

BLANK SLATE

written by

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INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

GINA GAVER (early 30s) opens her eyes to a brilliant white light. She winces. A shadow passes over the fluorescent glow. DR. KOHLI stares down at her.

DR. KOHLI

Don't worry, sweetheart. You were only dead a few hours.

Dr. Kohli moves from Gina's vision. Gina winces at the lights once more. Her eyes readjust.

A bleached-white room crowds around her. The hard tile floor and benign walls freeze the air. Gina's pale, scarred features blend in with the the space.

Dr. Kohli stops next to JUSTIN GAVER by the door. Justin towers over the doctor. He looks the same age as Gina.

DR. KOHLI

Her vitals are stable, seems the operation was a success. I'll clear her to leave today.

JUSTIN

And her memory?

DR. KOHLI

The experimental nature of the operation makes the extent of the amnesia uncertain.

JUSTIN

Right.

DR. KOHLI

LifeMatters will have a representative reach out for routine updates.

JUSTIN

Okay.

DR. KOHLI

In the meantime, don't expose her to too much stimuli. That includes friends, family. It's unlikely she'll even remember who you are.

Justin stares at Gina.

DR. KOHLI (CONT'D)

It'll take a few days before we can clear her, but we have the paperwork so she can leave with you.

JUSTIN

Whatever it takes to make her better. Thanks, doc.

Dr. Kohli exits the room. Justin scratches his beard. He smiles at Gina.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Justin pushes Gina in a wheelchair. Her white hospital gown exposes the scrapes and bruises up her arm. A long row of stitches protrudes from her partially shaved scalp. She feels the purple shiner under her right eye.

Justin rolls Gina to their van. He opens the passenger door and swivels her to face him. Gina gets her first good look at Justin:

Tall, with a naturally muscular frame that can only come from many years of manual labor. He has a full beard and a tattoo that climbs up his arm. The definition of a traditional, John Wayne, manly-man.

GINA

Who're you?

JUSTIN

I'm your husband.

GINA

Husband?

JUSTIN

Here, I'll help you up.

GINA

Wait. I don't know you. Stop it. Stop!

Justin lifts Gina out of the wheelchair. She yells. A NEARBY CROWD watches the commotion.

GINA

Stop it!

JUSTIN

Gina, it's alright. Stop yelling.

GINA

Stop!

Justin backs away from her. Gina breathes shallowly. She watches her trembling fingers white-knuckle the seat.

A giant hand rests upon her thigh. Gina glances up into the eyes of Justin. His face is calm and cerebral, and he even smiles.

JUSTIN

Tell me what's wrong.

Gina keeps her eyes on him. The longer she gazes at his face, the quicker she gains control of her breathing.

JUSTIN

We don't have to go. We don't have to do anything you don't want to do. I'm sorry for pushing you. It seems I have a lot to learn, as well.

Gina nods.

JUSTIN

Do you want to stay here?

Gina's hands loosen around the seat.

GINA

No. I'm fine.

JUSTIN

We'll get through this together. At your pace.

GINA

Thank you.

Justin buckles Gina up and closes the door. He turns to the crowd which still meanders around them.

JUSTIN

Mind your business, assholes. Can't you see she's in pain?

The crowd moves on. Justin shakes his head.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Gina stares out the passenger window. The sun sets over the horizon. The countryside zooms past in a blur of hazy colors.

Justin increases the volume of the radio. Ambient folk music blares out. Gina nods to the rhythm.

JUSTIN
You like this?

Gina clams up. She nods her head. Justin holds his gaze on her. He smiles.

JUSTIN
We'll be home soon.

Gina shuffles farther from him. She watches the sun set.

EXT. GAVER'S HOME - NIGHT

The van pulls up to a two-story home in a lower-middle class neighborhood.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Justin pushes Gina through the front door. Her eyes lock on a staircase before her.

JUSTIN
Don't worry. I'll build a ramp if
need be.

Gina scans the framed pictures on the wall below the stairs.

They reveal a loving and nurturing marriage: Justin and Gina kiss on a beach, in matrimony, under an arch; Gina, in cap and gown, holds a degree; Justin, in blue mechanic overalls, fixes the underside of a truck.

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Justin parks Gina at the kitchen island.

JUSTIN
I'll make potato soup, your
favorite.

Justin sets a pot on the burner and lights it. Gina's eyes drift to a dish of almonds on the table. She reaches for them.

JUSTIN
Gina! Gina!

She freezes. Justin drags the dish away from her.

He hesitates.

JUSTIN
You're allergic to tree nuts.

GINA
Oh.

JUSTIN
I buy these for myself. But I guess
I should toss them, your memory the
way it is.

GINA
Sorry.

JUSTIN
It's not your fault. I should have
known better.

Justin dumps the almonds into the trash.

INT. GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Gina places her hand on a queen-sized bed. She feels the
fabric between her fingers. Justin stands behind her.

JUSTIN
This'll be our temporary room,
y'know, until you can walk again.

Gina's chest thumps. Justin places her pajamas on the foot of
the bed. He sits next to her. Her hands shakes.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
I'll bring down my things, then we
can get some sleep. Glad we finally
found a use for this room.

GINA
No.

JUSTIN
What?

GINA
I'm sorry. I don't know you.

JUSTIN
I'm Justin. I'm your husband.

Justin reaches for her. Gina thrusts her chair back.

GINA

I know, but, I don't know. I'm confused.

JUSTIN

Of course. Gina, I can help--

GINA

You're just some man. I don't know why they let me come here with you.

Justin scratches his beard and stares at his feet.

GINA

I'm sorry. I don't feel comfortable with you. I'm sorry. I don't even know who I am, or this place--

JUSTIN

It's okay. Can you dress yourself?

Gina nods. Justin drums on his thighs before he stands. He roams to the door.

JUSTIN

You can lock the door here. I'll sleep on the couch right out there, in case you need anything.

GINA

I'm sorry.

JUSTIN

Don't be. Want me to lock it?

Gina nods. Justin locks the door. A brief silence climbs over the room. Justin feels his pockets.

JUSTIN

Oh, almost forgot.

Justin places a bottle of hydrocodone and Xanax on the bedside table.

JUSTIN

The doc prescribed these. Take this one for any pain and take this one once per night, I think. Just make sure you read the label and have the right amount.

Gina nods.

JUSTIN

Okay.

Justin crosses back to the door.

JUSTIN

Good night. I love you.

Gina doesn't reciprocate. Justin shuts himself out.

INT. GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Gina wears her pajamas but remains in the wheelchair. She stares out the bedroom window.

Gina rubs the back of her neck. She grimaces. Gina reaches for the bottle of hydrocodone and pops some into her mouth.

Moonlight glares off a reflective object in her peripherals.

Gina maneuvers and picks up the bronze-framed picture off the dresser. She scans the dusty photo:

A younger version of herself. She wears a cap and gown and holds a diploma. A MAN and WOMAN stand to her sides, but their bodies are cut off by the edges of the frame.

Gina glides her fingers over her own face in the picture. She studies herself.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Gina peers into a 50 gallon fish tank. The glass warps and contorts her face. She watches a beta fish.

The beta swims in circles. It reaches the glass barrier, backs up, and re-circles the entire tank. The fish views each leaf, rock, and superficial façade with new interest, like it was the first time it ever saw its environment.

Gina pulls her lips tight.

JUSTIN (O.S.)

Gina? Gina.

Gina breaks from her fixation. Justin waits for her at a door. DIANE, PHYSICAL THERAPIST (P.T.) stands next to him. She smiles at Gina.

DIANE, P.T.

It's time, Gina.

Gina rolls past the rows of waiting chairs to them.

INT. DOCTOR GUS' OFFICE - DAY

DR. GUS sits at his desk. Gina and Justin sit opposite him. They strain their necks, not only to see over the pillars of paper, folders, and computers strewn across his desk, but also to keep up with how fast the doctor talks.

DR. GUS

Let me begin by stating that, yes, indeed I am a licensed physician and therapist, despite the fact that I work in the private sector for LifeMatters Incorporated.

JUSTIN

So, you have a degree?

DR. GUS

I have a M.D. from the University of Michigan.

JUSTIN

See babe? He's good.

DR. GUS

How do you feel today, Gina?

She shrugs.

DR. GUS

You were in a serious automobile collision. Do you remember the incident at all?

JUSTIN

She doesn't.

DR. GUS

I'm sorry, sir, but I was asking Mrs. Gaver.

Justin puffs out air. He leans back in his chair. Gina shakes her head.

JUSTIN

Told you.

DR. GUS

Your accident was life threatening.
First responders kept you alive and
transported you to the hospital.
You don't remember any of it?

Gina plays with her fingers. She ignores the question.

DR. GUS

Well as fate would have it, my
employers at LifeMatters were
running an experimental operation
at your hospital. It's a
complicated procedure that involves
implanting artificial nerves within
patients. In short, after you were
pronounced braindead, you possessed
all the requirements to be a
perfect subject for our operation.

JUSTIN

But how does it ruin her memory?

DR. GUS

We're essentially reconstructing
her neural pathways, bypassing the
dead ones and implanting new ones.
Like I said, this is a brand new
operation, just recently sanctioned
for human testing by the FDA. The
main side effect we've found so far
is the formation of retrograde
amnesia. It's the tradeoff for
giving a life back.

JUSTIN

That's unbelievable.

DR. GUS

I know it does seem more fiction
than science, but, we live in an
amazing time. Any other questions?

Doctor Gus moves a stack of papers in front of his face,
ending the conversation early. Justin and Gina glance at one
another.

INT. GYM - DAY

Diane, P.T. pushes Gina through a small workout area. Justin
follows behind. Diane alludes to two parallel bars that run
horizontally off the ground.

DIANE, P.T.

That's where you'll do the majority of your training. We'll interchange with some elliptical and aerobic exercises. You'll be up, walking, and out of that chair in no time. How's that sound?

Gina smiles. Diane smiles back at her.

INT. DIANE'S OFFICE - DAY

Gina parks at one end of a glass coffee table. Diane sits in a low armrest on the opposite side. Justin remains relegated to a metal chair by the door.

DIANE, P.T.

Lucky for us, the crash didn't cause permanent spinal injury. So with some time and determination, you'll be good as new. How do you feel about starting Thursday?

Gina nods.

DIANE, P.T.

Alright, great. I'll have the receptionist set you up with a time that works for you.

Diane writes down a message on a slip of paper. Gina fiddles her fingers. Diane glimpses it.

DIANE, P.T.

Everything alright, Gina? Part of your rehabilitation is meeting with me after your sessions. Your mental health is every bit as important as your physical.

Gina glances at Justin, before she bounces her eyes back to the ground. Diane taps her pen against her clipboard.

DIANE, P.T.

Mr. Gaver.

JUSTIN

Yes?

DIANE, P.T.

Would you mind waiting outside the room for the remainder of our time?