

# Cleveland Clinic

by M. Barns

Allie didn't share *that* moment with Jim. That moment he spoke about whenever they made new friends as a couple— that moment he planned to recount at their engagement party. They were both visiting the hospital. Jim's brother had been in a car accident that broke his arm in three places. He had been in and out of consciousness after his surgery, but Jim sat by his side until early morning, when his mother came and forced him to go home and shower. His mother hadn't mentioned sleep because she knew the bond Jim had with his brother, and that any sleep he was able to get would be accidental and guilt-stricken.

Allie was coming in early for her second shift of the week. She had been out drinking late the night before, so she was looking forward to pouring herself a large cup of coffee. She hoped the strong, warm liquid would ease her nausea, and make it easier for her to move her limbs. When she saw the elevator doors closing she ran to stop them. *Hey*, she yelled. *Can you hold that for me?* This is the moment Jim claims that he knew. Knew that he loved her, knew that he would find her again, knew that one day he would marry her. Allie simply watched the doors closed, waited for the next elevator, got her glass of coffee and forgot about the incident. Two days later, when Jim had finally tracked her down, she pretended to remember their meeting— to be polite. And that's how their relationship continued— a polite dance between two strangers.

Jim was determined to get Allie to go to dinner with him, and he was surprised that after his third attempt she finally said yes. He had asked the girls she worked with what her favorite breakfast was. The next morning he went to the bakery by the hospital and brought in a spread for the entire floor. Allie mostly said yes because he asked her in front of her peers. Because after a guy does something nice like that for your friends, you can't exactly say

no. She said yes for the second date because he didn't try to kiss her on the first. She was intrigued, used to boys who lusted after her, before ever getting to know her. When he hadn't tried to kiss her by the fourth date she was convinced he was gay, and using her to trick his family into thinking otherwise. She was strangely OK with it.

Jim, however, was taking time because he knew he wanted to marry her. He loved everything about her— even her flaws. He loved the way she told him to straighten his collar before then went out in public, how she always insisted on driving, and especially the way she always acted tough. Jim knew she had more to offer than what she was showing, and he planned on spending the rest of his life coaxing it out of her. From where he stood there was only one answer why she was brought into his life—fate. So he never questioned it.

Allie said yes, seven weeks later, when Jim proposed, because she didn't know what else to do. She was nearly 30, still working at the same hospital she interned at, with no other prospects. She felt nothing the first few times Jim had kissed her, but after he proposed she convinced herself she would one day. It was the basis of arranged marriage. She could grow to love him. But when Jim raised his glass at their engagement party to tell the story he was becoming famous for Allie forgot to smile and raise her glass too. The embarrassment of his speech blanketed her face. And when Jim jokingly pulled her up beside him and asked what was the matter, she said plainly, *I don't even remember meeting you that day*. Even though she tried to whisper, her voice was still broadcasted across the microphone.

