

They held hands as they walked to Abbie’s car. He leaned her against the side door of her car, where they spent several minutes kissing each other.

“Does this night really have to end so soon?” asked Abbie.

“I do need to get to my parents’ house. Plus, I think it’s important to leave each other wanting more, much more. That will help sustain the feeling until we meet again.”

“I’m worried. What happens if an unforeseen circumstance prevents us from getting here three months from today?”

“That’s a good question. If we know ahead of time, we can send a messenger with an explanation and contact information. If it is a last-minute situation, let’s agree that if either of us is a no-show, we wait exactly one week and meet again at noon,” he said.

Still worried, Abbie asked, “But what if something happens a second time?”

Showing patience, Mystery Man kissed Abbie and then said, “Fate didn’t bring us together, just to pull us apart before we get started.” Then, he looked deep into Abbie’s eyes and confidently assured her, “I will be there, I promise.”

Mystery Man decided to lighten the mood and said, “I’ll tell you what. You keep the jacket. That’s my favorite jacket, and I’ll absolutely be back for that.”

“Good, because I love this jacket. I was planning to hold onto it anyway,” Abbie joked.

Making a final attempt to alleviate Abbie’s concerns, Mystery Man said, “If providing my name will ease your mind, I’ll be happy to give it to you.”

Abbie considered his offer and replied, “No, you’re right. If I get any information about you, my roommate and I will be on the Internet all night trying to find out what we can about you. I want this to be about the way we feel about each other and not about the details.”

Mystery Man opened the car door for Abbie, and she got in. She rolled down the window at Mystery Man’s request. He tells her, “I did my best to make sure your car is in working order. I’ll wait here while you drive off. If you have any problems at all, or you hear any funky noises. Stop the car, and I’ll come to check it out.” He gave Abbie a final passionate kiss and sent her on her way.

Abbie stops her car about 40 feet away, prompting Mystery Man to come see what’s wrong. He asks, “Is there a problem with the car?”

Abbie smiled and said, “No, I just wanted another kiss before I go.”

Mystery Man laughed and complied with Abbie’s request. Then, after yet another long passionate kiss, he joked, “Get out of here before we take this thing to the next level.”

Abbie smiled and confirmed, “Three months from today, 12 o’clock noon sharp,” and then drove off toward home.